

Chapter 11 – In the Light of the Truth

Annie was lying next to Hughie on his bed. He wore no shirt, exposing the bandages around his midsection for all to see. But with the medical care he received thanks to Mallory, at least his breathing had evened out by now.

It had been three days since the break-in at the tower, and none of them dared to leave Mallory's house, not even Maeve. The morning after the break-in, the news reported the death of The Deep but nothing else. There was no mention of the break-in, Black Noir's condition, or Maeve's betrayal.

Annie supposed it was good. It meant that while Homelander undoubtedly wanted to hunt them all down, Vought was holding him back so the public wouldn't ask questions. It would look poorly for them, after all, to have been fooled twice in the same day, with two of The Seven taken down, another one killed, and two betraying them. Even the biggest of their fans would start wondering what was going on in that company.

It gave them time to go through all the info they got from Vought. There was so much of it that Mallory had to run it through a special program she had developed during her time in the CIA. They had a meeting today with everyone so Mallory could share some of the biggest highlights they had found so far.

Annie looked at the clock on the nightstand and her eyes widened slightly. They had ten minutes before the meeting started, and Butcher was clear he wouldn't wait for the "sleeping beauty." He had started calling Hughie that because after the doctor set his ribs, they told him to rest as much as possible, and indeed Hughie had slept for most of the past couple of days.

Annie kissed his forehead and called gently, "Hughie, time to get up. Everyone is waiting."

The man stirred. He opened his dark blue eyes, and when those eyes found her, a wide smile spread across his face. Hughie had smiled like that ever since she told him she loved him, and she was glad she could bring him so much happiness just by being next to him.

Hughie rubbed his eyes slowly. "You stayed? What was it, six hours ago?"

Annie smiled back at him. "Someone's got to keep an eye on you."

Hughie just smiled softly at her and replied, "I'm already getting better. No pain when I sleep, so you can rest as well."

Annie's smile turned into a smirk. "And who said I want to rest when I'm in bed with my boyfriend?"

Hughie blushed and mumbled, "I wish."

Annie giggled and patted his cheek with a little condescension. "Soon, love, I promise."

Hughie's blush deepened, but his smile grew even brighter, as it always did when she reminded him she loved him.

Annie just shook her head before sliding her arm around his shoulders and helping him sit up. His feet touched the floor and his back leaned on her arm, trying to keep the pressure off his ribs.

Slowly, they both stood up, and Annie helped him put a shirt on before they went to meet everyone.

When they got there, Mallory was standing next to a screen now displaying a picture of Robin. Annie glanced at Hughie, worried. But while he did look sad, he didn't seem to freak out, which she was glad for.

Everyone made sure to leave the love seat for her and Hughie. MM, Butcher, and Maeve all sat on the couch, while Frenchie sat on a single seat with Kimiko sitting on its arm.

Mallory moved her gaze to Hughie and began, "First, we found all the evidence about your ex's accident. You can now prove A-Train killed her, plain and simple."

Annie saw Hughie's relief at the news. She was glad. Robin deserved justice, and Hughie deserved closure.

The picture on the screen changed to a dark-skinned woman with long raven hair in a business suit. Everyone looked confused at Mallory as she kept talking in her usual strict and emotionless tone. "Meet Congresswoman Victoria Neuman. She spent her entire political career loudly opposing Vought and its supes."

"Good lass," was Butcher's only comment.

Mallory seemed to fight a smirk on her face before saying, "You would think so. But according to Vought's files, you are looking at the adopted daughter of the CEO himself, Stan Edgar. Oh, and she is a supe herself. One that can blow up everything she sees with her mind."

The screen showed the pictures of a few other politicians who opposed Vought. On one side was their passport photo, while the one next to it showed the same person with their head blown up. Frenchie's "Merde" was the only sound for a while.

MM shook his head before asking, "What the fuck?"

Mallory nodded in agreement with the statement. "We are coming to that point."

The next picture on the screen confused everyone. It was Homelander's smiling face.

"I know we have plenty of time on our hands, Grace, but I think even that is not enough for this cunt's list of crimes," Butcher tried to joke.

This time the smirk broke through as Mallory said, “What I am about to tell you even Homelander doesn’t know. It was buried very deep in their archives.”

A picture of a man they all knew appeared on the screen next to Homelander’s. MM, for some reason she couldn’t understand, spoke through clenched teeth. “Soldier Boy.”

Butcher threw a wry look at MM before turning back to Mallory. “Yes, Grace, we’re all familiar with Chief Cunt the First.”

Mallory gave him a look. “Yes. There are many similarities between the two, as if they are related.”

Annie wasn’t the only one confused by this comment. But then Hughie’s weak voice filled the silence. “Are you trying to tell us Homelander is Soldier Boy’s son?”

Mallory seemed pleased someone figured it out and confirmed Hughie’s words. “Indeed. But this is just the beginning of the story.” Everyone waited for her to go on. “Apparently, after his son was created, Vought gave Black Noir the order to gather his old team and try to kill him. But when they failed, the Russians managed to, and as a reward, Vought allowed them to keep the body for study.”

MM looked both curious and furious at the same time. “Are you telling me the Russians have his body right now?”

But it was Butcher who replied with a smirk on his face, “What she’s saying is that the Russians have a weapon that can kill even the cunt Homelander.”

Mallory nodded. “I found the location of the base where they held their supe experiments. William, Frenchie, Kimiko, and Annie, you will leave for Russia this evening. Find the weapon and bring it back.”

The first three nodded their agreement, but Annie shook her head and said, “Sorry, I’ve got to stay with Hughie right now. You should take MM with you.”

Mallory considered her for a moment before speaking. “Very well. Marvin asked for time with his family; the three will do. I do have a couple of assignments for you and Hughie, ones which I would like privacy to speak about.”

The hint was not subtle at all, and soon it was just her, Hughie, and Mallory left in the room. Mallory moved to the next picture.

“That’s Butcher’s wife,” Hughie stated, surprised.

“Indeed. Both William and I were under the assumption Homelander killed her after he raped her, but according to the Vought index, she is alive and well, with a seven-year-old son.” Both

Annie and Hughie gasped at the revelation. But Mallory wasn't done. "Homelander's son. That's why Vought made her disappear."

Annie felt confused. "So they didn't want Homelander to know?"

Mallory shook her head. "No. They put them in a safe house and provide for everything they need."

Hughie tilted his head and asked, "Why tell us this and not Butcher?"

Mallory gave him a hard look. "William has an important task I need him to focus on. Also, I believe this information should be shared in a more controlled environment with results already in hand."

Annie understood the older woman's angle. "You want us to get her here so when Butcher comes back, we can tell him the truth with his wife. Because if she's not here, Butcher will go on a rampage to find her and show our hand to Vought."

Mallory nodded. "Precisely."

Hughie immediately nodded and said, "Tomorrow morning then."

Before Mallory could say something else, Annie put her arm around his shoulder again and said to him, "Well, if we have a big day tomorrow, we better get you the needed rest, mister."

Hughie just nodded to her in compliance and followed her to the room.

Hughie and Annie were walking from the driveway toward the entrance door of the house. Hughie couldn't stand for long with his injury still so fresh, so Annie had to support most of his weight.

They knocked on the door and waited for almost a minute before a woman, her skin pale and her hair long, wavy, and brown, answered the door with a guarded look on her face. Her voice was even when she asked, "Vought sent you? You're not the usual guys."

Hughie was trying to make his breaths as shallow as he could, which caused him to pant slowly. The walk took a larger toll on his ribs than he thought it would. But he managed to speak weakly. "Ma'am, I am Hughie Campbell, and this is Annie January. If you watch the news, I'm sure you know us and know we are friends with your husband."

"Billy..." Hughie thought he heard the woman whisper to herself, but the names did seem to be familiar to her. She looked at them more closely, and when her eyes landed on him, they widened. Probably noticing his pale face, hooded eyes, short breaths, and that he was completely

leaning on Annie, who looked very worried. Mrs. Butcher took a step back and asked, “What’s wrong with him?”

Hughie glanced at Annie and mouthed the word ‘Truth.’

Annie sighed, sending another worried glance at Hughie before speaking to the woman at the doorstep. “We broke into Vought looking for information to bring them and Homelander down. We found out about you too. Hughie... he took a punch from The Deep for me and broke his ribs. It was only three days ago and...” Annie was cut off when she noticed Hughie’s breaths were too shallow. She turned to him, seeing the unfocused look in his eyes. She called fearfully, “Hughie!”

Mrs. Butcher was quickly at his other side, helping Annie to hold him up. “Quick, let’s get him on the couch. I’ll see what we can do for him.”

Once Hughie was lying on the couch in the living room, Annie put a hand on his chest gently and called to him softly, “Hughie, concentrate and take steady breaths for me.”

Mrs. Butcher turned her head to the entrance and was about to call someone, but she stopped herself, looked between the two of them, and asked hesitantly, “Do you know about...”

They were both surprised when Hughie cut her off with a mumble. “Ryan... Homelander’s son... rape... have to get out of here.”

Both women looked shocked and concerned at Hughie. But Annie knew to trust his instincts and told the older woman, “Mrs. Butcher, you and your son should pack what you need most so we can leave as soon as possible.”

To her credit, the woman didn’t panic. She just nodded, turned her head, and called, “Ryan!”

A few seconds later, a blond-haired kid entered the living room. He looked surprised to see two new people in his house. He looked at his mother, but before he could speak, she did. “Go pack a bag, honey. We’re going on a trip with these nice people.”

Annie guessed the boy registered his mother’s tone. He nodded and left the living room.

A couple of minutes later, Mrs. Butcher came back with a wet cloth. She handed it to Annie and said, “Let him rest until we’re ready. Give us about half an hour, and we’ll be ready to go.”

Annie nodded, putting the cloth on Hughie’s forehead as she said, “Thanks, Mrs. Butcher.”

Before leaving the room, the woman looked over her shoulder and said gently, “You both can call me Becca.”

Almost an hour later, the four of them were on their way to the car. Annie and Becca were on both his sides, supporting him. Ryan was walking behind them, dragging both his and his mother's luggage.

Becca leaned a little toward Hughie and whispered, "Does Billy know?"

Hughie shook his head and answered with the same low voice, "No. He thinks Homelander killed you. He's in Russia now following a lead on a weapon that can kill the flying bastard."

Becca's eyes widened in response.

Once they were back at Mallory's house and had settled Becca and Ryan in their room, his dad and Donna had lunch ready for everyone. The four of them were already sitting around the table when MM and his family came in.

MM froze and looked at the new people around the table. He choked out, "Becca."

The woman looked worried and asked, "Do I know you?"

MM shook his head. "No. I know your husband, and he never stopped talking about you."

Becca gave him an awkward smile.

Hughie watched as Janine slowly approached Ryan and said, "Hi, I'm Janine, 8 years old."

Ryan gave her a shy smile and responded, "Ryan, 7 years old."

Five minutes later, both kids were talking with each other animatedly, probably glad to have a friend their own age around.

Annie was drawing MM into a conversation to distract him from Becca, who was a little uncomfortable with all of MM's questions.

Hughie smiled at the woman. When their eyes met, she leaned toward him and asked in a low voice, "Why did you want to get us out of the house so fast?"

Hughie shrugged before replying, "Vought. They might try to distract Homelander from chasing us by telling him about you guys, and once he finds you, he won't let go. Or Vought saw us on the cameras around your house and will send a team there. Either way, you're safer here."

Becca gave him a big smile, then it turned into a frown. "Billy..."

Hughie shook his head again. "Don't worry about him. I'll talk to him first, lessen the blow."

She gave him a small smile full of gratitude. She glanced at Annie before turning back to him and asked, "Mind if I ask something?"

Hughie just smiled at her, so she went ahead. "Did you really take a punch from a supe for her?" He just nodded. "You could have died." He nodded in agreement with her statement. "Why?" she asked, full of wonder.

"The same reason Butcher is willing to go after Homelander even though it will probably get him killed." Hughie looked at Annie. She was still talking with MM, but when she noticed him staring, she gave him a lopsided smile. There was only one thing he could say. "I love her."