

## Chapter 9 – To Break In the News

Hughie thought it was amazing Butcher let the light and fun atmosphere to continue for so long before interrupting it with reality.

*“So, me and Grace prepared all the info on the compound V and the video from flight 37. We think it will be better to wait couple of days before releasing it. Let the cunts feel like we are too busy hiding before we make them like a chicken with no head.”* Butcher said once he had everyone’s attention.

Frenchie tilted his head around before asking *“And where is Madam Mallory?”*

Butcher inclined his head toward Annie and said, *“Making sure shiny’s friend gets the part you need in the tower.”*

Kimiko than signaled a few thinks with her hands that only Frenchie seemed to understand, and so he translated for the rest *“She asks when we go to the tower.”*

Butcher shrugged and replied, *“If the cunts will react like we hope they do, the evening after.”*

MM looked around the table before asking *“And the rest of the plan stays the same?”*

Butcher nodded *“Grace got some people to infiltrate the news station Frenchie has ties with. When Homelander will be there she will make sure no transmission will get to him. The rest of us are heading for the tower.”*

Then Butcher stood from the table, looking seriously he said *“This will be dangerous... Fuck, most likely we will die if we make one mistake. So, if anyone wants to stay here say that now.”*

MM snorted *“Sure man we followed you into all this shit just to step back when we finally doing something really important.”* He spoke everyone’s mind.

Hughie was surprised to see even his dad and Donna, were looking determined to join. That worried Hughie very much. He cleared his throat *“Ummm... Dad, Donna, you do know you can’t come with us right?”*

They both frowned at him. Hughie was surprised again to have his dad respond the question *“I know we won’t be much help in fighting, but we can pretend to be part of the staff and look around, keeping you inform if something in the plan changes.”*

Hughie was lost for words. His dad was rarely this firm, and he did make sense in some way. Fortunately, Annie came to the rescue *“Look we appreciate what you are trying to do. Both you Hugh and you mom, but on this mission to worry about your safety the entire time is a liability we can’t afford.”*

Both parents sighed heavily and nodded, dejected. Hughie had to fight a smile. It was not seeing Annie in charge. But then she turned her hard stare at him and said gently *“I’m sorry Hughie, but I think the same applies to you.”*

Hughie reared back in his chair, shocked and offended for a moment before his eyes narrowed and anger took over *“I might not be a supe, but I was going on the same missions everyone else here did and handled myself just fine. And might I remind you I am the only one in this table that actually killed a supe himself.”*

When Hughie saw his dad’s and Donna’s shocked faces at his last statement, he winced. He was so consumed by his anger he said a lot more than he ever wanted either of them to know.

Annie did look a little ashamed for hurting him but kept looking around the table for support. When her eyes landed on Frenchie the man smiled and said, *“Like Petite Hughie said, he proved himself before and we need all help we can get.”*

MM just shrugged before giving his piece *“I told you the kid is the rain-man of fucking people over. That’s a talent I want on my side when shit hits the fan.”*

Kimiko raised two fingers on each hand, miming a long gun shooting while staring straight into Annie’s eyes, as if trying to remind her something. Before shrugging and leaning back into her chair.

Annie looked desperately at Butcher, but the Brit sighed and said, *“Look love I want to agree with you, but the kid did prove himself so far.”* Then he looked at Hughie and said *“But your job is with Frenchie on those servers.”*

Annie shook her head in disbelief, but then her mom said firmly *“Annie, both me and Hugh will feel better when Hughie is out there with you.”*

Annie’s eyes widened in surprise, but defeated she just nodded.

With nothing more to discuss everyone cleared the table and went to sleep.

Hughie was about to leave the kitchen toward the room he shares with Butcher when he heard Annie’s voice calling to him. Still hurt and angry from her insistent to keep him away from the mission, he considers to just keep walking toward the room. But that was his old self that run away from problem, he can’t let himself revert to that.

Hughie took a deep breath and turned around to face his girlfriend. She did look apologetic when she said *“Hughie, I am not trying to hurt you. I want you to be safe.”*

Hughie frowned at her *“Yhea I like to be safe too, and I want you safe as well. But everyone is going to put themselves on the line for a good reason in the tower, and I want to do the same.”*

*“Do you know what you getting yourself into?”* Annie tried to plead

Hughie frowned managed to get even deeper when he replied in a deadpan voice *“It’s my plan. And should I remind you I’ve been helping fight Vought for the past few months, while you were helping them.”*

Annie took a step away from him in shock. Before her eyes narrowed and she shot back at him *“You know it’s not fair.”*

And she was right. He already felt guilty for his comment. He was never angry at Annie before and the conflicting emotions are hard for him to control it seems. With a bowed head he admitted *“No, it wasn’t. I’m sorry.”*

Annie sighed and got closer to him again *“Look I get it. You want to help, but we have everything we need for the mission already. It’s just doesn’t make sense to endanger yourself when there is no reason for it.”*

Hughie shook his head sadly *“Is that what you really think, or you still don’t trust me? Think I will kill someone else?”*

Annie scanned his face with her eyes before asking *“But you already did, didn’t you? At my mom’s those Vought security guys?”*

Hughie’s face return to a scowl and his tone was tight when he asked *“Would you rather your mom died? Or me? Because those were the choices I had at that moment.”*

Annie tried to take one of his hands, but Hughie pulled it out of her reach. She looked hurt, before replying gently *“That’s not what I am saying. Today you mentioned killing Translucent like it meant nothing. I don’t want it to become the norm for you, I don’t want you to loose yourself to this part of yourself, and let me lose you as well in the process.”*

Hughie shook his head irritated *“Yhea, I know I shouldn’t have mentioned it, but you were trying to get everyone to doubt my abilities.”*

Annie’s eyes were wide as she tried to deny it *“No, I didn’t!”*

Hughie was angry again by now and just countered with *“So what do you call going around the table and looking for someone who will tell you I am not good enough to go with the rest.”*

Annie shook her head so fast the blond hair was getting into her face *“Hughie…”* She began but was cut off.

*“Look I get you never saw me on mission before, that won’t be my first and I know my limits. Anyway, this conversation is getting nowhere, and I am tired. We had a long day; you should go rest too.”* Hughie said firmly.

Annie looked so sad, even in his angry state it sent a pang into Hughie’s heart. He got closer and hugged her briefly, whispering to her gently *“We will talk about it more later.”*

Annie just nodded before Hughie broke the hug and went into his room.

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Two days later everyone was sitting in Mallory’s living room at the late evening, watching the screen in front of them as every news channel was speaking about the leaked flight 37 video, showing Homelander dragging Queen Meave off the plane and forcing her to abandon all the people on it.

*“Correct me if I’m wrong but wasn’t that the same man who just a day after this video cried on national television saying they didn’t have to die.” One of the anchors said.*

*His partner nodded before pointing out “Yes and blamed practically everyone else while doing so.”*

*The first anchor waved his hand “Exactly! His speech during the memorial ceremony getting a hell of a new context with this information.”*

*The female anchor shook her head slightly “At least now we know why Queen Meave couldn’t stand hearing that speech.”*

*The first anchor nodded “It’s always hard to hear hypocrisy. But then again, she isn’t entirely innocent either...”*

*In this point the channel changed to one more willing to give Vought a chance “In addition to the leaked footage, another rumor concerning Vought and all supers world-wide began circulating today morning.” The anchor started, a photo of a vial with Compound V in it appeared on the corner of the screen before the anchor said, “This drug is supposedly the origin of every super-hero on the planet. Created by Fredrich Vought himself and injected into babies to give them powers.”*

*Mallory turned the screen off. She stepped in front of it and began “So far, the plan moving forward as planned. Vought is yet to make any statement, and they are holding Homelander on a tight leash for now. And because she was involved in the video as well, Vought don’t suspect Meave to be the leak. But there are rumors on some changes in the seven since Starlight left.” She looked at Frenchie and said “Your friend does excellent job making Vought believe he is on their side of the truth. I believe when he calls tomorrow to offer Homelander a fair interview, even if he will not want to go Vought will force him.”*

*Everyone was smiling at the small victory of catching Vought off balance, and managing to hit Homelander where it hurts him most. His brand.*

*Hughie and Annie were sitting with each other, their legs are touching in a way to comfort each other. Since the night of their fight, they haven’t spoke about it again. And while they weren’t fighting or avoiding each other, there was this tense feeling between them neither of them was ready to face yet.*

Butcher stood up from his seat, distracting Hughie from his glom thoughts, and said *“Okay mates. Go rest, tomorrow when the sun is down, we take the fight into those cunts home.”*

Elated and nervous everyone stood up to go to their room.

Before Annie and Hughie could leave Donna’s voice called them *“Annie, Hughie can you stay for a moment?”*

The two exchanged a look before taking a few steps back into the living room, where both his dad and Donna were waiting.

His dad sighed before saying *“We noticed the weird air between the two of you. Both of us can guess where it started and why, and usually we wouldn’t intervene in your relationship.”* He trailed off, clearly uncomfortable.

But Donna picked up where he left off *“But with what you about to do tomorrow night it’s important you both be on the same page. So, me and Hugh will leave you now, do yourselves a favor and talk it out.”*

With that both parents left, leaving behind an embarrassed couple. Annie sighed and tried to lighten the mood *“Jees, I think I preferred it when my mom disapproved of my relationships.”*

Annie and Donna sat and had a long talk yesterday, as far as Hughie understood they both reach an understanding of each other, and while Annie is not ready to completely forgive her mom for all the lies and many other things, she is trying to and that’s a great beginning in Hughie’s opinion. After all that happened between the two it was never going to be an easy or quick fix. His dad on the other hand got a lot closer to Annie in the last couple of days, filling a hole even Annie didn’t seem to know about.

It looked like he wasn’t the only one to get more confidence from Annie’s presence. Hughie shrugged without a smile when he responded *“Well maybe. But they weren’t wrong. We keep avoiding this talk.”*

Annie sat on the closest coach with her head between her hands *“I don’t want to fight Hughie. Last time we both said thing we didn’t mean, and hurt each other.”*

Hughie sat next to her and put a hand on her knee, saying gently *"You are right. So how about we talk instead?"*

Annie gave him a glare *"Because both of us were hell bent to fight last time."* She commented sarcastically.

Hughie gave her a sheepish look *"Fair point. But then the emotion was still raw. I think we both had enough time to sort them out and talk about them rationally."*

Annie sat up and looked at Hughie with a smirk on her face *"Look at you all grown up, doesn't even bottling your emotions."*

Hughie smiled back at her and said, *"Well I couldn't risk losing you because I was too stupid to open up and speak out."*

Annie nodded and replied *"I guess that's bring us back to the conversation we should have. Because that's exactly how I feel Hughie. I don't want to lose you, so I had to say something."*

Hughie took one of her hands in his while saying softly *"I can understand that. But what you did was imply I'm not capable of handling things like that."*

Annie bowed her head and said quietly *"I got it sometime later."* Then she raised her gaze to meet Hughie's *"I didn't mean like that, I swear."*

Hughie nodded slowly *"I get that now Annie, but then it hurt me too much to realize that."*

Annie leaned forward to give Hughie a tight hug as she said, *"I'm sorry."*

Hughie hugged her back and said, *"It's okay, we learn from our mistakes. I sure as hell do it often enough."* He leaned back from the hug and gave Annie a hard look before speaking *"I am still going to the tower with all of you."*

Annie sighed, her voice was with a note of defeat when she spoke *"I know. Part of me wished you would have stayed back and safe. While another part of me is happy to have you at my side for this."*

Hughie gave her a wide smile *"And I will always be. Even if you try to argue against it."*

Annie just leaned in and kissed him on the lips.

Few minutes later, they were both breathing heavily, and Annie said between gasps *“Well that was fun, but we do need a good rest before tomorrow.”*

Hughie reluctantly agreed, and they both moved toward their rooms. Much happier without the tense air that was constant for the past couple of days.

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They were all in the living room. Butcher, Frenchie and MM were preparing each weapons of their own.

Hughie looked at Annie and asked, *“Not going to wear your super-suit, Starlight?”*

Annie gave him a weird look, saying, *“Didn’t exactly had time to pack it with me Hughie.”*

After all, they were wearing now the same clothes they wore when they got into Mallory’s house couple of days ago. Washed and fresh, but that’s a testament to how few their clothing choices are now.

Hughie rubbed the back of his neck, embarrassed. *“Good point. Sorry, just in the movies the suits always come out of nowhere. Never actually considered you have to pack it with you everywhere you go to do it.”*

Annie chuckled and rubbed his arm *“It’s ok I get it. Actually, I don’t think I would have worn it even if I did pack it with me.”* At the confused look from Hughie, she explained *“that suit represents the old me. The me that believed in Vought, Ezekiel and everything they stood for. The me that was mouth-raped in it while in the tower and didn’t fight back until it was too late. I hate that version of myself. You gave me the courage to change, to stand up for myself. To be the better version of myself. I outgrow that suit.”*

Hughie smiled proudly at her before asking *“So what you plan to do now?”*

Annie shrugged without a care *“For now this will do. After that... We will have to live and see.”*

Then she smirked, turned to Hughie, patted his cheeks gently and said in a teasing voice *“Oh you don’t have to worry Hughie. I will keep the suit for the nights you will prefer a go with Starlight instead of Annie.”*

Hughie choked, his entire face burning red which caused Annie and Kimiko to burst out laughing. Kimiko held out her hand to Annie, and the blonde high-fived her, both still smiling at Hughie’s embarrassment.

That was when Mallory entered the room and without a word turned the screen on *“To all our watchers we have a rare surprise today. Today at 8 p.m. none other than Homelander himself will join me in the studio to discuss the rumors surrounding both himself and Vought in the past two days. So, tune in to hear Homelander’s side of the story for the first time.”* The anchor said with as much enthusiasm as possible for a single man.

Mallory immediately shut the TV down and looked at everybody in the room *“Our preparation worked as planned. You have 30 minutes leave toward the tower, when you see Homelander walk into the studio to begin his interview that will be your signal to begin your infiltration. I will leave shortly to make sure the equipment in the station is functioning while Homelander is there.”*

With that said the final preparation were at end.

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The six of them were sitting at the van, all looking at the screen of Frenchie’s phone where the anchor was standing behind his table clapping as Homelander walked into the frame. The supe king had a large, but clearly fake, smile on his face as he waved to the audience. Few moments later they both were sitting down and the anchor started asking *“So, Homelander in the past two days rumors about flight 37 and a drug for creating supers have been circulating in the news. Vought is yet to comment on the issues, what do you have to say?”*

Homelander kept the fake smile as he began speaking *“Well I am here from behalf of Vought and the seven so I can tell you...”*

Butcher snatched the phone and turned it off. *“As much as I would like to see how the cunts trying to spin it, we have a job to do and an hour starting now.”*

Annie looked down at her phone, the messenger app opened on a contact named simply 'M.' Her last messages read 'Device planted.' And 'Eagle left the building.' She gave a nod to Frenchie, and the thin man began typing on the tablet he was holding.

Couple of minutes later he said *"Magnifique. I added Annie's palm read to all doors again, so no one will suspect who will gain access to the floors. I also started a loop in all the cameras at the tower."*

Butcher open the door and stepped out before saying *"Well let's do it. We all reach the server floor together. From there it's Frenchie's and Hughie's job to find a place to connect their devices so they could copy the info, which should take about 15 minutes. Me and MM will hold off all the security guards, while our resident supes will deal with the cunt Noir once he arrives. Clear?"*

A series of nods later, they were on the move.

MM distracted the two guards in the entrance so the other could slip in with the weapons, before passing easily himself into the lobby.

From there Annie's palm opened the elevator doors and gave them access to the server floor.

Luckily for them the floor they needed was one of the lower ones, so couple of minutes later the metal doors slid open.

Butcher and MM stood in the front; weapons ready to fire. And indeed, once the door opened, they both fired, taking down the guards assigned to that floor. Butcher turned to them and said *"Well the cunts will get here eventually so you better start moving toward that server."*

Frenchie and Hughie immediately ran forward looking for a port. Hughie was the first to find it and call Frenchie to his side.

The port was in a server that was located almost at the end of the room, farther from the rest farm than Hughie ever saw. Which left a big empty space in front of them and a solid concrete wall behind them. On the opposite of the wall stood next to were the large windows that made the tower so attractive from the outside.

Frenchie pulled out the tablet from his bag, while Hughie connected the first end of the cable into the port of the server. Frenchie quickly followed with connecting the other end to the tablet.

While Frenchie was typing at his tablet Annie and Kimiko joined them. Annie looked around confused *“So all we needed was connect a cable to a port?”*

Hughie shook his head *“That’s the first part, but Frenchie still need to hack their firewall so we can access the info.”*

Frenchie smiled and said *“Oui. And thanks to Mallory I have software that did exactly that. Start counting my friends, in 14 minutes we will have access to all their data.”*

Annie sighed, relieved *“Maybe we can get out of here before what’s left of the seven catch up to us.”*

*“I wouldn’t count on it Starlight.”* A familiar voice caused Annie to spin around.

Infront of them stood the two members left from the seven.

They expected Black Noir, but next to him stood a supe they thought they don’t have to worry about. The Deep.