

Chapter 10 – The Deep Fall into the Light

Black Noir, as usual, stood silently, his mask hiding his face and emotions. Yet, the air around him felt threatening. The Deep stood tall and proud, his trident held tightly in his hand, a smirk on his face.

Annie glared harshly at the two members of The Seven and snarled at The Deep, “What the fuck?! I thought they sent you away.”

The Deep shrugged. “Well, thanks to you, I am back with The Seven.”

Annie reeled back in shock. “What?”

The smirk on the ocean-themed supe grew. “Nobody gave much stake to the accusations of a traitor. So when you ran away, Vought brought me back, telling the public you invented all the charges.”

Annie’s face turned red with rage. Vought had not only allowed her to be mouth-raped without punishing the guilty party, but the second she left, they called her a liar and gave the man his job back. Fine! She would take him down the hard way.

Through the fog of anger in her mind, Hughie’s voice reached her. “Annie…”

It was enough to ground her back into reality. Then a grunt from the black-clad figure opposite them reminded everyone why they were there.

The Deep nodded, saying, “He’s right. As fun as it is catching up, we have a job to do here.” He raised his trident and aimed it at the two men working on the server.

Annie stepped forward, positioning herself between Hughie and The Deep. She raised her palms, her eyes glowing white before a burst of light shot from her hands, pushing the Vought hero a few steps back.

From the corner of her eye, she saw Black Noir advancing toward her, but Kimiko quickly tackled him down.

The Deep was ready for a fight. Avoiding her next light burst, he tried to stab her with his trident, but Annie crouched and avoided most of the hit. With a hiss, she punched him in the gut. When the punch landed, the so-called hero dropped his trident and hugged his midsection, gasping, “My gills.”

Annie was about to send another light burst to knock him out, but The Deep quickly recovered and swept her legs out from under her, sending her to the floor.

She tried blinking the pain away, but suddenly, four sharp points were descending on her.

She rolled out of the way and kicked in the direction she saw the attack come from.

The kick apparently hit something because she heard a groan. When she got back to her feet, she saw The Deep rising to his full height with an annoyed look on his face.

That look made Annie happy because she was getting under his skin. This fight was far from over.

Hughie watched as The Deep charged at Annie and whispered to Frenchie, “How much longer?”

Frenchie, who was watching Kimiko run toward Black Noir at top speed, averted his eyes back to the screen and mumbled back to Hughie, “Merde, still ten more minutes to go.”

Hughie shook his head, his face a mask of concern, but for what, he wasn't sure anymore. He looked around the room and whispered again, “Wouldn't help even if it finished now. The only way out is through that fight, and somehow I doubt Black Noir will miss either of us if we try to sneak past.”

Frenchie nodded. Hughie noticed he watched as Kimiko barely managed to avoid being cut by one of Noir's knives, but it was clear she learned from their last fight. The mute supe quickly moved aside from the stab aimed at her shoulder and landed a powerful hit to his head. The helmet he wore cracked slightly, and he took a few steps back, disoriented. But before Kimiko could land the next blow, he caught her fist and tried to kick her knees.

Kimiko wasn't one to give up; she jumped, turned in the air, and wrapped her legs around the dark supe's neck, trying to choke him.

But Noir bent backward quickly and then just as fast bent forward. He stopped his momentum once Kimiko slammed to the floor. A strong ‘crunch’ sound came from her body, and she lay there limp.

Both Hughie and Frenchie knew Kimiko would be fine and back fighting in a minute. But before that could happen, Black Noir drew another knife and seemed ready to plunge it through her heart.

Neither of the two men watching knew if Kimiko could recover from that, especially if the Vought supe left the knife inside her. Frenchie was drawing his gun, ready to fire, but before he could, a powerful shotgun blast hit Black Noir in the face, sending him to the floor. His mask shattered into small pieces around him.

Butcher came into view, holding the shotgun he had just fired and aiming it at The Deep's head. The Brit had a black eye, obviously indicating he and MM were busy while the supes attacked.

Unfortunately, the shot that hit Black Noir was loud enough to draw The Deep's attention. He managed to dodge the shot, and while doing so, he got close enough to Butcher to swing the

trident hard enough to send the older man flying backward. Butcher landed hard, blood trickling down his forehead.

Annie noticed The Deep's distraction and used it to her advantage. She sent a powerful burst of light to his back, causing him to collide headfirst with the window. Luckily for him, he stopped with just his head out the window. His trident wasn't so lucky and flew out the window into the darkness below.

Annie began walking toward the dazed Deep, but suddenly Black Noir, his disfigured face revealed now that his mask was broken on the floor, appeared, blocking her way with two knives in his hands.

Hughie watched Annie raise her palm, ready to attack, but Kimiko seemed to have hard feelings about Noir experimenting with killing her. She pounced on him with punches and kicks, keeping him on the defensive for a while, but soon enough, he began matching her.

Meanwhile, Annie was fighting an angry Deep again, this time he didn't play around but tried to go for the kill.

Annie and Kimiko were back-to-back with each other, both female supes trying to defend themselves from the ongoing assault of their opponents.

Just before Noir could land another deadly hit on Kimiko and take her out for a while, a figure landed on his back, pulling him away from the raven-haired female supe.

Hughie was shocked to see Maeve punching Black Noir in the gut as soon as he turned to her, causing him to gasp. Without a moment of hesitation, she pulled a candy bar from her pocket and shoved it into his disfigured mouth.

"Was that an Almond Joy?" Hughie whispered, confused.

"Oui," Frenchie replied, equally confused.

But then Black Noir fell to the floor, gasping and trying to reach for something in his pocket, but Maeve took it from him and threw it out the window, letting Noir fall limp to the floor. It took a moment for Hughie to realize, "Allergy!" he whispered in wonder.

With Black Noir down, Annie managed to subdue The Deep soon enough herself. The ocean supe was on his knees, panting.

As Hughie kept his eyes locked on Annie's fight, he heard Frenchie saying with an excited whisper, "We got it."

A smirk began to form on Hughie's face, but it froze when he heard Annie's taunting voice, "Look who's on his knees this time around."

Then The Deep began to speak. "I-I am sorry, Starlight. You were right. I had no right to do to you what I did. I deserve whatever you do to me now."

Hughie saw Annie lowering her guard, surprised by his words. Hughie was about to say something. Annie was always forgiving; she never wanted to kill, and she had idolized The Deep. But now wasn't the time for that. If the ocean supe saw weakness...

Hughie's eyes grew in horror as he noticed the sharp movement in the male supe's body. Luckily for him, while fighting, they both moved close to where he and Frenchie were hiding. Annie was looking at her opponent's eyes, searching for the truth, so she missed the movement of his arm as a fist headed toward her.

Hughie was moving before he was thinking. With a yell of "Annie!" he pushed her with as much force as he could muster. Afraid it wouldn't be enough, he also turned himself in the air so the fist would reach him before it reached Annie. At the very least, he would absorb most of the hit himself.

He felt the punch connect with the right side of his ribcage and then a sharp pain in his back before the world went black.

Annie was in shock hearing The Deep's words. Maybe there was a good man underneath the asshole she met. Maybe he was the real hero before Vought corrupted him.

She was so focused on the man's face that she ignored the rest of his body. But then she felt herself being pushed away.

As she fell toward the floor, she turned to look at her attacker just in time to see The Deep's power punch connect with Hughie's body, sending her boyfriend to the wall behind him with great force. She heard herself screaming his name just as he hit the wall and fell limp to the floor.

Hughie! How could she miss that attack? The distraction was so obvious. But Hughie saw it and threw himself at her to save her. And in doing so, he could be dead now. She saw Frenchie getting to his side immediately, calling for him, but Hughie was not responding.

Anger filled every fiber of her being as she jumped back to her feet. Looking around, she saw Black Noir still down while Butcher, Kimiko, Maeve, and MM were fighting a squadron of Vought security men. Then she saw The Deep charging at her. She used her anger to match him at full force.

Hughie slowly opened his eyes. Pain was the only thing he could feel. But that changed once his vision came back into focus and he saw Annie fighting The Deep again.

Frenchie's voice cut through the pain and worry, "Petit Hughie!"

Hughie groaned and managed to get out through gritted teeth, "Lights..."

Frenchie's face finally came into view, confused. "Quoi?"

Hughie glanced at the tablet Frenchie was holding and repeated, trying to make his voice stronger this time but failing, "Lights...Up...Annie."

Frenchie seemed to get what Hughie meant. He grabbed the tablet and began tapping its screen, using his access to the tower's system to increase the light output on the floor.

Hughie let his head fall to the floor again and stared at the ceiling with a small smile on his face.

Annie knew The Deep was getting tired from the long fight, but so was she. Soon, it would be about who could last longer. Unfortunately, Annie had learned to rely on her powers to end a fight quickly, but against another supe, her super strength was nullified by his own, and The Deep had a few more years of experience on her. She knew if something didn't change in her favor soon, she would lose this one.

Annie didn't know what she was expecting, but the room getting brighter wasn't high on her list. That was until she felt the surge of power around her.

Annie smirked at the confused Vought hero. He scowled at her and asked, "What the fuck are you happy about, Starlight?" Then he smiled nastily. "Oh, you must be glad to have a better view of your boyfriend's last breaths. Don't worry, soon enough you..."

Annie's anger clouded her mind when she heard The Deep's comment on Hughie's life. He trailed off with his next nasty comment as both her eyes and hands glowed stronger than ever before. His smile turned into a confused frown.

In her anger, Annie drew on all the energy now available to her, which, with the lights' new output, was a significant amount. The Deep's confused look turned to concern as electrical sparks began framing Annie's menacing form. But Annie had no mercy left, especially not for him.

Her mind replayed every crime the so-called hero committed. Mouth-raping her, supporting institutions that hurt the animals he claimed to care about, but worst of all, killing Hughie. Without hesitation, she thrust her palms out, sending the most powerful light burst she had ever produced toward the murderer.

The Deep's face showed horror as he was pushed out the window toward the ground below with a force he had no hope of opposing.

Still high with her newfound power level and anger, she turned her gaze to the group of Vought security men fighting her friends.

MM was the first to notice her glowing and angry state. With sparks still flying around her, he yelled to Butcher and Maeve, "Close your eyes and get down!"

A moment later, when the three were on the floor with their eyes covered, she released another powerful light burst that knocked all the Vought security out for a good while.

The lights dimmed back to normal, and Annie stopped glowing. With the overwhelming feeling of power gone, she took a deep breath. For now, it was over, all thanks to the trick with the lights. Without that, she would probably be dead. She knew only one man could think of that. She would have to thank Hughie...

Hughie! She turned around with a speed that gave her whiplash. When she saw Hughie lying unmoving on the floor with Frenchie looking worried over him, she ran forward.

Kneeling at his side with tears in her eyes, Annie whispered sadly, "Hughie."

Her eyes widened when his eyes opened in her direction, a small, tight smile forming on his lips. In a small and pained voice, Hughie asked, "Are you okay?"

Annie shook her head, tears filling her eyes, and said incredulously, "Me?! I wasn't the one who got punched by a supe and sent into a wall across the room."

Hughie tried to shrug, but even the start of the movement caused him to wince. Nonetheless, he tried to wave it off. "I probably just broke my right ribcage; it'll be fine. He was about to hit you, you didn't see. Did you get the fucker?"

Annie didn't want to upset Hughie at this moment, so she smiled sadly and answered, "He won't rape anyone else ever again."

Hughie gave a tight, small nod before replying weakly, "Good. That's good. The fucker deserved it." And then his eyes began to close again.

Frenchie immediately leaned over his tall form and began slapping him gently. "Non, petit Hughie. You must not close your eyes. Think of something important to stay awake."

Annie was very concerned. Hughie only groaned in response to Frenchie's nagging, his eyes still closed. She needed to do something. She needed to give him something important to think about. A blush spread across her cheeks when an idea came to her.

She wasn't sure when she realized it. Was it when Hughie chose to tell her the truth, or maybe when he opened himself up just so she would leave a door open to a relationship with her mom? Was it after Janine's question or after their fight, and all this time, she denied and resisted it because of her own fears and insecurities? Maybe it just happened when he was willing to sacrifice himself for her, but no matter when it happened, what was important was that it did, and she knew what to say to Hughie.

She took the hand that was close to her and said quietly, "I love you, Hughie."

Hughie's eyes opened, clouded with confusion. A couple of blinks later, he asked mostly himself, "Is this a dream, or am I in heaven?"

Annie shook her head with a smile. "Neither one, silly. It's real."

Hughie still looked confused. "Oh... I thought I heard you say something... doesn't matter."

Annie gave him a funny look. "That I love you? I did say it. And I do."

Hughie's jaw dropped, and he asked disbelievingly, "What?"

Annie rolled her eyes playfully before answering with a soft smile and a strong voice, "I love you, Hughie Campbell."

Just to emphasize her point, she leaned down and kissed him gently but deeply.

When she broke the kiss, Hughie had a wide smile on his face, not the tight one from before, and he said dreamily, "I love you, Annie January."

But then the British voice broke the moment as usual. "Sorry to break this lovefest, but we got to move before Homelcunt comes back and the cunts send him to look for us."

MM and Frenchie each grabbed Hughie by an arm and lifted him to his feet. Hughie let out a small scream of pain, which caused Annie's heart to clench. With an arm around the shoulders of each man, they began dragging him with them to the elevator and from there to their van.

As they walked to the van, Annie saw The Deep's broken body lying in the street with a pool of his own blood around him. She expected to feel horrified with herself, but she didn't. She wasn't happy she killed, but she didn't regret it in this case.

Butcher was driving the van as ordinarily as he could so they wouldn't arouse suspicion while leaving the city toward the woods. Frenchie sat shotgun and talked with Butcher about the amount of info they got from the Vought servers.

MM, Kimiko, and Maeve all sat in the middle bench, resting with their eyes closed after the trying evening they all had. Maeve had to join them because Vought would kill her for betraying them, and with no way to kill Black Noir, it was just a matter of time before they found out. Mallory was already picking Elena up on her way back from the news station.

She and Hughie sat in the back bench with Hughie lying across the three seats, his head resting in her lap. She made sure to keep making small talk with him so he wouldn't close his eyes. Mallory should be waiting with a medical team by the time they arrived at the forest mansion.

Annie's smile was huge. Vought would not take this lying down for long, she knew it. But today was a huge win for them. They got all of Vought's info and secrets in the palm of their hands, and between The Deep's death, Black Noir and A-Train being out of commission, and both

Queen Maeve and Starlight being fugitives, Homelander was all Vought had left. The Seven were finished. And Annie was satisfied with that.