

Chapter 6 – Levels of fights

A moment after the door exploded a group of men in black suits, and rifles entered the living room. Annie dropped the phone and raised her hands, palms out, ready for attack. Until she noticed the Vaught pin each of them wore. She frowned and asked, *“What the hell is going on here?!”*

The man who burst first into the door replied *“You two are coming with us to the seven’s tower. Miss. Stillwell will like a word.”*

Annie remembered Hughie’s warning. She turned her head over her shoulder and said firmly *“Get behind the counter mom and don’t look.”* She didn’t wait for a reply but could hear shuffling from behind her.

The men obviously heard her warning and understood she had no intention to come quietly. They raised their gun ready to fire, but Annie’s eyes were already glowing when she turned around. She began drawing electricity from around her until a bright light shot out of her palms, hitting Vaught’s men and sending all of them flying backwards.

Before any of them could get back up, some of them won’t for a while, she began collecting their guns and breaking them. She didn’t want to kill anyone, and that all of them are useless without weapons. But then a fresh group of men with rifles entered through the blasted door and attacked her.

Sparks of electricity filled the air of the living room, as Annie used her powers again and again to knock the as many of the attacker out. By now there were at least 20 men in the living room trying to get to her, with another 10 on floor already out of the fight. Usually, Annie wouldn’t have a problem to take them on, but in a small space like that and with her trying to keep the attention off her mother the options were limited.

Soon enough Annie couldn’t feel any electricity around from to draw from except from her phone, but she knew she will need it later to call Hughie. She was forced to resort to using her enhanced power to incapacitate the men with injuries, which she didn’t enjoy, but right now choices were thin.

Unfortunately, while she was bullet proof, the hits, especially from such a short distance, were still painful to her. And a few moments later she was overwhelmed and pinned to wall, each arm held to her back by at least five men. She felt despair wash over her when he

heard them prepare the enhanced cuffs. But then another explosion, this time from the window of the living room, shocked Annie. She wondered if it was more of Vaught's men, and if it wasn't an overkill. After all she was already pinned to the wall. And that's when she felt the weight holding her to the wall disappear, she heard yelling and felt a splash of some warm liquid land on her back.

Hughie could hear the gunshots and the fighting all the way from the bedroom. He was glad the window was unlocked, and he didn't have to break it to get inside from the fire escape. He crouched to keep a low profile and began moving toward the sound of the fight.

When he reached the end of the corridor leading from the bedroom to the living room, he looked around the corner to see at least a dozen men pinning Annie to the wall. He was about to stand up and do anything to help her, which would have ruined the plan, when the big window of the living room shattered, and Kimiko came through it inside the now destroyed living room. She didn't hesitate for even a moment before throwing herself at the still dumbfounded men.

Hughie watched as first she used her strength to push all the dozen men away from Annie, and when they began attacking her, she retaliated by killing each of them which she could reach. He saw as Annie's shocked look turned into confused one, but once she understood Kimiko was there to help her and not take her in she helped her. When one of the men aimed their gun to Kimiko's head Annie kicked him hard enough to send him into the opposite wall. And when Annie had too many men on her at once Kimiko appeared from behind them and redirected their attention.

Hughie was brought out of his awe filled state when he noticed the downside of such a big fight. Bodies and bullets were flying in every direction. That was when Hughie saw Annie's mom curled into a ball behind the counter on the kitchen's side. As discreetly as he could he moved toward the older woman.

Once he reached her, he slowly tugged her arm. Luckily for them the sound of bullets covered the sound of her scream. Hughie whisper-shouted "*Mrs. January! My name is Hughie.*" He noticed her eyes widen in recognition, which for him was weird considering she didn't exactly pay him any attention at the single occasion they met. But don't look gift horse in the mouth and all of that. "*Follow me to your bedroom, I will get you somewhere safe.*" The Woman just nodded and got on her feet ready to follow.

Just before they were back at the safety of the corridor Hughie noticed a rifle lying not far away from him. He motioned Annie's mom to crawl on to the bedroom, while he snatched the weapon and followed her shortly after.

Once he met the woman in the bedroom he stood up and offer her a hand to help her. When she was on her feet she glanced at the rifle and asked timidly "*What's that for?*"

Hughie was about to say safety, when there was a sound behind him. Apparently, they movements were not a subtle as he liked to think. Without even thinking about it too much, he stepped forward to block Mrs. January from their bullets and faster than they aimed, raised the weapon to the general direction of the doorway and pulled the trigger. With closed eyes, he moved the weapon slightly to the left and then to the right until the clip was empty. When Hughie opened his eyes, he saw two bodies on the floor with holes in a few spots on their body, the wall opposite to him was riddled with holes as well. Hughie winced, hopping Mrs. January won't hate him for that.

He looked back at Annie's mom and said lightly "*That's why.*" But then quickly changed it to a firm voice saying, "*Down the fire escape, now.*" He watched her stepping out the window into the metal railing slowly and nervously. He could relate to her, a year ago he would be in the same state. But now, he glanced at his empty rifle and dropped it to the floor before grabbing one from the dead Vaught security men. Immediately after he followed Annie's mom into the fire escape and down the 3 stories to the first one. Once there he jumped from the last step onto the dumpster, he used to climb on in the first place. He turned and offered Mrs. January help again. Couple a minutes later they were on the street walking toward a car parking innocently at a parking lot not five minutes walking distance from the apartment they just escaped.

Once they reached the car, Hughie opened the back seat door and signaled Mrs. January to get in. After she did, he closed the door, turned with his back to the car and leaned on it, the gun hidden behind his back while his eyes on the street. He heard the window of the passenger seat coming down and Butcher voice came out "*Got a nice weapon there kid, I don't suppose they were nice enough to let you keep it as a memento voluntarily.*"

Hughie rolled his eyes "*Sure Butcher, right after they showed us the way out safely.*"

The Brit snorted, before looking at the back mirror and asking "*I thought we are here for your supe girlfriend, why did we pick up the hag?*"

Hughie let out a frustrated sigh, a common thing while spending time with Butcher, he could imagine the offended look on Annie's mom face. *"First of all, isn't manners are an English thing? And second, Vaught will use her against Annie if they get their hands on her. And finally, I wasn't about to leave her in the middle of the battlefield."*

Butcher shrugged *"Are you sure about the second? If it was me, I wouldn't rush to help the bitch that sold me into the same company that allows rape."*

Hughie really couldn't deal it with anymore and snapped *"Fucking stop Butcher, do you really think it's the time for comments like that?"*

The older man didn't respond and there was an awkward silence in the car. Hughie heard his dad clear his throat before saying a bit shyly *"I am Hugh Campbell, Hughie's dad."*

Hughie wanted to facepalm at how embarrassing his dad acting but was a bit surprised when Mrs. January responded pleasantly *"Donna January. Annie's mom, or maybe you know her as Starlight."* Then again, Hughie guess she liked how normal his dad was acting compared to the fucking mess they just escaped. He heard Annie's mom voice again asking, *"Do you have any idea what's going on?"*

His dad chuckled *"Not a clue."* And after a small pause added *"But I did seem to gather my son and your daughter has something going on."*

Hughie paled slightly, not sure how Mrs. January would take the news. He wasn't expecting a small laugh *"Well my daughter certainly didn't hide it. Actually, told me quite pointily."* That surprised Hughie, but before he could think any further on that, two figures came running toward the car.

Annie was surprised when she noticed the female helping her fight the Vaught men, but then she remembered Hughie mention a supe female they rescue. Which meant Hughie is here somewhere! With renewed energy she helped the other female supe to fight the men. Annie was slightly disturbed when she noticed the other supe killing the man without a second thought.

Annie noticed one of the men aiming to shoot her in the head, not knowing if she was bulletproof Annie kicked the gun hard enough to break it, and then sent the man to the wall. When the men started close on her again the other female came from behind her and began killing until all their attention was on her. It took them a little more time to deal with

the rest of them. Most ended up dead by the raven-haired woman, and some were knocked out for at least the next day.

Then Annie remembered her mother and began looking around for her, but when the other woman noticed she began signaling with her hands a few times the same thing until Annie got it “*Oh, Hughie got her out?*” The other woman nodded. Annie tried to remember; Hughie did mention her name of the supe on their team. She looked at her and asked “*Kimiko, right?*” Kimiko smiled at her and nodded.

Annie noticed her phone lying on the floor and picked it up, there were a few cracks on the screen, but it was working just fine. She turned to the door and was about to walk out, when a hand on her shoulder stopped her. She looked around to see Kimiko shaking her head and pointing at the corridor leading to the bedroom. Annie took a moment to realize “*The fire escape. That’s how Hughie got in and out.*” She received a nod in return and followed the other supe.

Annie froze at the entrance the bedroom, where two bodies were lying on the floor. Each of them had a few bullet holes, and the wall behind them was riddled as well. She looked at Kimiko, who was already sliding out the window, and asked “*Hughie did this?*” She received a combination of a nod and shrug.

As they were running toward someplace Kimiko knew, Annie considered the latest of Hughie’s crimes. Somehow now she didn’t feel horrified, but warm. She assumed Hughie did it to protect her mother, and part of her was very grateful for that, while another part wondered what else Hughie willing to do to protect those he care about. After all, the list of crimes to his name keeps growing, and all for the same reason. Never to protect himself, but others.

When they arrived at the parking lot Annie was the first to notice the tall man leaning on a car. She increased her speed and called “*Hughie!*” Said man smiled at her and brought his hands from behind his back, revealing the rifle he was holding. Annie stopped few steps away from him and raised an eyebrow, asking “*A weapon Hughie?*” But there was no heat in her voice, just teasing.

Hughie chuckled before replying “*Well someone needed to be on parents guard, and not all of us can shoot light from our palms.*”

Annie giggled before taking the final steps and hugging Hughie tightly. Not caring about their blood-stained clothes.

Hughie was enjoying the hug, even if it was a little awkward hugging with a rifle in one hand. But their moment was broken by a voice with a British accent calling *“Oi, lovebirds. We need the get the fuck away before more cunts show up here.”* Hughie nodded and pulled away from the hug. He went to the back so he could hide the weapon in the trunk. When he came back Kimiko was sitting in the passenger seat, and the back seat already had two of the three places filled. He looked confused at Annie who kept standing next to the car. She smirked and motioned for him to get in. Still confused he sat, and a moment later was shocked when Annie sat herself in his lap and closed the door behind her. Without any comment from anyone else, which surprised Hughie even more, Butcher started driving away.

Hughie tried looking over Annie’s shoulder at Butcher when he asked *“Where are we driving? The hideout?”*

Butcher shook his head and responded *“It’s in the city. With Homelander flying around and the other cunts looking for us it’s too dangerous. We will keep a low profile at Mallory’s.”*

Annie tried to look over her shoulder at Hughie before asking *“Who is Mallory?”*

Hughie shifted a little uncomfortably. Partly because of Annie’s position, slightly because of her mother sitting right next to him while they were in this position, and some thanks to the question. *“She’s formally a CIA, and Butcher worked for her. Now she kind of helps us taking down Vaught.”* He debated with himself about adding something else, and eventually decided that he better prepare Annie for what can happen *“Fair warning she isn’t exactly a fan of supes either.”*

Annie tilted her head, but before she could reply Butcher commented *“Sensible lady.”*

The blonde raised an eyebrow and asked flatly *“Oh?”*

Butcher just smirked at her through the back view mirror *“What’s the problem love, where’s all the smiles for Hughie’s old mate Billy.”*

The light powered hero glared at the British asshole while retorting *"All I see is a lying piece of shit, that got Hughie into this fucking mess to begin with."*

Butcher scowled at her and said flatly *"So you would have told him to take the cunts money and tell everyone his lass was in fault for dying? And of course, a supe will want Vaught to get away with every fucking thing."*

Annie felt her face burning, and she had to fight really hard to keep her powers in check. She hissed with as much venom as she could muster at the driver *"Listen you asshole..."*

But before she could finish, her mother cut her off with an automatic scandalized voice *"Annie! Watch your language!"*

Annie's ire was redirected to her mom, who until this point she tried to ignore, still far too angry with the woman to talk with her. But with her mother's comment Annie couldn't stop herself from shooting one in return, her voice emotionless *"Oh you are here? I thought you will go with your Vaught friends."*

Hughie noticed Mrs. January flinch at Annie's words, and her eyes became filled with tears. His dad was shifting awkwardly, not used to such tense situations. Until now Hughie made sure to keep his hands to himself, but he had felt he had to do something. He put his arms around Annie, trying to comfort her. When he felt Annie's stiffness leave her body and felt brave enough, he commented *"I really don't think now is the best time."*

He felt Annie stiffen again before replying *"Of course this is the time Hughie. She sold her own daughter to Vaught once before, who said she wouldn't do it again. She didn't move an inch when dad left, so don't think that you or anyone else will change her mind."*

This time Hughie could feel even himself wincing at the harsh words. From the corner of his eye, he saw his dad putting a comforting hand on the older woman's shoulder. But Butcher decided to make things worse. The older man snorted and mumbled *"If she's always like that I might just like her... Oi!"* Hughie glared at him and was happy to see Kimiko punching his shoulder with a disapproving look on her face.

Hughie wanted to ask Butcher to pull the car aside so he could talk with Annie alone. But with Homelander and Vaught after them, it's probably a bad idea. On the other hand, bringing this tense atmosphere to Mallory's bound to make everything worse. Hughie took a

deep breath *“Annie... I-I get you are upset, and you have every right to be. But you are going a little too far.”*

She turned sideways to look at her boyfriend with narrowed eyes *“You wouldn’t say it if you knew how many times she lied to me. You warned me it would happen if I knew the truth, and I made my choice Hughie. I don’t regret it.”*

Hughie gave her a small, sad smile before gently saying *“I didn’t tell you that so you will hate your mom, I did because you deserved to know.”*

Annie shook her head and replied, *“It doesn’t change what she did.”*

Hughie looked to his left, seeing Mrs. January silently crying on his dad’s shoulder. His dad patting her back, trying to comfort her. Memories Hughie always tried to banish the moment they came, now seemed so different. The past two decades looks so different in this new light.

Hughie held Annie even closer to him, causing her chin to rest on his shoulder. His blue eyes stared deep into her brown. When he spoke, it was so quietly he wasn’t sure anyone will hear *“My mom left us when I was 6 years old.”* His dad’s gasp proved he was well heard inside the car, and Hughie understood his reaction. Hughie for all those years always refused talking about his mother, settling on ignoring her existence.

Annie’s eyes went from narrowed anger to wide confusion. She was surprised by the change of the subject. But she could see how hard it was for Hughie to say even that much, so she waited patiently until he spoke again *“I still don’t know why. Everything was great until one day she was just... gone. I blamed myself for a while, thinking I wasn’t worth sticking around for.”* Hughie could feel tears gathering in the corners of his eyes, but he kept going. After all that time, talking about it felt... relieving. *“I’m sure you noticed I can be clingy. I honest enough to know I will do anything to keep the people I care about in my life. It was a part of why I told you the truth. Kind of pathetic I know.”*

“Oh Hughie, there is nothing pathetic about it. It’s human, and if it’s worth anything I really glad you told me the truth.” Annie said softly, a hand resting comfortably on his cheek.

Hughie took the hand Annie had on his cheek in his own, before keeping talking gently *“I am not telling you this to get pity or something like that. I just want you to know that I understand having a parent walk out on you, I know how this hole feel. And while I had my*

dad, I still wish I could have had a mom too. I don't want you to give yours up because of your anger."

The soft look sharpened slightly, but Annie kept her eyes on Hughie's as she said as calmly as she could *"I appreciate that. But it's not just my anger Hughie, my mom did a whole of a lot more than leaving."*

By this point Hughie and Annie were ignoring all the other occupants of the car and their reactions. Hughie looked back at Annie determined *"Yes, she did. She stayed!"*

Annie was surprised at Hughie's words and tone. She leaned back from him as much as possible in their position. Not knowing what else to say she asked *"What?"*

Hughie sighed. He didn't mean to hurt Annie, but she was blinded by her anger. It would be worse later if she did something she will regret in her anger. He was where Annie is now, the emotional turmoil of feeling, betrayed by your parent, putting the blame in the wrong place and making bad choices because of that. Some of them he still dragging to this day.

Hughie wants to spare Annie all those mistakes, but to do so he has to own up to his own. *"When my mom left, dad did his best. He knew me and mom used to listen to Billy Joel songs together, and that our favorite food was pizza rolls. So, he bought a shit load of pizza rolls, and we ate them on the sofa, listening to Billy Joel, every night."* Hughie had a wistful smile on his face, before shaking it off to an expression full of regret *"Now I can see he was trying to fill the hole mom left behind inside me, trying to support and heal me when he himself was breaking down inside without anyone to lean on. But then I saw a defeated man, who gave up on everything good in his life without a fight. And when he told me to let go of Robin and move on with my life, I thought he was trying to teach me to be weak like him."*

Hughie turned his head to look at his dad. Both of them had tears in their eyes. Eventually Hughie managed to get the words out *"I'm so sorry dad. You did everything you could for me, made sure I was as happy as I could, and took care of me at both my worst and best. All this time I looked at you as weak because I didn't know what real strength is. I-I wish I could take all of those years back so I could help you too."*

Despite the tears coming down his face, his dad had a wide smile on his face *"It's ok son, I love you. Maybe you didn't know what real strength is, but you always had it. You were willing to risk your own life so I could get away safely, that's the kind of man you are. And I*

am very proud of that man.” His eyes shifted to Annie, and he added happily “I am glad to see that even in hard times like that you found your own happiness, and you are willing to fight for it.”

Hughie gave his father a wide, tearful smile before turning back to Annie. She was crying too, looking at him with wide eyes and small smile on her face *“I am proud of you too Hughie. It takes a lot to admit to a mistake like that and find your way to fix it.”* She praised him softly.

He shook his head at her, holding both her hands he said gently *“Make yourself proud Annie, and don’t make the same mistakes I did. Your mom did make her mistakes, but she deserved a fair chance to at least explain herself. And you should consider if your anger really worth losing the only parent that stuck by you all this time.”*

Annie’s face frowned. She didn’t want to disappoint Hughie, but she didn’t know if she could forgive her mother either. Unsure of what she should do she asked him *“Don’t you think in this case it is?”*

Hughie squeezed her hands, he smiled at her with reassurance before saying *“It’s your decision Annie. And I will be there for you no matter what you chose, but I would like for you to give her a fair chance.”*

Annie gave him a grateful nod, before leaning in an awkward position for a quick kiss.

Before anything else could be said Butcher cut in *“If this fucking feeling festival is over, we’re almost there.”*

Annie looked out the window, watching the house in the distance. Illuminated by the setting sun, she wasn’t sure what will happened between her and her mom, but as long as she had Hughie, she will make it work.