**Infringement 16.12**

There were many places I expected to be. Fighting abominations and disarming dangerous anomalies in the Yellow Zone. Assisting the clearing of buildings in the Green Zone. Helping my team train in Eclipse.

A Family Barbeque at a rented lakeside house in Strafford, New Hampshire wasn’t one of those places.

The last few days had been pretty peaceful, all said and done. Collecting bodies, creating another couple buildings, and slowly pacifying the Zones. Another breakout was stopped, some weird giant intelligent centipedes that’d break out and swarm out towards Charlie’s position, then out from there.

Taylor and I took care of it in about five minutes.

Well, we stopped them in about thirty seconds, with me boosting her power to grab them all and bring them to heel. Controlling something with a mind was. . . *different.* You could feel their thoughts, and, if they hadn’t thought of anything other than themselves as inferiors, *literally incapable* of being peaceful, we would’ve felt bad about turning them on each other, making them rip each other apart with diamond-sharp mandibles and neuro-toxic acid.

As it was, we’d made sure to bring a couple back to Amy, who’d been equal parts repelled and fascinated, and then killed them too. Last I heard from our resident Biokinetic she was utilizing what made their teeth sharp to implement sharper claws on the suits, and was playing around with concepts for full blades.

Herb had been busy, and I did talk to Mouse about how I’d handled the spy, being the only one whose judgement I trusted who also had experience with superheroing. She’d been less than helpful, already telling me what I already knew for the most part. That I’d had two options, to go after them, or to try to isolate them. I could’ve caught them, or they could’ve gotten away if I’d gone after them, while if I left them I might be able to isolate them, but for someone who could be anyone that was next to impossible, and there was a chance that, when they knew they were made, they might disappear, or they might go on the offensive.

It’d been a bad situation, and she refused to say if what I’d done was the right thing to do, only what she would’ve done, which wouldn’t’ve worked as the Mark that Karen had left on the spy had disappeared when she’d shifted forms.

The spy had been literally every one of the Penumbral Defenders, except Quinn and myself, and we still had no idea why. I’d wondered if they were yet another one of us that Abaddon had dropped off, given the power she’d wielded, seemingly taken directly from the same CYOA I’d filled out what felt like years ago. However the only black woman I knew was my godmother, and she was nowhere *near* as young as the person we caught flashes of that the cameras had picked up between transformations.

Then again, Eden was supposed to have collected a number of Abaddon’s Shards when they’d done the traditional side-swipe, so even though it’d been as strong as Herb’s, Charlie’s, and Dad’s, that might just be an Abaddon Shard thing. I’d wondered if Contessa, who I was pretty sure also had an Abaddon Shard, would burn just as brightly.

But, yesterday, I’d been approached by Karen, Herb, Amy, Quinn, and Victoria. Apparently New Wave wanted to invite me over as a thank you for saving them during the Leviathan attack, and to see Amy, who’d not seen them since that day. They’d called Glory Girl, who, unable to find me, had talked to Quinn. All five apparently thought it was a good idea, and while it would disrupt my schedule a little, I was starting to outpace how quickly Sherrel could clear areas for me to build more shells in.

Which led me to where I was, standing in my civvies, really just my costume shifted to casual clothing, though I kept a basic, invisible helmet up and my skin was covered. Some might call it paranoia, I called it not exactly trusting people who’d done jack-all to help Brockton Bay when it was crime-ridden.

Harsh, yes, but not untrue.

Standing with them, though, sharing a beer with Flashbang and Manpower, they. . . weren’t exactly bad people. I’d been asked not to talk shop by Herb and Karen, or at least not talk about heroics and limit myself to discussing powers. It was likely a good move given my less than stellar opinions of the group, but for a few hours to relax in a place that almost seemed. . . *normal,* it was. . . *nice.*

Topics had been pretty varied, about what I was doing (cleaning up the city), if I had anyone special (I didn’t), cars in general, Baseball (Red Sox vs Yankees was a thing here too), and more.

It was the fourth time that Flashbang had trailed off, frowning as he touched his head, that I asked, “You okay?”

He grimaced, but tried to smile. “No, it’s fine. Amelia looked me over, and it’s nothing she can do anything about.”

“Well, while I can heal like her, I can also affect brains,” I offered, “If that’s the problem.”

He considered it, before shaking his head. “Thanks but. . . don’t take this the wrong way, but I don’t know you well enough to have you messing around with my noggin.”

“I shook my head, “No, it’s not like that. I have no idea what I’m doing.”

Manpower, who, at seven feet tall, towered over both us, frowned. “How’s that supposed to help?”

Flashbang, however, understood immediately. “You can’t control it that much? But I’d heard you were doing alterations for money.”

“Plastic surgery. I can’t diagnose, so anything past surface level is *super* dangerous for me to try. Want a different shaped nose, I’m your man, want a different shaped *heart*, that’s a hard no. But I can also heal, generally, I, well, it’s kind of a dumb way of putting it,” I admitted, “But I can just want someone to Get Better, and they do. I’m doing it to myself, at a low level, all the time.” I held up the beer. “Can never get drunk again, but, hey, worth it. Want me to give it a crack?”

The two men exchanged looks, communicating something nonverbally. “Sure,” Flashbang said, turning back to me, a little unsure. “Do I. . .?”

I held out a hand, pulling back my invisible glove. “Same as Amy that way, still need touch.” He took it, and I started to feed him my Peak Condition power, as well as Immunity, causing him to twitch a little.

“Oh, right, fair warning, if you’re on any drugs your tolerances get reset, and anything you’re currently on gets flushed,” I said.

“You alright?” Manpower asked, and the other man, standing a little straighter, nodded.

“It feels. . . good,” he said, brows knitting in thoughts. Not addicting good, just. . . relaxing. And you have this on all the time?” he asked.

I shrugged, “Not sure about the relaxing part, but yeah, to some extent. No idea how long I need to do this for, though. Like I said, no diagnostics, but overdoing just starts to heal long-term damage. Scarring, worn joints, that sort of thing, so there’s no danger. I had Amy check over the people I over-used it on, and other some accusations of ‘cheating’, it all checked out.”

“Says the girl who can regrow limbs,” Flashbang laughed. “Didn’t know she could do that until. . . until we lost Brockton bay.”

“She’s worried about people thinking she’s more dangerous than she actually is, so she was staying away from anything Bio-Tinker-y,” I offered. The fact that her lack of danger came from her morals, and she had capabilities that’d make Bio-Tinkers pale in comparison, were both things I carefully left out. I’d suggested she leave the Bio-Armor behind, only for her to give me a flat ‘no shit, Sherlock’ look, which was fair.

Now she was talking with her aunt, while Vicky and Laserdream sat down by the table, talking. Shielder was sitting off to the side, on his phone. Brandish was absent, which had been the only reason I’d agreed to this in the first place.

Manpower asked, breaking me out of observations, “Is that why Amelia’s looking better?” I shot him a questioning look. “She seems more energetic.”

Considering it, I had to shrug. “Maybe? She was getting Mastered by Vicky for years, so there might’ve been some lingering damage. Human Master powers are nasty like that.”

The larger man’s expression darkened slightly. “She’s a Shaker, not a Master.”

I rolled my eyes, “Yes, my apologies. She was getting mind controlled by Vicky’s shaker power for years, so there might’ve been some lingering damage. Human mind control powers are nasty like that. Happy?”

Flashbang spoke up, “You have experience with those?”

“Not a lot, thank god, but you guy’s remember Regent? Of the Undersiders?” Flashbang shook his head, but Manpower nodded. “Heartbreaker’s kid. Had the parts of his brain that handle fear practically burned out. Wouldn’t let me heal him, not that I tried *that* hard, little shit tried to control me as a prank, but even low-level powers can cause permanent changes. It’s why I made sure she stopped doing it to everyone, everywhere we went.”

The guy I was healing laughed, getting a surprised look from his brother-in-law. “How’d you manage that? Carol must’ve yelled at her to do that more times than I can count.”

“Well, *yelling* at someone to do something usually doesn’t work. It becomes white nose, they only do it when you’re around so you don’t yell, or they start doing it *more* just because they refuse to be bullied,” I pointed out, having had copious experience with that, having to finally realizing that *not* doing things that would help me just because I was yelled at to do them was doing me no favors.

“So, what did you do?” Manpower asked.

“Part explaining to her how bad what she was doing, part having a bad reaction to Mastering in general so she learned not to that way,” I told them. I considered explaining just *how* bad a reaction I had, but, again, no matter how justified I was, I don’t think they’d see it rationally if I told them I nearly killed her when she tried to effectively Dominate me, especially if she’d never done that to them, the lower levels more than enough to get what she wanted.

The Brute laughed, “And that worked?” He paused, thinking it over. “It might. If you didn’t cave to her puppy eyes like Mark does.”

“I don’t,” the man objected.

“You really do,” his brother-in-law countered, looking over to me. “I think you’ve done enough.”

I let go, asking, “Why?”

“Because you were starting to clear his scars,” was the answer, and, looking, I didn’t see any. Manpower tapped the side of his jaw with his beer bottle, and I looked back at Flashbang, only to realize a small divot in his beard, where a small bit of scar tissue used to be, was now clear skin.

“That’d do it,” I agreed, smiling. “How’d ya feel?”

The previously depressed man smiled, “Good. Awake. Tell ya what, Neil. How ‘bout I do the grilling this time?”

Neil smiled back, shaking his head. “This one time, I guess you can.” He looked to me. “Even if this doesn’t last, thank you, Vejovis.”

I shrugged, “No prob. It took me, like, a minute, and you guys are trying to make things better. Least I could do.”

“It isn’t,” he disagreed, not saying anything else, turning and heading inside to grab the meat as Mark was already making his way to the grill, getting it started.

Walking up to the healed man, I said, “So, I don’t actually know how to grill. Think you could teach me?”

He looked at me in disbelief, before shaking his head, smiling. “So, the first thing you need to know is that kinds of grill change the taste. Charcoal tastes more like you think it should, but also tastes a bit smokey, because of vaporized drippings, which *I* think is a good thing. This grill is propane, like *Neil* likes, which gives it a taste that *he* says is bacon-y, while I just say it tastes like *laziness*.”

<AB>

It was mid-afternoon when we sat down for the most stereotypical cookout dinner I’d ever had. Burgers and hot-dogs, fresh from the grill, potato salad made by Lady Photon, and a fruit salad that had apparently come from Eclipse’s hydroponics bay. I didn’t recognize all the fruit, but I also noted everything I didn’t know was seedless. Giving Amelia a look as I poked at something that looked like a purple bit of diced tomato, which tasted almost like bacon, she blushed a little, confirming my idea.

Either way, it was good, and I was glad to see my ‘no reproducing’ rule was being upheld.

Conversation was light, until Lady Photon cleared her throat, a significant gesture by the way everyone in the family fell silent. “Vejovis,” she said, and I was suddenly nervous. I’d handed both girls a bracelet that I insisted they wear made from my costume. If things went bad, I could have them suited up in seconds, and we could fight our way out.

I didn’t think that was going to *happen*, but, given how things had gone in the past month, it paid to be careful.

“. . . *Yes?*” I asked, when it was obvious she was waiting for me to respond.

“Please, relax,” she said, which of course made me do exactly the opposite, and she sighed. “I just wanted to say, on behalf of all of us, thank you.”

“Um, you’re welcome?” I replied. I knew this was a thank you, but it didn’t seem to merit this degree of seriousness.

“If you hadn’t helped us, before the fight started. . . there’s a good chance we all wouldn’t be here,” she insisted.

I nodded. “I mean, um, not to sound like a dick, but, *yeah*, I know. Endbringer fights are always bad, and that one was hell. But, well, Vicky and Amy are on my team, even if they weren’t *officially* then, and they asked. I just wish I could’ve ended the fight earlier,” I shrugged.

That caused her to pause, “Then at the end, that was really you?”

Now it was my turn to freeze. “Um, can we just pretend I didn’t say that?”

She looked at her husband, then at her brother-in-law. “With Break becoming that. . . *thing* at the end, we thought it might be, but. . .”

“But why didn’t I do it sooner?” I asked. “I could see why you’d ask that. I would’ve if I could, but I got messed up early on, didn’t have a good shot, and, well, you saw what it did to the city. I kept hoping it would just *leave,*” I sighed. I also *literally couldn’t*, not having the slots to pull it off, but that *was* the reason I hadn’t said ‘fuck it’ to the entire game from the word go.

Next Endbringer? We were going hard from the word go.

“No,” she said, “I didn’t think that, *we* didn’t think that.” looking to the other two, they nodded, while Laserdream and Shielder just watched. “In that case, thank you for that as well.”

“Vejy’s been beating himself up over not doing more,” Victoria shared, and I shot her an annoyed look. “You have been. Mouse, LB, Overwatch, and Break all say so.”

“That’s. . . *oh,*” Laserdream said, starting confused and ending with understanding.

Lady Photon looked at me kindly, expression maternal. “You aren’t responsible for Leviathan,” she told me.

“I know that,” I disagreed, “but if I’d-”

“Done more?” Flashbang interrupted. “Fought harder. Done something smarter because of intel you didn’t have then, but do now?”

Frowning, I shot back, “When you say it that way it sounds dumb, but I could’ve-”

“Done better if you knew the future?” he interrupted again. He nodded, slowly, “Been there. It fucking sucks.”

“*Mark,*” Lady Photon chided.

He just gave her a flat look, “You saying it doesn’t?”

She sighed, “It does, but don’t speak that way in front of the children.”

“I’m in college,” Laserdream pointed out.

Her mother looked at Shielder, who, wearily, but with a wry smile, turned to me and added, “Uncle Mark’s right. It fucking blows donkey balls.”

*“Eric!”*

I couldn’t help but laugh, the family dynamics were so picture perfect, so, in some ways, like the best of what I’d left behind, that I couldn’t help myself. I also didn’t miss how, while still looking disapproving, the corner of Lady Photon’s mouth twitched upwards.

For a moment. . . it felt like I was home. During the good times.

I shook my head, “Okay, fine, I *might* have been being dumb in a way that’s, apparently, pretty fucking common. Was it like that for all of you, after your first Endbringer fight?”

The universal agreement from the table. . . helped. I wondered if the rest of my own team felt the same, but didn’t say anything, because they didn’t want me to feel bad, leaving me to try to understand things with an incomplete data set.

“That *was* my first, and, yeah dude, felt the same,” Shielder said. He frowned, and seemed to be older for a moment. “I remembered what you said about making sure to save myself first. And I did. And I left some people to die. But I was barely holding on, and if I’d tried to save ‘em too. . .” he trailed off.

“Then you did the right thing,” I told him. “I expected arranged teams, where your capabilities wouldn’t be spread too far, but with the free for all it was from landfall on, it would’ve been too easy to reach beyond your means, and pay for it.”

Amy poked me, and gave me a significant look. “Like you did? When you got your guts liquified. And after I put you together you went back out, and *lost your arm?*”

“I’m sorry, what was that?” Lady Photon asked, looking at me incredulously.

I shrugged, “I held off Leviathan while the others got away. One v one-ing an Endbringer without armor was. . . *dumb,* which is why Boardwalk and I got the experimental powersuits. Did better the second time, and was able to hold him off until the Triumvirate arrived, and we cut off his tail,” I mused. I’d thought his core was at the base of his tail, but, given how close we’d cut to it *without* it freaking out, I might’ve been wrong. “And then the last bit, where I had to use myself as a bullet instead of the eighty-inch tinkertech artillery shell that we had back at base. That’s where I lost the arm, but,” I waved it, “got that back.”

There was a moment of silence at my statement, before Amy gave a *very* aggrieved sigh, motioning in my direction. “This is what I have to deal with.”

New Wave looked to Vicky, who shrugged, and nodded in agreement. “He’s totes extra.”

“I fucking saved a couple dozen people, and you think *you* didn’t do enough?” Shielder asked incredulously. “Dude. The fuck?”

“I’m stronger than you are,” I replied. “Around Triumvirate-tier,” I added, mentally continuing *above is around*. “Higher power, higher standards.”

“That’s,” Lady Photon started to say, likely going for ‘that’s not how it works.’, only it *was*. “It’s not that black and white,” she tried instead, and I gave her a look that said ‘yeah it is’. “You think you’re that strong, and you might be,” she quickly added. “But would you say you’re five times as strong, ten times as strong as the average cape?”

I looked to Laserdream, “What’d you say Eidolon is?”

The college girl blinked at the unexpected question, but gave it a moment of thought. “Twenty five? Thirty?”

Turning back to her mother, I said, “Forty.”

Lady Photon paused, then nodded. “And there were over a thousand parahumans there. Even if you were two hundred times stronger than the average cape, you’d be less than a sixth of the force there.”

“That’s. . . actually a good point,” I had to admit, frowning. “Hell, even when I tried to point out the problems with the planning, I got told to sit down and shut up.”

Manpower nodded, noting, “That is what Alexandria said. Not in those words,” he explained at his wife’s look, “her meaning was clear, though.”

She nodded, “And you’ve always been the leader of your team?” she prodded, and I nodded, starting to see where this was going. “Vejovis, you aren’t responsible for what happened. You were part of the team, a really really big team, and you did your best.”

I opened my mouth to object but she gave me such a stereotypical ‘mom’ look that I hesitated for a moment, and she continued, “I didn’t say you did the best possible thing, I said you did your best. I might be biased, since you helped my family survive,” she added, smiling a little, “but I don’t blame you at all for what happened. I don’t see how anyone could reasonably do so.” I opened my mouth to object, and she reiterated, “*Reasonably.*”

“And ‘sides, you’re buildin’ it back up,” Shielder added, getting questioning looks from the adults. “You didn’t know?” He grabbed his phone, and, in a couple seconds, had a video playing, apparently taken by one of the people I’d hired to do the cleanup.

It was the office building that Quinn had insisted on, to move some of the more mundane operations out of Eclipse and better secure it. The plans for this one had required complex geodesic designs which had been a bitch to get right, but the effect the interweaving lines had had in macro was well worth the headache.

“You’re rebuilding the city?” Manpower asked skeptically, leaning back and looking at me in disbelief.

I just shrugged. “Someone has to. We’re clearing out the safe sections and sending stuff back to their owners, then tearing it down and rebuilding. The outer shells are pretty easy, and from there our people are taking care of all the fiddly bits. Actually,” I said, grabbing my phone, and looking up their old house, finding it in the Yellow Zone, a stone’s throw from the Red “Okay, we’d normally not get there for a while, but if you want, if you give me a list I can do a dive and get your stuff back.”

“We were told it was too dangerous to go back,” the Brute replied.

I wiggled my head back and forth in a ‘sorta’ gesture. “If you’re not careful, it’s a deathtrap, but with the ability to fly, you can ignore most of them. Not all,*”* I quickly added. “You try to go over the Red you might run into the Quetzalcoatl, or any of the other Anomalies, but going in from the ocean minimizes most of that.”

“Quezawhatll?” Shielder asked.

I waved a hand vaguely in the air. “Giant invisible flying snake thing. Not sure if it’s a creature, a power, Tinkertech, or something else entirely. It’s *really* territorial though. I’ll deal with it eventually.”

There was a moment of silence at that, Lady Photon asking, “And you’ve been. . . dealing with things?”

“He has,” Vicky agreed. “I would too, but he says I’m not ready.” She shot me an annoyed look, even as her Aunt looked relieved.

“I’m not saying that, *Mouse* is,” I shot back. “When she gives you the go ahead, I’ll bring you along on a Green run.”

“But what does LB get to go?” the teen whined.

I shot her an unamused look, having told her this before. “Because she’s got a Thinker rating, follows orders, and *doesn’t* poke the anomalies with her sword, thinking she can take it.”

“Mouse?” Flashbang asked. “Mouse Protector?” Vicky nodded. “How’d you get *her* on your team.”

“Vejy saved her from the Slaughterhouse Nine,” Glory Girl bragged, getting me disbelieving stares.

“*Boardwalk* pulled her out from Bonesaw’s lab, Amy and I healed her,” I clarified. “He’s mostly been laying low after that.”

“I can see why,” Lady Photon nodded. She looked at me, then glanced towards her daughter. “How old did you say you were?” she asked me.

“I didn’t, but I’m in my mid-twenties,” I replied. It was only a matter of time until Panacea and I cracked biological immortality, assuming that my Abaddon Shard fed Peak Condition didn’t already do that on its own.

She glanced at Laserdream again, before shaking her head. “So what-” was as far as she got, when my powers, the presences at the back of my head, which had been calm and silent, practically *screamed.*

I threw myself backwards, even as I could feel the air displaced from a large projectile coming in towards me, Aerokinesis forcing it upwards as I pulled back. Without needing to focus, my power took care of our costumes, Vicky, Amy, and I armoring up even as I saw a large spear, crackling with electricity, fly over my head as I was flying away from the table, turning to face my attacker.

Standing there, was Dauntless, along with Triumph, Velocity, and Miss Militia, along with two others. A Brute, who could punch someone and power them down, and someone who coil conjure animals made from wood, which even now were pulling themselves out from the nearby trees.

I spared a glance to New Wave, who were taking cover, but by their expressions, a combination of panic and anger, they weren’t in on this. Amy and Vicky were standing together, armored up, which was good, but they were outside of my Area Teleportation range, having pulled back when I moved forward, which was *not*.

I faced my attackers, ready to fight, but that was dumb, and it was only a ruse to make them think we were going to banter when I made a run for my teammates and teleported us the hell out of here. Strider’s power took a moment to work, not having the man’s skill with it, but Mouse’s would get us away in an instant, I just needed to touch them.

“What are yo-” I started to say, just starting to turn, when I felt a hand on my leg and my body locked up, jaw slamming shut as I was forced into an almost fetal position. I could still fly, though, and started to turn when I felt something click around my ankle, that power, along with my connection to my insects, and my copy of Amelia’s power, all cutting off in an instant, the Flames I held not out, but shoved down to the merest ember in an instant.

I fell, *hard,* the metal still running through my body was available but my control over it clumsy, almost like I was drunk. Behind me, where there hadn’t been anyone a moment ago, was Shadow Stalker, and another girl I didn’t recognize, but who had an Aura of Paralyzing Touch about her.

I tried to teleport out, to get away and get the other two later, only to feel as if I’d bounced off something, a splitting headache slamming into my skull. “Teleportation blocked,” I heard someone call, far away, but even my fumbling Acoustikinesis enough to let me interpret the comment.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Lady Photon demanded out of sight.

“Taking this asshole down,” Shadow Stalker sneered, and I regretted not killing her when she attacked me beforehand. Boardwalk wouldn’t make that mistake again.

“Stalker, enough,” Miss Militia commanded, and I could hear her and the others walking up behind me. “We’re taking a criminal into custody,” she informed New Wave. “Do not attempt to stop us, or we’ll have to take you in as well.”

“What did you do to my daughter?” Flashbang demanded, and I wished I could see what was going on.

The lead PRT good was quiet for a moment. “We didn’t. . . *Dissipater, hit him!*” she said, suddenly worried. I didn’t know what she was talking about, but heard pounding steps coming for me, and shifted the metal to plates covering my vitals, right before I felt a boot slam into my back, all of my powers diminishing as he did so.

Kick after kick slammed into me, my spine and organs holding up under the assault, even as I felt my powers slip away with each blow. The hits, however, were enough to turn me to see both Dallon sisters curled up just like I was. Finally, every power I had a tiny fraction of what it should be, the assault stopped. I breathed, and the familiar pain of broken ribs lanced through me, but with the metal sheaths I at least knew I wouldn’t puncture a lung.

“Must be Tinkertech,” a harsh voice announced, probably Dissipater. “After that, Legend couldn’t make a flashlight.”

“Myotonia, do you know what’s happening?” the leader demanded.

The girl next to Shadowstalker, her costume a red bodysuit with lines that suggested muscles, shook her head. “If they were all touching, that’d happen, but they’re not,” she said.

*Touching? Shit,* I thought, understanding what it was immediately. Every costume I made from my own was one continuous garment, only the connected threads were. . . out of phase, maybe even in a different dimension entirely. If *I* was affected by that, then there was a good chance that every other person that was touching it would be similarly affected.

“Hit him again,” Miss Militia said, and, even knowing it was coming, the brutal kick to my leg, only the metal around my bones keeping it from breaking, had me choking back a cry of pain. I wanted to realise the girl’s costumes to give them a way to escape, but they thought this was Tinkertech, and locked up, I had no way of de-activating it. “This can work,” the head goon said to herself.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Lady Photon, reiterated. “Attacking us in our home?”

“One moment,” Miss Militia said, the rustle of cloth. “Sir, we’ve apprehended Vejovis and Panacea. Yes, Sir. New Wave is objecting, sir. Yes sir.”

She tapped something, and I heard a man’s voice, harsh and arrogant. “New Wave, this is Director Tagg. You are to stand down, or you will be considered aiding and abetting, interfering with a police operation, and anything else I can think of. You’re harboring fugitives, and be glad one of your own had the sense to come clean, or you’d all be taken in.”

“Who. . . *Carol?*” Lady Photon gasped.

The voice laughed, “Yes, I was surprised when Brandish contacted us, but it’s only because of her that your family is getting a pass. Try and stop us, and that all goes away.”

“But, you’re taking Amelia,” Flashbang objected.

“Your *biological* family,” Tagg corrected. “I was quite surprised you’d taken in Marquis’ daughter, but Brandish was correct. With who her family was, you should’ve expected this. It’s only because she ran away that you’re not being arrested for aiding a rogue biotinker.”

“But to attack our home-” Lady Photon started to object.

“That’s rich, coming from you,” I could hear Tagg sneer. “You might’ve thought that everyone forgot how the Brockton Bay Brigade took down Marquis, but we never did. We’re done. Militia, bring back your targets. If they try to stop you, bring them in as well. Lethal force is authorized.”

The call ended, and Miss Militia added, “Please don’t make us. This isn’t your fight.”

“I. . . fine,” Lady Photon sighed, and I could see the defeat on her face as her hands stopped glowing. She looked to Amy, “We’ll try to get you help. I’m sure you didn’t do whatever it is they’re saying you did.” She looked to me as well, but grimaced, not saying a word.

Miss Militia leaned down over me, and, as she sprayed a foul selling gas in my face, my de-powered immunity letting the drug work, she quietly said, “I told you not to fight us.”

As darkness took me, now, more than ever, I felt like Mick was right. I should’ve handled this earlier, and not listened to Herb. If I survived this, things were going to change.

If I survived this, *Brandish wasn’t*.