

Chapter 7 – To Break In a Plan

Hughie looked around the dark forest as they kept walking. They left the car about ten minutes ago, Butcher didn't exactly say why, and were following him through the trees. Couple of minutes later they got to what looked like a mansion in the middle of the forest.

On the porch stood a tall woman, her blond hair in a single bun, she looked in her late 50's. Hughie never met the woman before, he just heard of her from Butcher couple of days ago. Her face was set into a stern expression as Butcher got close to her and said *"Grace, lovely as always I see."*

Mallory just raised an unimpressed eyebrow at him responding with *"William, I thought you promised I never see you again. And yet somehow, I now find myself hosting you, your friends and their families. Care to give me a good reason?"*

Butcher smirked at her, pulling a vial full of blue liquid, this time the real V, Hughie knew that much. He handed it over to her while saying *"Because this time I bring you solid proof love. This is Compound V, the drug that creates the supes. The CIA won't act on it because of something to do with another supe."*

Mallory examined the vial in her hand while giving a short nod as a response to Butcher. Then she raised her eyes to look at Annie. Annie felt a little uncomfortable by the steely look on the woman's face, so she took Hughie's hand in hers, but met the stare with a determined one of her own.

"You are Starlight, right?" The former CIA asked, no trace of emotion in her voice so Annie couldn't guess what her angle was. Nonetheless she nodded confidently, a small smile tugged in the corner of the older woman's lips *"I like you."* She stated in the same emotionless tone.

Annie blinked surprised. From what she was told about the woman that's not the response she expected. Judging by Butcher frown she wasn't the only one surprised by the comment. Mallory just shrugged and said, *"She alone did more damage to Vought than any of us did in the past few years with that speech in the expo."* She turned toward the glass doors leading inside the house and said, *"Let's get in, we have stuff to talk about."*

When Annie entered the living room, she saw three people sitting on the couch. One of them was a muscular, dark-skinned man, and who she assumed were his wife and daughter. On an armchair not too far sat a thin man, with trimmed hair on his head and face.

Both men stood when the group stepped into the living room. Hughie cleared his throat and introduced the two new groups. He turned toward the muscular man first and said *“MM this is Annie, her mom Mrs. January and my dad. Guys This is MM.”*

MM gave a small smile, before saying *“Kids. Ma’am. Sir. Those are my wife Monique and daughter Janine.”* Annie smiled and waved at the two other women.

Before Hughie could say anything else the thin man stepped forward said, *“Frenchie,”* He bowed slightly and added *“Enchanté, Madam Starlight.”*

Annie turned to Hughie, was Frenchie flirting with her? Hughie seemed to read her mind because he shook her head with a smile and motioned her to look again. When she looked at the man he was hugging Kimiko tightly. He was whispering things to her while she moved her hand in quick and different motions.

Annie hears a squeal and suddenly she felt a tight hug around her waist. She looked down to see Janine staring up at her in awe. The Young girl took a deep breath before saying, full in excitement *“You are Starlight! I am such a big fan!”*

Annie shook off the surprise and was about to respond to her when Monique’s voice called *“Janine! Let her go and at least introduce yourself.”*

Annie hugged the girl back with a smile and said *“Oh that’s ok. It’s the best greeting I received in a long time. You can all call me Annie by the way.”* She said to both please the girl and her mother, while using the opportunity to tease Hughie.

Of course, Butcher had to be the one to destroy the fun atmosphere. His sarcastic *“Yhea, Yhea everybody know each other now, just pitchy. Can we move to talk about the real situation we are dealing with?”* quickly destroyed the mood.

Annie noticed that Monique was glaring very harshly at Butcher, but before she could say something MM said, *“Honey, why won’t you and mom go and play with the toys you*

packed? I sure Annie would like to see your Starlight toys later.” The supe smiled at the wide-eyed kid and nodded in agreement.

Hughie turned to their parents and offered *“Dad, maybe you and Mrs. January should go to the kitchen and drink some tea?”*

Her mom shook her head slowly *“You can call me Donna dear,”* Which surprised Annie as much as it probably did Hughie. *“And I would like to sit and hear what you and my daughter getting yourself into.”* Hughie’s dad nodding along, both taking a seat on the couch. Hughie and Annie exchange confused looks, before she shrugged and went to take a seat as well, leaving a place for Hughie next to her.

“As it stands currently all of you here are declared as wanted people by the United States government.” Mallory was standing in the center of the room while all the others were sitting. Hughie himself was sitting next to Annie.

Mallory’s news were received in shock by the two parents and Annie, While Hughie, Butcher, MM, Frenchie and Kimiko just nodded like it made the most sense. Annie was the one to ask, *“No offence to you guys, but why the three of us on that list?”* Then her frown deepened even more before she asked, *“For that matter why Vought is after you guys, from what Hughie told me you stayed out of their radar.”*

Butcher scowled and said, his voice filled with barley contained fury *“That cunt Mesmer sold us out to fucking Homelander.”*

Hughie scowled. He remembered the short man, he felt creeped out by him even if you don’t take in consideration his powers. Hughie cursed inside his mind, that exactly what he was afraid will happen if he let go of Translucent. And now he dragged Annie and her mom into it as well.

Mallory meanwhile answered Annie’s first question *“Apparently Homelander was aware to your connection with Hughie here. He got to the conclusion that the group couldn’t achieve any of this without inside help, and as your arrival to the seven happened at the same time as their operations, he named you the culprit. I heard from my sources he took the fact you didn’t show to today’s meeting as the final proof.”* She than pointed at the two parents *“Vought just included you two as associates because you resisted their arrest.”*

Hughie felt so much guilt welling inside of him. He bowed his head and said quietly *“I’m sorry Annie. It’s my fault you and your mother in this fucking mess.”*

Annie took Hughie’s hand that was close to her and tugged at it until her looked at her. When she had his attention, she said firmly *“I made my choices, and I don’t regret them Hughie. Homelander and Stillwell was already on my case since the expo speech, do you really think I would have been safe in the tower right now? I much prefer being here with you all.”* She then tried to lighten the mood by teasing *“imagine how I would have reacted if I discovered everything in front of Homelander.”*

MM cut the moment when he asked Butcher *“I thought you spoke to that CIA lady and gave her the V so she could put a leash on Vought.”*

Butcher nodded with a frown *“I called as soon as we were burned. She said she had the cunts where we wanted them. But then some supe did something that made the CIA back off Vought and the government to kiss their arses.”*

Mallory stepped forward again, showing them a video on the screen of her tablet. The video showed a man with an Arabic word tattooed on his chest explodes, killing all the soldiers in the area, before he himself walk out of the fire unharmed.

Frenchie’s eyes were wide as he asked with his French accent *“Is this terrorist, a supe?!”*

Mallory nodded *“Exactly. And that’s the problem, not only has the CIA was ordered to back off Vought, but the bill to put the supes into the army is assured to pass in the next few days.”*

MM was rubbing his head with both his hands repeatedly *“How the fuck this happened?!”*

Mallory spoke again *“If you ask me, it’s very convenient that a supe terrorist was discovered just in time for the voting about their bill to enter the supes into the army. And we already know they tried giving the V to adult recently.”* She pointed at Kimiko as the evidence.

Annie was in shock *“Are you telling me Vought created the supe terrorist just to make sure their bill pass? Why would it be so important to them?”*

Hughie was the one to answer, *“Because this deal will earn them billions of dollars annually between the government’s money and the increase in brand worth of the so-called heroes.”*

Annie shook her head, anger starting to slip through her voice *“You are saying that all the life that terrorist like that will put in danger, the life ruined while they did those awful experiments. All of this just for money?!”*

Butcher snorted, drawing her attention to her as he responded *“Welcome to the real-world love. That what it was always about with the cunts.”*

Frenchie leaned forward in his armchair, the cigarette he always holding in his hand for the first time wasn’t lightened, Hughie guessed Mallory warned him off. He spoke a moment later *“I have contacts in the media. We could tell them about the V, oui?”*

Mallory shook her head *“Tomorrow morning the news about the supe terrorist will break. The people will demand Vought’s ‘heroes’ in the army as it will be the only defense. No one will want to believe this story unless we will have a very concrete proof of how they are using it. As we don’t have any..”*

“I do.” And everyone in the room was shock to hear Mrs. January’s voice cutting Mallory. The tall woman just raised her eyebrow at Annie’s mom *“I can confirm they are using it on babies to make them supes.”* The older January woman said with determination in her voice.

Annie was surprised by her mom’s offer, and as much as she didn’t want to admit it right now, she felt a little proud of her mom for willing to do the right thing even in a small way. But then Hughie’s voice cut in and made Annie feel another emotion toward her mother she wasn’t sure she could feel at the moment, worry. *“I am sorry Mrs. January, but you signed an NDA, if you testify about that you will incriminate yourself in a few ways.”*

Her mom smiled softly at Hughie *“I told you it’s Donna dear. And you were right. I made a mistake and now I will pay for it, especially if it will mean my daughter will be safe. I..”*

Before her mom could keep going, causing Annie’s heart to clench over and over again, not knowing what to feel. On the one hand they have to take Vought down, her mother already made the mistake and if the time come to pay for it that she can do? On the other one Hughie was right, she was her mom, the only parent she still had. Was she willing or even

ready to say goodbye forever? Still MM made all this irrelevant *“it wouldn’t matter kid. Sorry ma’am but escaped convicts don’t really have credibility.”* The man said gently.

Annie saw her mom slump in her seat. She really wanted to help, to make up for her mistake. Annie will listen to Hughie and give her mom a fair chance to explain, she earned that much today.

There was silence in the room, as everyone tried to find a way out of that mess a ringtone filled the room. Annie pulled her phone from her pocket and frowned at the screen when she saw it read ‘Private number.’ Annie looked at Mallory, and the woman just motioned her to answer.

“Starlight?” A voice Annie recognized came through the phone’s speaker. Annie was so surprised and frightened she didn’t answer, but the voice didn’t give up instead kept asking *“You and your boyfriend are safe I get from all the bodies I found at your mom’s”*

Annie could hear the smug smirk at the other’s supe voice, she immediately felt annoyed and replied *“It wasn’t me Maeve. You know I don’t like to kill.”* Hughie, MM and Frenchie looked at her with wide eyes and pale faces. While Mallory, Butcher and Kimiko simply had a frown on their faces, the same as Annie herself. *“Why are you calling, is this a Vought phone to trace me because you knew I won’t pick up your call?”*

If Maeve was annoyed or anything else for that matter, she didn’t let it show in her voice as she spoke with an even tone *“This is a burner phone, so Vought won’t know about this call. I sent you a message with a video and a number, after you see what on it and you know I’m not with Vought right now, call me.”* She didn’t even wait for a reaction before ending the call.

Annie looked around at all the curious looks before settling her stare at Mallory. *“Maeve sent me a video, said after we see it we will see she isn’t on Vought’s site.”*

Mallory had Annie send the video before playing it for everyone to see. They all watched with wide eyes as Homelander convinced Maeve to leave a plane full of people to their death, not even trying to do anything.

Annie was the first to realize *“That’s flight thirty-seven! The one that crushed in the ocean, and everyone died.”*

Hughie frowned when he remembered a news report from a day after the crush *“The one he cried about not being able to save despite his best efforts, and blame bureaucracy for?”*

Frenchie had a smirk of his own on his face while he added *“Oui. Now isn’t this just connerie.”*

MM sat forward in his chair and asked the room in large *“We can use it, can’t we?”*

Mallory considered it for a moment before responding *“While it will create a scandal for Homelander and Maeve it won’t stop the bill at this point, and Vought will just use their new connections in the government to buy their way out of it. In the long run it won’t change anything.”*

That was the somber reality. But Hughie felt a spark of an idea beginning to develop in his head. *“Maybe we can use it.”* Hughie thought out loud, and when everyone was looking at him, he added *“We need dirt on Vought and supes that breaks the law, as much of that as possible.”*

Butcher snorted *“No shit kid. What’s your point?”*

“Vought will have everything on their servers.” Hughie pointed out.

“Ah petit Hughie, we cannot access remotely. Non, we have to be in the server room at the tower. I don’t think Homelander will like it much.” Hughie could hear Annie snickering next to him after hearing how Frenchie’s being calling him and blushed slightly.

“And that’s how we use the video.” When everyone looked confused at him he explained *“Like Mallory said, the video especially combined with the Compound V proof will create a scandal that we can use as distraction.”* He looked at Mallory and asked *“Think you can block Vought signals in a studio for an hour?”* Mallory thought about that for a long moment, until she nodded. A small smile beginning to form on her face. Seems like she started to catch on his plan.

Hughie turned to Frenchie and asked, *“Think you can convince your contact to sell it to Homelander he wants to give him a fair chance explaining his side to people, and keep him talking for about an hour?”*

Frenchie laughed *“Esprit magnifique, petit Hughie. Oui, he can do it.”*

MM sighed before asking *“Not a bad plan kid, but how do we get in the tower, and what about the other members of the seven?”*

Hughie blushed, he too still trying to figure out how to get into the tower. But then Annie chipped in *“Well Maeve did say we should call her back, as I know her, she won’t get directly involved, but I think I can convince her to make sure the doors in our way will be unlocked.”*

Hughie smiled at her, then went back looking at everyone else as he added *“As to the seven. Translucent...is dead, A-train is out of commission for at least a week, The Deep is in Oklahoma or something like that, while she won’t help us fight she won’t fight against us either so Maeve is good, Starlight herself is on our side...”* Annie pushed him playfully for his teasing *“Homelander, which is the biggest threat, hopefully will be busy and won’t know about anything until we will be gone. So, all that’s left is Black Noir, and between Kimiko and Annie I hope we have that covered.”* Both female supes exchanged a smile and a high-five.

Butcher was smirking with a look of a predator in his eyes *“Oh you are magnificent mate. Me and MM can take care of the security men, while you and Frenchie deal with copying everything from the servers. 45 minutes in and out. I like it.”*

Annie was smiling as she called Maeve at the number she provided. After a couple of tones, she answered and immediately said *“So you have a plan I suppose?”*

“We do.” Annie replied without any information, at least not before she asked, *“But first I need to know why you are helping us?”*

There was a deep sigh from the other side of the line, causing a little static noise from the speakers before Maeve’s voice came out again *“Elena found out about the video, she wanted to leave me. Said she will only stay if I will find a way to fix it on the same level I failed that kid on the plane. I love Elena, I was always scared what Homelander will do if he found out about her. I know there is no way taking him down as long as Vought will protect him.”* She paused for a moment before explaining further *“Vought need to go down, I can’t do it, all I have is the video. If it will come to my word or Homelander’s I know who’s will count more. But your boyfriend managed to kill Translucent, paralyze A-train, and was giving Vought headaches since his girlfriend died.”* Annie could practically hear the woman’s shrug before she finished *“I figured you two will have a better chance than me. Vought will go down. Me and Elena get to live our own life together.”*

Annie nodded in understanding, and after getting the silent permission of all the others she said *“We need you to unlock all the doors from the entrance of the tower to the server room.”*

There was a moment of silence before Maeve reacted *“I see. I can do it. It’s not a bad plan, but Homelander won’t exactly sit down and watch it happen.”*

Annie smirked and retorted with *“Oh we have a plan to keep him busy doing his favorite thing.”*

Maeve snorted before saying *“Well it seems I was right, you and your stick got everything covered. Sent me a message to this number with the details when you have them.”* And as simple as that the line went dead.

Annie smiled and said, *“Seems like we are in business guys.”*

There was excitement in the air now that they knew what they were going to do. Annie hugged Hughie as tight as she could without breaking him, it was his idea after all and amazing one in that. She kissed him straight on the lips.

It was their longest kiss since Hughie’s confession. When they broke apart, they smiled at each other. They had a plan.