

CHAPTER 15

There's never warning when catastrophe strikes. More accurately, there's always a warning, but it goes unheeded—or unnoticed. That is why it's catastrophic, not just annoying...

The first explosion from Incinero had knocked the Corvair sideways and almost tipped it when the tires hit the curb. Anne's head smacked into the driver side window. It took her a moment to clear her head. There was a track of blood dripping down her lip, but she was able to reorient herself and see what was going on with her surroundings. A massive blast of fire from the bank and a figure walking through it told her immediately she was in the middle of a hell-storm.

Fucking Supers! was the only thought she had as she turned her head about trying to figure her options. Her fingers tightened around the steering wheel. There was no way out. But if she didn't do something, she would end up dead.

She struggled with the key, turning it again and again to reignite the engine. The only response was a loud clicking. Grunting, she kept struggling to start the car. Just like everyone else in the world, she had seen Supers fight on TV and knew the last thing you wanted to do was be stuck between them.

The assholes had little regard for bystanders, despite what their publicity people said. Thankfully, the engine rumbled to life, hissing and snapping from unknown damage. Had Anne been focusing on the space ahead of her, or on anything other than the fact that she was completely freaked out between the emotional rollercoaster of just moments ago and the Supers having a deadly fight over her and her car, she would have seen that driving forward was a horrible idea.

As it was, she was just trying to get the hell out of there. Slamming on the gas pedal, she spun the tires out and the car jerked forward. Her Corvair may be bad at starting, but it was like a bat out of hell off the line. Accelerating quickly, she

had barely swerved into the road before a large piece of concrete and metal, that looked like a chunk of the Raleigh Bank building, fell from the sky right in front of her car.

She jerked the wheel to the right, barely avoiding it as the exposed rims of her wheels vainly dug into the concrete, throwing sparks. Unfortunately the rather large, and completely stationary, lamp post was something she couldn't avoid. The car smashed into the steel pole. Her body jerked forward, seat belt digging painfully into her torso. The Corvaire lacked an airbag, but did have a sloping windshield. Her forehead struck it. It cracked slightly, but didn't shatter.

She screamed in frustration and slammed her fist into the steering wheel. Blood from the gash in her forehead dripped into her eyes. She had barely managed to avoid a thousand pounds of building façade crushing the hood of her car, only to run directly into a lamppost. Her grill and hood were wrapped around the pole. This time, her car was definitely dead.

The two Supers continued fighting above her. Carefully looking up to make sure that she wasn't going to get hit by more falling building, she ripped away the seat belt and pushed at the door. It was jammed, twisted against the lock. She slammed her fist against the remaining shards of glass, clearing it away and pulled herself through the window, tumbling to the concrete below.

Her survival instincts took over as she bolted for a nearby alley, but she stopped abruptly. "Shit!" she realized. "The book!" She glanced cautiously up at the battling duo. Even in the middle of the danger, there was a strange hypnotic fascination with the way Supers fought each other.

Incinero had a smoother style than Amazing, weaving his fire into the strikes he threw against the Hero. The Admiral would staunchly take the strikes, using a vapor shield to shrug them off, then bulldozing through the fire with quick strikes of his own against the Villain. She reached her car and jumped in again, frantically searching. The book was gone! Desperate, she leaned through the window, past the front

seats, and found it. She could barely see the corner of the book peeking out from under the back of the passenger seat. Breathing heavily, she crawled back in, stretching herself, painfully pressing against the stick shift as she strained to reach for the book, her fingers just barely brushing it.

Above Anne, and unnoticed by her, Incinero deftly avoided one of Amazing's strikes and turned himself sideways in the air, slapping both of his hands against the Hero's back. Two giant bursts of flame exploded from his palms against Amazing's cape. The indestructible fabric absorbed the fiery blast, but the Hero shot forward as if blown from a cannon.

Amazing smashed into the Prospero's sign on the roof of the three story building. With a loud, straining crunch, twenty feet of steel signage bent slowly, then came crashing down.

The crowd let out a collective gasp as the sign fell toward the blue car and the struggling figure within. Anne heard the noise and look over to the bent passenger side mirror. In it, she saw the sign tumbling toward her, getting larger with its approach.

"Objects in mirror are larger than they appear!" Über taunted.

Anne's muscles tightened, coiling her body like a tightened spring. The book went flying as her survival instinct took over and the volume slipped from her fingers. She hauled herself backwards. Rolling onto the ground, she barely avoided an instant death as the letters P R O crushed her car. She turned over on the ground and blinked in shock. Her car.

Her Corvair.

Her baby.

Hers.

It was destroyed. The roof collapsed and the driver's seat was completely crushed. The lamppost had been caught in the crashing signage and now wrapped the car, from front to back, a ribbon on a ton of scrap steel present. It was now, truly, the junk it had always pretended not to be.

But there, now embedded on what remained of the

dashboard was the book. Choking down fear, frustration, anger and loss, Anne stepped forward again. She was moving on automatic now, her common sense and any concept of personal safety completely gone.

She would be damned if these two fucktards would force her to fail out of college on top of everything else they were doing. Blind to her surroundings as her anger started to pool in the depths of her soul, building pressure, she struggled for the book as reclaiming it would, somehow, vindicate her day.

The wreckage moved. It was Admiral Amazing, now standing on the twisted remains of her beloved Corvair, lifting the sign out of the way and tossing it to the side.

He glanced at Anne. "Stand back citizen!" his voice boomed as another fire bolt raced toward them. Amazing reached down, grabbed the twisted metal that remained of the car's hood, and ripped it free. Hefting the hood as a shield, he deflected the column of fire.

Anne screamed. The hood exploded with the impact, pushing Amazing back and hurling Anne across the sidewalk through trash and collapsed concrete, hitting a brick wall in an alley. Shards of glass and metal rained around her. She blinked, stunned, and tried to rub away the blood in her eyes, spreading it across her face instead.

Anne shook her head, trying to stop her ears from ringing. Her face felt wet, how weird was that? Her vision went in and out of focus as she blinked her eyes and searched the street. Her addled mind still fixated on one thing.

There, nearby in the street, was what remained of the book. It was burning, the pages curling with the flames, each one disappearing along with Anne's hopes of graduation. Anne stood up, leaning against the wall, fighting to stabilize a spinning world. She watched as the book burned in slow motion, tiny mocking flames consuming the paper. In her mind, those flames had just charred and destroyed her life.

It was fate, luck, God, demons, she didn't care what you wanted to call it.

She saw her parent's faces in the flickering light.

She saw all her hopes as they died one by one over the years.

She saw her dreams shattered and fragmented.

And she saw her car. Her beloved car.

Her hands were shaking, fingers curling into claws. Rage was pushing upward. She didn't even try to hold it back. She was tired of fighting it. Worn down. Sick of meds to control that part of her. She was pissed. Fury's icy grip clutched at the pit of her chest and spread out, purging her mind and blood.

"Yes, yes, yes!" Über whispered in her mind. *"Come on... come on..."*

Sound had disappeared from her ears. The shadows on the ground gave life to the battle continuing above her. She smelled blood and smoke and didn't care. Anne, the Anne that had the rational mind, had to go home for a few minutes. That Anne wasn't needed right now. Another Anne took her place, one that had not yet seen the light of day. One that had only peeked at the sunlight on rare occasions, when frustrations and anger allowed a small crack in the prison of self-control.

Über smiled. Anne felt it. And it empowered her.

She walked directly to the remains of her car, kicking aside the ashes of the book in her determined stride. She started to breathe heavily, evenly, deliberately. Her head shook slightly, not to deny the eruption forming within her but to release it. Her eyes narrowed and she started to see the pinpricks of darkness appearing in the periphery of her mind. She smiled to herself. *Here it comes.*

Slamming a fist into the twisted metal of her Corvair, she added another dent to the burning metal as the world snapped around her. The two above wouldn't stop, wouldn't even deign to notice, she was sure. She was beneath them, just another part of the battle of egos between two cocksucking leeches on society.

Über interjected. *"At least they have a purpose. You? You're just a waste, aren't you?"*

Über was egging her on, driving her toward the

madness—but he didn't need to bother. She was already there. The silence in her ears began to dissipate, the sounds of battle began to filter their way back in.

She heard Amazing, with that deep booming voice say, “Face my fists of justice, criminal!”

The line was followed by the sound of flesh hitting flesh in quick succession. She glanced back up at the two. Incinero spun out of control, almost crashing into a street light before correcting enough to level off.

Amazing floated in the air, a smug smile on his lips. He smacked the building next to him, ripping a chunk of rubble out, throwing it at Incinero. It went wide, smashing into the office windows above the bank.

Incinero spat fire, the flames danced around his body, creating a second suit of living armor. He shot forward, almost faster than the eye could see, at Amazing.

“I'm sick of this!” he shouted. “Let's do the man-dance, asshole. I have loot to spend.”

He crashed into the Hero, bringing both of his fists fast together, slamming them upwards at incredible speed. They smashed into Amazing's jaw. And the Hero went down, crashing to the ground, mere feet away from Anne.

Anne's fists curled. “*That's my girl.*” Über chortled. “*It's playtime.*”

There was a large chunk of concrete on the ground to her right. She leaned over and grabbed it...