

## 1248

If the rider ever gave a damn about Vinicius, someone he apparently knew, he didn't anymore. With a clear chance to sink his axes into Vinicius's claws and send the gigantic demon tumbling down toward Mia and David, he didn't take it. Maybe he thought it'd put Vinicius in his way of his true goal, because he ignored Vinicius, hooked one of his axes on his back, kept the other in hand, and jumped.

His metal boots hit the sloped balcony, and he slid down the bloodied metal surface like he was riding a surfboard.*Ww.Nó(v)ŁwOrM.com*

"What the fuck!" Mia tightened her grip on the beam between her legs and backed away from the balcony as fast as she could. Not very fast. Sliding up forty-five degrees on a big metal beam covered in blood and giant spikes, to get higher and away from where the rider would land was borderline impossible. And David was below her.

The rider, body and helmet aimed straight at David, raised the axe.

"David, jump!" Mia reached down below her, half to David, half to the empty air beneath her.

David jumped. The fact he didn't pause and do some calculations was surprising. Her brother was not the sort of guy to just do something on the fly, no matter who told him to, but he listened to her this time. He looked petrified.

His hand wrapped around her wrist. Hers wrapped his. Her chest slammed into the beam as his weight pulled her down, and she groaned as she squeezed as hard as she could. Thank god her brother was a small guy.

David, dangling from her wrist, risked a quick peek down before looking back up at her with wide eyes.

"Mia, can--"

The loud clink of metal hitting metal vibrated through the beam. Behind her, the rider landed on the base of her metal beam, and his axe hit the metal where David had been at the same time. The sharp ping made her ears ring.

"Stop, please! Leave us alone!" She almost didn't bother saying anything. A random hellquake ripping a canyon open directly under the spire? The strange blackness below them that no shadow could explain or justify? It didn't even register to the rider. Whoever he was, he didn't give a shit about anything other than killing them. No point in begging.

The rider took one step up the black metal beam, and Hell ripped apart again. He fell back, and his back pressed against the slope of the balcony, the beam under his feet. Heavy vibration shook the tower, and Mia squeezed her dangling brother with all her might while her other arm held the metal beam and its bloody spikes until her knuckles ached.

The darkness below rumbled. She looked down, knowing full well she shouldn't have, and when the darkness again met her eyes, she tried to scream. Nothing came out, only silence, an empty voice lost under the roaring vibration of Hell crumbling, breaking, and tearing further apart. The canyon grew wider, and chunks of stone and flesh fell from the canyon walls and the spire alike from the trembling. More screams and roars fell past Mia, and she peeked around only long enough to confirm more demons fell from the tower into the abyss below. The same thing happened again. They fell and fell, a long plummet into darkness, until their bodies broke apart and vanished before reaching the thing waiting for them.

The darkness reached up. Invisible, but she could see it, limbs or tentacles or something, shimmering in the air, warping and bending her vision like heat would. Or like a black hole would. It struck out against the canyon walls, and Hell shook again. Whatever was beneath them was trying to rip a hole open directly underneath Mia and David. Not the rider, not Vinicius, not the spire or the hundreds of demons around or anything. It was looking directly at her and her brother.

The rider pushed himself back to standing, fell forward toward Mia's beam, and grabbed one of spikes coming off its sides. Without a sound other than the clinking of metal, he climbed closer, and raised his axe high.

Mia looked up the balcony back toward the center of the tower. Adron wasn't there anymore. Did he fall out of the tower into the canyon? Did Kas? She sucked in a hard breath and looked down to David. He stared back up at her, eyes flicking between her and the rider.

The rider came closer. He refused to let the hellquake dislodge him. He climbed up the beam, one foot to a spike, hand grabbing a higher spike, and he brought down the axe.

Mia rolled off the beam.

The world froze again. Her stomach shot up into her throat. Realization cut through David's eyes like a knife.

"Mia!"

"David, I'm sorry! I..."*Ww@.nóVŁwOrM.com*

She held his hand. He held hers. They stared into each other's eyes as they fell toward the darkness below.

Just like last time, David hugged her and wrapped his arms around her. She hugged him back. In a couple of seconds, the speed of their falling turned the wind against their ears into a maelstrom, and cold shivers stabbed through her as the air grew harsh and cruel.

But she could feel her brother. That was a whole lot better than nothing. Dying with him a second time wasn't so bad, right? He--

Her stomach shot back down into her guts and almost out through her ass as the sudden fall turned into a sudden upward climb.

"What the--"*Ww@.óvŁ@©Łm.com*

"Almost didn't jump in time!" A woman's voice. A demon woman's voice.

"Jes!" David, arms still wrapped around Mia, screamed in the most joyful voice she'd ever heard. "Jes, you fucking beautiful angel!" Whoever the demon Jes was, apparently David liked using cheesy lines on her.

"Shut up and let me work!"

Mia forced her face out of David's chest and neck, and looked up. Gargoyle wings. Jes the gorgala had her hands' claws hooked under David's shoulders, and was straining hard to hold on as her wide wings fought against the air.

"I jumped down before you fell, the moment the rider came down to get you. Had to build up... some... fucking... speed!" Her throat flexed almost as much as her shoulders, and she veered them toward the canyon wall opposite of the spire. For a second, she'd taken them back up, using her built up speed on the way down to curve her momentum back upward. The pressure that must have put on her wings was insane.

It wasn't long before she leveled out, though, and gravity got its claws in her again. Demons couldn't fly. Mia knew that from what the others had told her. They could only glide, and Jes did her best to glide toward the canyon wall opposite from the spire and the rider.

"Thanks!" Mia yelled.

"I said shut up!"

Okay, the gargoyle woman was the angry sort. Mia could understand that. David probably appreciated that in a woman.

Mia hugged David as tight as she could to keep from falling, and he did the same, but his shoulder was a mess. It didn't look dislocated, but she could see it flex oddly and the whole arm trembled under her. So she held on tight and looked around some more. Hell continued to rumble, and the demons on the edges of the canyon backed off as a few more rocks broke off the wall of stone. The rider remained where he was, half standing on the metal beam and half against the tilted balcony behind him.

The spire really had tipped over. With the opposite canyon wall having ripped away an enormous chunk of the flesh and white bone of the spire's lower half, leaving the hidden metal framework of it exposed, the spire half collapsed under its own weight. It bent to the side, teetering over the canyon, bending like a branch and refusing to break. A weird building of metal, and literal flesh and bone that'd grown inside a hellscape of rock and deep rivers of lava.

Dozens of levels of the spire were below ground. The fleshy walls were bent and broken, compressed at the bottom where the tower's weight half pressed into the canyon side. Another demon fell from one of the exposed inner balconies, and another. The rider watched on, ignoring all of it, helmet still pointed up at David and Mia*Ww(w)@ÓvŁWOrM.Ł©M*

A huge mass slid down the balcony behind and above the rider, dark red, with black spikes all over it. Vinicius.

"The fuck!?" Jes said, looking over her shoulder.

"Vinicius," Mia said, and she clenched hard as she hugged David, and stared past him at the exposed side of the spire.

The rider and Vinicius knew each other, and whatever had happened between them hadn't been good. Enemies now, of some kind or another. He might have slid down the balcony because he was too injured and massive to hold his own weight along the blood-soaked surface. He might have slid down because he wanted the rider dead that much. Either way, Vinicius and his titanic form were more than big enough. He crashed into the rider's metal beam, and another beam almost ten feet away.