

1250

No, that couldn't be right. The thing that'd attacked him on the mountain had been huge, sure, at least as far as physics would guess considering the footprints it left. But not so big it could create a fucking canyon. A canyon that was getting bigger by the second as another earthquake, or hellquake, ripped through Death's Grip, and turned the wall Jes climbed into slippery ice.

Her claws slipped free.

"Jes, get out of here!" he yelled.

"Oh shut up!" She grabbed his wrist with both hands and flapped her wings for all they were worth. It was just like last time, Dao in his arms, the two of them falling to their deaths, and Jes doing everything she could to save them. At least no giant rocks fell on them.

But demons couldn't fly. They sank lower, and lower. No matter how hard she flapped, her wings refused to grab enough air, and the void grew closer.

He wanted to let go of her wrist. Something in his brain told him to let go, so maybe she could save herself, glide to one of the tunnel openings, anything. But the demon had her claws wrapped tight around his wrist, and every muscle in her body flexed as her big bat wings spread as wide as they could. Even as her wings blasted air down at David, the best Jes could manage after the collision with the wall, was slowing their descent.

"David, look!" Mia's voice.

"What? I--" *Www.no@e!Worm.com*

An amber maelstrom descended on them. Black wings of bone, wreathed in flame. *@ww.n@veLw@r(m).com*

The rider. How did the rider get above them?

David squeezed Jes's wrist. "Jes, let go! Get to a tunnel!" *Www.n(o)VeLW@rmm.có(m)*

"I said shut--"

The speed was insane, the wings almost a blur of amber against Hell's fire sky. Maybe it was because of the rider's weight, all that gold bronze armor, but he came down from above and his giant wings did nothing to slow him. And once he got close to them, he spread his wings and crashed directly into them.

The impact was painless. Part of David's brain told him it'd hurt later, like the time he'd slipped on an ice slope and cracked the back of his head. In a few seconds, he'd be on the ground, groaning, maybe crying, from what was probably a bunch of busted ribs. Not yet, though.

More realizations kicked in. Jes had let him go. He'd let go of Mia. He snapped his eyes around. He couldn't see them. Oh god oh god oh god.

"What the fuck let me go you fucking sonuvabitch fucking I'll fucking send you to the fucking after-after you fucking--" *W(w)w.n@rêL(w)@rM.cóM*

Oh thank god Jes was still alive. It was hard to see anything, with his face inches away from a set of giant burning black wings, his gut on the rider's shoulder, but he heard Jes's curses and roars punch through the noise like firecrackers.

"David!" Mia's voice. "David, can--"

"Be silent," the rider said, and her voice cut through Jes's curses, the roaring vibration of the hellquakes, and the hissing wind hitting David's ears.

Wait. Her voice?

Whoever the gold-armored person was, they had much more air control than Jes had, and didn't have to fly across a canyon. The stranger had no trouble turning back to the nearby wall, and glided into one of the tunnel entrances.

She landed inside a tunnel, a small one only ten feet tall and wide, and landed with the same heavy clinks that'd warned David whenever the rider was moving. But, it couldn't be the rider. He'd heard the rider speak, and had seen the rider use fire wings to land on a much lower tunnel along the canyon wall, near the bottom before the ravine wall ended and opened up to the black void.

Whoever this woman was, she dumped David off her shoulder with a powerful shrug, and as he landed on his ass hard enough to bruise, the stranger dropped Jes and Mia. She'd held Mia by the wrist and Jes by her ankle before dropping them on the tunnel floor. Mia landed on her feet at least. Jes had been upside down, clawing at the woman's hand, and subsequently dropped on her back and wings.

With a snarl and hiss, Jes jumped away from the woman, grabbed Mia and David's wrists, and threw the two of them to the stone a few feet behind her as she flared her wings and faced the armored stranger again.

"What the fuck?" she said, snarling as she snapped her tail behind her.

Jes was a few inches shy of seven feet, and about as tall as the stranger before them. The rider had been a little taller than either of them, and on second, third, and fourth glance, this stranger was a little slimmer, too. Considering the woman's voice David had heard, and the sword sheath on her back and lack of axes...

"You're not the rider," David said, and pushed on the ground with his only good arm. Nope, that wasn't happening. Pain finally found him, flooded him, ripped the air out of his lungs, and he collapsed backward.

"David. Holy fucking shit, David." Mia got up, and helped him up with his good arm. "You look like shit. Dislocated?"

"It was. It's been yanked back into the socket... half a dozen times today." He knew he was going to be starving tomorrow. "You okay?"

"Yes I'm okay! You... you..." With tears in her eyes, Mia threw her arms around him. Never mind the gargoyle standing beside her she didn't know, or the stranger in gold armor who'd saved them, Mia wanted to hug him. He wanted to hug her back as tight as he could, but settled for a one-armed hug.

The pain in his chest told him it was going to get a million times worse soon, like a popcorn kernel about to explode. He gently pushed her away.

"Sure you're okay?" he asked.

"Yeah, yeah. I got kidnapped, made a few weird friends, and Zel, she--you! How did you survive?"