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"David! David!" Mia dangled from the stranger's hand, squirming in the air. Every moment she grew further and further away, and her voice disappeared under the rumbling hellquake and roaring demons above. [Ww.no\(v\)elw0Rm.c0M](#)

"Mia! Jes, do something!"

"Fucking do what? I can't glide that far! I have no idea how she's doing it but that's borderline flying, David."

And only angels could fly, according to Jes.

"Fuck! Fuck fuck fuck!" He slammed his good hand against the stone, but the hellquake and the vibrations that came and went in waves laughed at him. It roared and shook the ground underneath him, and his voice vanished underneath it all.

And then it stopped. The hellquake, the breaking stones, the shaking canyon walls that grew further and further apart, it all came to a sudden, sharp stop. [\(w\)w.\(n\)0v6lw0Rm.C0M](#)

"The fuck?" Jes said as she stood back up.

David pushed himself back up to his hands and knees, but didn't risk standing. He couldn't tear his eyes away from the stranger's red flaming wings, and the now descending path they took toward the opposite canyon wall that'd grown even further away.

"I... I can't believe..."

"I have no fucking idea what's going on," Jes said. "Was that the rider? Couldn't be. They looked different. Felt different, too." [wWw.\(n\)0vreLw0Rm.c0m](#)

"No, it wasn't the rider. Someone else."

"Someone else in aera armor, with fire wings!?"

"I... don't know." He sat back and watched the stranger glide off with his sister. Every moment the stranger grew lower and lower, not able to fly but still getting a ridiculous distance. "Will they make it?"

"Looks like." Jes squatted down beside him at the edge of the tunnel, and watched, the only thing either of them could do.

She was right. The stranger got dangerously close to the void below, but she reached one of the tunnels on the other side of the canyon, near the spire. The tunnel Vinicius climbed toward.

"David..."

"She took her! She took my sister."

"David--"

"We have to get over there!" He ignored the pain radiating from his nose, from his shoulder, the fucking agony from his ribs, and got back up. Hell wasn't shaking anymore, so he risked getting to his feet, and pressed his good hand against the nearby tunnel wall. "If we climb to the top, we can glide over there, right? We can--"

"David! Just look, man. Look at that." Jes stood beside him, and gestured out around at the canyon. "This thing has grown ridiculously huge. Even if I climbed to a nearby mountaintop and jumped, fifty fifty I don't make it across. Carrying someone? Not gonna happen."

"But--"

"It grew! The canyon grew! It fucking grew, and grew... until that bitch in the armor took Mia."

"Until..."

Jes was right, on both accounts. The canyon had kept growing and growing, and was now so damn wide Mia was just a dot in the distance, standing next to a slightly bigger, gold and bronze dot. Vinicius was big enough he still had form, and slowly but surely he made his way along the canyon wall toward the tunnel.

"Think he'll make it?" Jes asked.

"Now that the hellquake is over, I... I guess." Energy gone, adrenaline gone, he collapsed back on his ass again. And of course that sent enough pain through him to almost blind him. It forced a little whimper out of him, too. Or maybe that was the crippling depression he felt course through him, like someone had dumped him in an ice bath and drowned him in it for good measure.

Trekking across Hell, running through a battlefield, facing the rider, none of it mattered. He'd failed.

"David, she--"

"She's gone. I can't get to her now." He watched the distant canyon wall. Far as he could tell, the stranger and Mia stood in the tunnel and waited for Vinicius, so at least she was still alive. But...

"She's gone. I can't... fucking... fix this. How the fuck am I going to fix this? I can't--"

Jes grabbed him by his useless half breastplate and yanked him up to his feet. He almost screamed, but the rage in her eyes knocked the wind out of him. [ww.N0vreW0\(r\)m.0om](#)

"I risked my fucking life to save this puddle of weak shit? No! I risked my life to save the fucker who ran through a fucking battlefield with nothing but a tiny broken sword, and faced off against the fucking rider, to save his sister! Pull yourself together!"

That was a familiar speech. Maybe Jes liked war films.

"I--"

"Shut up, I'm not done! Hell's been ripped open. That invisible thing that tried to kill us before is down there, in the black, and I don't know what that means! Guaran-fucking-teed not even Caera will have the slightest idea what the fuck is going on. But that thing down there, that... nothingness, was trying to break Hell! Break Hell or break into it, I don't fucking know. And it stopped trying when that bitch took your sister. And look! She didn't kill her!" Jes, one hand holding David up, pointed out to the canyon. "She fucking helped!"

"Helped..."

"Yes, helped! She saved your lives when I couldn't, because you and your sister are too fucking fat! Saved my life, too." The rage melted from her eyes, and she stepped back as she let him go. "And she told you what to do. You've been going out of your mind trying to figure out what's going on, right? Now, you have an idea, or at least know where to go to find out."

He stepped back, too, put his back against the rock wall, and let the weight of all the shittiness drag his head down. But not all the way down.

"I have a goal."

"Exactly, and while I'm not happy some bitch in gold armor yanked me out of the sky, I'm inclined to believe what she said."

"About Hell being doomed if I don't make it to the Forgotten Place?"

Jes opened her mouth, probably preparing for a sarcastic comment. But after a few seconds of silence, she sighed and nodded.

"Yeah. And that bitch asked about Mia's leash before she took her. I'm guessing she's going to make Vinicius help her."

"That giant demon, on a leash? The fuck is a spire leash?"

"No idea. Valzanal used to fuck around with shit like that, torture methods using the spire's powers. Zel had that fucker locked up for a long time, long as I can remember. So sure, it makes sense she got a leash on him. Mia has it now, so if I had to guess, your sister has a protector."

"A protector." David shivered and rubbed his chest and ribs. "He was fucking terrifying, Jes."

"Then it's a good thing she's got the leash. And--Hey, he made it."

Jes was right. Vinicius, gigantic even on the colossal wall of stone, got to the edge of the tunnel where Mia and the strange waited. And unless the distance was lying to David's eyes, the stranger helped Vinicius up. Damn, she was strong.

He sucked in a deep, resetting breath and forced himself to nod. His sister was alive, she knew he was alive, and unless Jes was wrong, she had a powerful demon on a leash. Even better, she had the same goal he did: get to the Forgotten Place.

"Okay," he said. "Okay. Mia's okay. I'm okay. I--"

"You look like shit." Jes came in close and examined his face. "Nose doesn't need to be set, at least, but holy fuck you went through some shit in there."

He smiled. "Thanks. For saving me and my sis."

She pulled her head back and snarled.