

Skybound Grit

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Chapter: Skybound Grit

Carmen had never thought she'd find herself thirty stories in the air, tethered to a steel frame like a leaf in the wind. But here she was — pink overalls, reinforced buckles, and a safety line clipped securely to the D-ring on her back. It wasn't fashion; it was armor.

The construction site had become her second home. Tower cranes sliced the sky like steel quills, and the half-built high-rise cast long shadows that changed with the hour. She was the only woman on this crew — something she never announced but made obvious through her precision, her silence, and the rose-colored defiance stitched into her uniform.

The pink leather overalls had been a gift from her sister, who'd said, "Wear them like a war flag." And she did. The reinforced straps hugged her shoulders with a weight she'd grown to respect. The side loops clinked against her hips when she walked, a rhythm only she carried.

Her father had been a welder. He used to bring home bits of metal and stories thick with sweat and pride. He died before seeing her step onto her first site. But Carmen felt him in every gust of wind that tugged her back — not away from the ledge, but onward, forward, higher.

Today she was leading the tether line test on the new safety grid. The team called it "the angel hook," a grim nickname born of past accidents. Carmen just called it "insurance." When she clipped in and heard the solid *click*, she felt invincible — not because she wouldn't fall, but because she'd prepared to.

A junior worker, just 19 and terrified of heights, watched from below. Carmen saw the fear in his eyes and gave a simple nod. Then she stepped up to the edge of the beam, arms wide, like she owned the sky.

"Don't fight the height," she called down. "Let it know you belong up here."

And in that moment — wind in her face, pink leather tough as steel, a city rising behind her — she did.

Flashback: *Threaded With Fire*

It was late — nearly midnight — and the tiny apartment above the upholstery shop buzzed with the low hum of an industrial sewing machine. The room smelled of scorched leather and lavender-scented balm. Marisol, Carmen's older sister, leaned over the machine with a determined squint, guiding thick pink leather under the needle with the same care she'd once used to stitch Carmen's scraped-up knees after bike crashes.

"I still think you're insane," Marisol muttered, pausing to adjust the heavy-duty thread spool. "But if you're going to risk your neck up there, you're not going to do it in some junk off the rack."

Carmen, twenty and still recovering from her first fall in training — a short one, but enough to shake her — sat cross-legged nearby, holding a tangle of safety buckles and webbing Marisol had scavenged from discarded harnesses. She watched in quiet awe as her sister's hands danced with the leather. Every line was double-stitched. Every seam was reinforced with the same precision their father had once used welding engine brackets.

"Pink, though?" Carmen raised an eyebrow.

Marisol didn't look up. "Not baby pink. Not soft pink. This is iron pink. Looks pretty, punches hard. Like you."

They didn't talk much more that night. They didn't need to. When the overalls were finished, they looked almost too clean to wear. The leather was stiff, newly born, the attachment rings at the waist and back glinting like jewelry.

Marisol held them up and gave a short nod. "Stand up."

Carmen did. Marisol crouched to guide one leg, then the other, helping her sister step into the unfamiliar weight. She pulled the bib up and fastened the thick black belt at the waist, looping it through the reinforced metal rings. The straps over the shoulders clicked into the buckles — loud and final.

"They'll break in," she said, tugging at the chest pocket to check the seams. "Like you did."



When she stepped back, Carmen caught her reflection in the old mirror by the doorway. She looked like someone else — someone built for this. And yet entirely herself.

"I don't know if I'm ready," she whispered.

Marisol adjusted the strap on her back — the one with the hidden loop she'd sewn in by hand for the safety line.

"You don't have to be ready," she said. "You just have to hold on. Let the rest catch up."

That night, Carmen didn't sleep. She lay with the overalls folded beside her, smelling of new leather and lavender balm. And when the sun rose, she carried them to the site like armor, every stitch a vow.

Flashback: *First Light, First Hook*

The sky was still gray when Carmen walked through the chain-link gate of the construction site, her hard hat tucked under one arm, steel-toe boots thudding on gravel. The overalls, freshly broken in after a few test movements at home, creaked softly with each step — thick pink leather flexing at the joints, hugging her like a second skin.

The chatter started before she even reached the hoist.

“Hey Barbie, you lose your dollhouse?”

“Someone got brave at the costume store.”

“Real cute, sweetheart.”

She didn’t flinch. She didn’t look away. Carmen just strapped on her gloves with deliberate slowness and met each smirk with a stare that didn’t blink.

The foreman, Torres, a man of few words and fewer smiles, gave her a long look from under his goggles. He didn’t say a thing. Just gave a short nod and turned back to his clipboard.

That was enough.

Up on the fifth floor, where rebar curled like weeds through the concrete, Carmen moved with practiced care. The other workers — all in standard blues and grays — watched her like a new tool being tested. Novel. Distracting. But curious.

And then came the moment.

The safety line dangled from a retractable anchor bolted into the upper frame. Carmen reached behind her — hand steady — and clipped the steel hook into the reinforced loop Marisol had sewn into the back of the overalls. It clicked into place with a satisfying *snap*.

A padlock followed, a personal touch — Carmen’s own little ritual. Not a required step, but something Marisol insisted on.

“Lock it, *claim* it,” she’d said.

The weight of the line tugged gently on her shoulders, reminding her of its presence. But instead of making her feel tethered or trapped, it felt like being held. Like being recognized by the sky itself.

Her boots met the beam edge. Thirty feet below, the city yawned open, waiting.

And she smiled.

For the first time since training, since the fall that bruised more than just her ribs, Carmen felt something new up there: not just fear managed by protocol. Not just control. Not even courage.

Belonging.

The pink overalls weren’t just seen — they were *noticed*. Not as a joke, not as weakness, but as a challenge, a promise stitched in defiance.

By noon, the teasing had faded. By the end of the week, three different crew members asked where she got them.

She didn’t tell them. Not yet. The overalls weren’t ready to be copied. They were still becoming legend.

Chapter: *Blueprints in Her Bones*

It wasn’t visiting hours, not really. But rules had always been more of a suggestion to Marisol.

She arrived at the site just before lunch break, in black jeans stained with dye and glue, her boots scuffed from the shop. Her hair was tied back with a measuring tape she'd forgotten to remove. She walked like someone with purpose — not confidence exactly, but the kind of steadiness earned from years of finishing what she started.

Carmen spotted her from the fourth level down, squinting past the scaffolding. A few of the guys were already looking at Marisol like she was lost.

"Yo, Pink's got a twin?" someone muttered.

Marisol waved up at her sister like she was flagging down a city bus. "You climbing down or should I come up and get you?"

Carmen met her halfway — dirty boots against rebar, her tether line swinging slightly as she rappelled to ground level. When she landed, Marisol was already inspecting the overalls like a surgeon checking a scar.

"You've been sweating in these," Marisol said, wrinkling her nose and tugging at a seam near the underarm. "Too tight here. I see friction burns starting. And that D-ring's taking all the strain — you feel it in your shoulders?"

"Only when I swing," Carmen replied with a half-smile. "It's still holding."

"Still holding' isn't good enough."

Marisol circled her like a tailor possessed. One hand on her chin, the other tapping along stress points — where the pink leather had started to crease, where the waist belt dug into Carmen's side when she bent too far. She muttered as she worked:

"Pivot seams on the hips. Padded backing on the lumbar... A drop-seat system, because I know you're not unbuckling six clasps every time you have to pee. And mesh insets under the arms. Something breathable but fire-retardant."

Carmen stood still, letting her sister measure with her eyes. Around them, a few workers wandered by, watching with thinly veiled amusement.

"Is this your designer?" one of them asked with a chuckle.

Marisol didn't even glance up. "No. I'm her engineer."

She looked Carmen straight in the eyes. "You gave me version one. But now I've seen the battlefield. You're getting version two. Reinforced, ventilated, full-range movement — and we're doing color options."

Carmen raised an eyebrow. "You serious?"

Marisol grinned. "Deadly. I'm not just making gear now. I'm making *uniforms*."

The foreman passed by, raising his brow at the sight of Marisol scribbling ideas in a little oil-stained notebook. He stopped beside Carmen and nodded toward her sister. "She gonna be on payroll soon?"

Carmen smiled. "She's already got stock in the company."

That day, Marisol stayed at the site longer than she intended, sketching designs on the back of steel delivery invoices, asking questions about how often Carmen crouched, twisted, leaned into wind

shear. By the time she left, her satchel was stuffed with notes, sample scraps, and Carmen's original sizing sheet.

And Carmen — standing there in the fading sunlight, tether line coiled at her feet — felt the shift in her bones.

She wasn't just the one who wore the gear now.

She was helping invent it.

Chapter: *Version Two*

Two weeks after Marisol's visit, Carmen found herself standing in the break room trailer next to a cardboard box labeled in bold black marker:

FIELD TEST PROTOTYPE – C2.0

Inside: overalls that looked like they came from the future. Same rugged pink leather, but lighter. Joints gusseted for stretch. Mesh ventilation panels seamlessly worked into the underarms and lower back. The lumbar section was padded now, and the whole thing flexed with movement instead of fighting against it. The attachment rings were doubled — one main, one backup — both integrated into a crisscross harness sewn invisibly into the leather.

And, in classic Marisol fashion, the instructions were handwritten on a coffee-stained napkin:

"Climb like you mean it. And tell me what sucks." — M

Carmen suited up.

The new overalls moved with her — not just around her. The straps hugged without biting. The fabric breathed. Even the little details — angled chest pockets, a back zipper pouch for gloves, a redesigned drop-seat she could manage with gloved hands — all worked without thinking.

When she walked out onto the frame in version two, jaws didn't drop. They tightened.

The guys didn't joke this time.

They noticed.

By noon, Manuel — one of the older riggers — sidled up during a break. He'd once scoffed that "fashion doesn't hold weight." Now he was looking at her rig like it was a goddamn blueprint.

"You think your sister would... I mean, does she take commissions?" he asked, rubbing the back of his neck.

Carmen just grinned. "You know your size?"

He nodded.

"I'll tell her."

By the end of the week, two others had tried on the prototype. By the end of the month, Marisol was measuring their team lead. The site buzzed with talk of "that new gear," half-joking that Carmen's overalls were the first time pink had outranked OSHA yellow in safety.

And behind the scenes, Carmen and Marisol were quietly building something bigger — not just a product, but a **standard**.

They worked nights, sketching improvements over video calls. Carmen would come home with a new rip, a sweat patch, a bruised knee — and Marisol would immediately see it as data. Every field report became a better seam. Every discomfort became a design choice.

Their latest plan?

C2.1 – The High-Rise Series.

For women. For smaller frames. For anyone who'd ever been told "standard fit" was "close enough."

One night, Carmen found a draft logo in Marisol's sketchbook.

A stylized harness woven into the shape of a phoenix.

Under it:

"Risewear."

Carmen looked up. "Is this what we're doing?"

Marisol didn't answer immediately. She just smiled, soft and quiet.

"We already are."

Chapter: *The Drop Test*

It was supposed to be a routine lift. Just a pallet of steel rods moving from ground level to the eighth floor.

Carmen was overseeing the west scaffold, clipped in as always, her Risewear C2.1 overalls snug, the new dual-hook harness tight across her chest and back. The morning had been smooth, the kind of shift that lulled you into thinking things couldn't go wrong.

Then the wind shifted.

Not a breeze — a hard, punching gust from the east, out of nowhere. The crane operator radioed for a pause, but the load had already begun to swing. A staccato shout echoed up the scaffolding: "HEADS—!"

Carmen turned just in time to see the load veer, hit a snag in the rigging, and twist. A bundle of steel rods broke free.

Time didn't slow down, not exactly — but her thoughts did.

Two workers below her hadn't seen it. They were focused on their section, heads down. No time to yell.

No time to think.

Carmen moved.

She unclipped her backup line and swung around the beam, reaching the edge of the scaffolding with a speed that was instinct more than intention. She leapt, anchored only by the main safety line.

The overalls held. The harness bit into her ribs, but it held.

The wind snapped her sideways as she caught one of the men by the back of his vest and pulled. The steel rods slammed into the level just behind them with a deafening *clang*, cracking plywood and scattering debris.

Everyone froze.

Then shouting. Radios squawking. Runners sprinting across the frame.

But Carmen was still dangling — rope taut, boots scraping concrete — with one arm looped around the beam and the other around the worker she'd saved.

Her voice was calm, steady: "You're okay. I got you."

It took a full two minutes to pull them both up. When she finally stepped back onto the scaffold, her legs trembled. Not with fear — with adrenaline, with the weight of what *could* have been.

Torres, the foreman, reached them first. His face was pale.

"You good?"

Carmen nodded once. "Gear held."

He looked at her — really looked — then glanced at the overalls, now dust-streaked but intact. He said nothing else. Just turned and barked into his radio for a full rigging inspection.

Later that afternoon, while the site sat still in that post-emergency lull, Carmen sat alone, sipping from a lukewarm water bottle. Her glove grazed the pressure-mark on her side where the new lumbar panel had taken the force.

Her phone buzzed. A text from Marisol.

**Saw the news ping from your site's safety app.
That was you, wasn't it?**

Version 2.1?

Carmen stared at the screen for a moment. Then she typed:

Version 2.1 just earned its name.

A moment later, Marisol replied with a single image: a sketched blueprint, already labeled:

C2.2 — Fall Response Reinforcement System (FRRS).

And Carmen smiled.

Because now it wasn't just about making gear better.

It was about saving lives. For real.

