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"Yes. In this regard, a gabriem knows best." Nodding, Yosepha took a step back and gestured at the alcove around them with a wing. "I will teach you batlam."

"Oh shit, really?" Batlam, the rune that gave angels their armor and weapons. "I thought you didn't want me to learn that one? I thought--"

"Thank Galon, the next time you see him. I still don't know if I can trust you with such power, Mia, but I have come to trust in Galon's judgment of people. Now, equipping batlam for an angel requires far more grace than potram or royam. And--"

"Um, but if royam is easier, should you teach me that one first? WW@noy@lworM.C@m

Yosepha shook her head. "Royam would not provide any use for you, except in a matter of negotiation. Maybe some day that will be required, but batlam is far more important. I would teach you both, but I worry about teaching you batlam at all, and I need to stay here for long enough to see if something happens to you for using it."

Mia gulped and nodded. "Okay."

With a face of stone, Yosepha gently pushed Mia away to make more room, and unleashed a gold glow. It took Yosepha no time at all to don the armor, as if she lived and breathed the glorious metal that now coated her. Silver, shining, with lines of gold, and hints of white silk underneath and beneath the joints. The helmet didn't cover her face completely, leaving her stern mouth and hard eyes visible, just as deadly as the sword she now wielded.

She sheathed the sword -- by making it poof out of existence, of all things -- and held out her armored hand to Mia. And Mia touched it WW@noy@lworM.C@m

Nothing.

"You um, have to do what you did last time, I guess?" Mia said. "Pour grace into the rune?"

Yosepha sighed but nodded, and did so. Her body and armor glowed again, and stayed glowing, as if she was permanently in the state of equipping it. As if she was permanently in the state of saying a word, or signing it.

They touched hands again, and the electricity flooded Mia's mind. It wasn't mild like last time with potram, but a tidal wave of jolts and shocks that coursed through her body, into her mind, and out into her limbs. She'd just grabbed a live, ungrounded wire. Lightning cut through her, burned her insides, and forced every muscle to clench sporadically.

Her mind went blank. Pain blocked everything. She fell back, hit the stone on her ass, on her skull, and everything inside her fought to get out of her, as if the blood in her body had begun to boil. Potram vanished, and only the tiniest hint of consciousness told her she was naked again.

"Mia!" Yosepha fell to her knees beside her and scooped her head up. "Mia, are you alright? Mia!"

The pain went away, eventually. Pain wasn't even the right word. The rune had overloaded her, shocked her in a way her nervous system couldn't understand, and had everything inside clenching until she almost broke. The best way her brain could think of it was electric, but it was a pale comparison.

"That... sucks," she said up at the angel. "Holy fuck, that hurt."

"You're alive."

"Alive... in Hell."

"Semantics," the angel said. Mia blinked up at Yosepha. That sounded dangerously close to a joke, but of course, Yosepha wasn't smiling. "Why was your reaction so strong?"

"I don't know. It was... It was weird. I tried to do what I did last time, but it was like... like... trying to lift something too heavy? I don't know. More like, I was trying to pull Excalibur out of the stone, while it had a billion volts going through it. Fucking... fried me." She lifted her arms. Yeah, sore. Everything was sore. But unless her eyes were lying to her, she didn't look injured on the outside, and her fingers remained intact. Lightning had a habit of destroying extremities.

"Can you sit?"

"I think so."

The angel pushed her up, and miraculously, Mia stayed sitting under her own power.

"What now?" Yosepha asked www.nOve1worM.c@m

"You're asking me? I don't know..." Mia looked down at her naked self. She could probably use potram again, but she was tired, panting, and tasted blood. Of course an electric shock through the body would make her bite her tongue. "But, the rune is... it's there. I mean, it was there before, but now it's there there. I can try and activate it."

"Was learning it from me what hurt you, or trying to use it?"

"I don't know. I think learning it was the problem? It was... so much... like, bam! You slammed me with so much... energy, I guess?"

"Then I must apologize."

Mia laughed. Mistake. Ow.

"Don't apologize. But, gimme a sec. I'll try using the rune. WW@noy@lworM.C@m

Yosepha didn't like that, but other than a frown, she did nothing except stand up.

"You may want to stay sitting, then."

"Good plan." Mia rubbed the back of her head. Yeah, she'd hit that, too. Being light and having a lot of hair saved her from a concussion, or the Hell equivalent.

She looked into her mind, into the array of runes, and found the two runes in her mind that made sense. Three, if she considered the control rune she learned from the tetrad's horde mark. Her mind understood that one, but had no idea how to use it, as if it was missing the instrument to do so. But the angel runes she understood, potram and batlam. They clicked in her mind, like pieces on a board puzzle.

She traced the batlam rune in her mind, signed it, spoke it internally in the language she didn't know, and it glowed. A binding connection, like a string or chain, latched onto her, the real her, deep inside whatever it was that made Mia Mia. Her soul.

Signing and using potram had felt like signing a small sentence. Something simple, and easy. Signing batlam felt like trying to do that, while riding a small boat in the middle of a tsunami, while the anchor hung from her jaw. Her body just would not do it. She tried again, clenched her eyes shut, and ground her teeth until her jaw click, but her soul refused.

"It's too... heavy!"

"Batlam is heavy, I will not lie. As I said, it takes much grace to equip the rune, and some again to maintain it. Only angels who have spent years learning what they are and have received extensive training can wield it with ease."

As much as Mia wanted to ask Yosepha about angel life, how they were born, what were they like when they were born, what an angel elementary school looked like, it wasn't the time. It was time to channel her inner David, and obsess about this rune until she could wear it.