

Lashara sighed as she finished working on the accounts of the Quarrier Orphanage, money was tough this month. An orphanage had many expenditures, the most taxing of them being food. It wasn't easy to obtain enough money to feed sixteen children and six adults. Although five of the six adults earned money, they barely made enough for everybody, this was despite the tax waivers that orphanages received from the government, and the few donations that the orphanage occasionally received from benevolent rich patrons.

Their monthly expenditure included food, clothes as children were constantly growing and with sixteen of them something or the other was always outgrown every month, sanitation supplies, the discounted tax, maintenance and several other individually small needs and indulgences that culminated in a daunting monthly expenditure.

The Quarrier orphanage had been founded by her twenty-three years ago, back then she was the only caretaker, and she had taken in five children back then. Generally, families looking to adopt went to larger and more famous orphanages rather than smaller ones like her own, so the five children she took in had never been adopted, she raised them like her own children.

Those five children Alice, Karin, Depp, Myra and Kenta grew up and decided to support the orphanage and their mother, together they constituted the six adult caretakers that ran the Quarrier Orphanage.magic

Lashara spent all her time at the orphanage, whereas the five caretakers had part-times that allowed them to sustain the orphanage. Usually they had anywhere between fourteen-sixteen children, this was their utmost limit given

the orphanage's accommodation and financial capacity, as well as the caretaker to child ratio. Though, families preferred to adopt younger children, below the age of one normally, so most of the older kids remained in the orphanage.

They would be home-tutored in their early years by Lashara mainly, she would teach them basic law, geography, history, mathematics and the absolute bare basics of economics and politics. She did her best to instill the foundational knowledge that all were expected to have as well as the things all adults ought to know. Although she was no learned academic, over the span of twenty-three years she had become a master of teaching the basics.

The ladies Alice, Myra and Karin worked part time in kitchens, restaurants, at wealthier residences as cooks, waitresses, maids, baby-sitters and jobs of those sorts. The men Depp and Kenta worked in manual labor jobs, rickshaw pullers most of the time, albeit in winter they preferred to get into mining. Together the five earned a majority of the monthly income the orphanage received.

Lashara loved each one of them from the bottom of her heart, without them, she would have to shut down the orphanage, the mere thought of which made her heart ache. Things were hard, but because she had such loving children, she could overcome these tribulations.

Things had gotten even harder since the orphanage took Rui in, a newborn infant required constant attention and supervision, this put an even greater burden on them, but Lashara did not regret her decision. She felt a great amount of heartbroken pity when her sister, who worked as a nurse in the hospital, informed her of a black-haired, black-eyes orphaned baby who had not been accepted by even a single orphanage.

Black hair and eyes were exceedingly rare and were ominous and it is said that those born with these traits could bring great ruin or fortune to the entire

world, thankfully Lashara never bought into that nonsense, and neither did most people, but the superstitious fear of bad omens still remained. To Lashara it was just a bunch of made-up nonsense that had no doubt made the otherwise perfectly normal and ordinary children born with these traits go through a harder life.

Of course, Lashara was not blind to the fact that Rui was far from a normal child. In her eyes, he was a prodigious genius beyond fathoming. He spoke his first word at the age of two months, shocking all the adults around him, and his vocabulary and speech increased dramatically until he could speak like a four-year-old even before he hit the age of one. Furthermore, his temperament was truly unbelievable, he very rarely cried, and even then, only shedding a few tears reluctantly when he got hurt badly. He was calm and patient, something Lashara thought to be impossible in an infant.

It would be quite intimidating to her if it wasn't for the fact that Rui was a truly wonderful baby, he was kind, affectionate and above all else truly adorable, she was sure he would be a heartbreaker when he grew up.

She sighed as she shut the accounts book and put aside her abacus when-
BOOM!

A sudden loud noise startled her. She walked down the corridor towards the back of the orphanage where the noise had come from.

"Ah the squire, I see." She peered through a window at the crumbled wood and sawdust rubble.

('Yet another expense, but we didn't have much of a choice. Chopping it down ourselves would take too much time and energy and the back exit is regularly used for receiving supplies because the storage room is closest to it.')

A storm had knocked down a brittle dead tree, leading to all these complications. Fortunately, Martial Squires were quick, making their services

worth every bronze coin of their service. A Martial Squire was one of six realms, or ranks, of Martial Artists, who were part of a Union known as the Martial Union, which offered any and all services that employed Martial Art. The Orphanage had commissioned manual labour from a Martial Squire, through the Union, though only in rare occasions.

She noticed Rui by Alice's side as she paid the Squire the fees for his labor, particularly she noticed the gaping awe and admiration he expressed at the Squire. It was almost impossible to miss anyway, especially coming from a childlike Rui, who was generally quite reserved and passive in his emotional expression.

"Fu fu fu... I wonder if he'll strive to become a Martial Artist..."

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