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## *Chapter 3: Head Start*

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ALICE LEYWIN'S POV:

Arthur had to be the most adorable baby, and I'm not saying this because I'm a doting mother.

No.

Him and his scruffy little patch of glowing auburn hair and playful eyes, that almost radiate blue light while his gaze, at times, seemed almost... intelligent.

No no, I told you, I'm not a doting mother. I plan to be a strict and just mother. I can't rely on my husband to teach little Art any common sense. For God's sake, he tried to teach my baby how to fight when he could barely crawl.

I know this little rascal would turn out just like his father if I left him be. As soon as he started crawling, I was so proud I was on the verge of shedding tears, but I didn't know how much of a handful he'd be as soon as he became mobile.

I swear, there's not a single moment where I can take my eyes off of him before he crawls into the study room. How weird. We made sure to buy him lots of stuffed animals and wooden toys to play with, but he always ends up going to the study room. THAT, at least was directly opposite of his father, seeing how Reynolds almost gravitates away from texts longer than the weekly newspaper.

Looking at how excited he got when we went out to town, I decided to go shopping for food once every other day instead of twice a week.

No no, I told you, I'm not a doting mother. This is for his education of the outside world and for fresh food in the house. Yeah haha...that's it.

My son seemed to be interested in a lot of things. I can't get enough of seeing his head, that seemed so disproportional to his little body, turning left

and right while trying to take everything around him in. He seemed particularly intrigued by his father's practices.

Reynolds was a pretty competent adventurer back in the days. Being a Bclass adventurer by the age of twenty-eight was actually a pretty fast climb. Acquiring an E-class rank, the lowest rank, required taking a test to prevent us from sending eager but ignorant adolescents to their deaths. As for the higher ranks, I've only seen a couple of A-class adventurers in my years of working there and I've yet to see an S-class adventurer, assuming they actually exist.

Working at the Adventurer Guild, or what we just called the Guild Hall, back then in Valden, I got to see too many eager teens. I swear, I was surprised they didn't float away from having their overly inflated egos get to their heads.

At least they were ambitious.

One time, I was assigned to proctor a basic practical exam, where the examinee had to simply demonstrate fundamental competency in their mana manipulation, but before the test had even begun, the kid fell straight onto his back because the sword he was carrying had been too heavy for him.

Talking about airheads, Reynolds sure came off as one back then. The moment he saw me in the Guild Hall, his jaw literally dropped and he just stood there until the guy in line behind him elbowed him to hurry up. He hurriedly wiped away his drool and managed to mumble a "... h.. hi... can I trade in th...the stuff for the mission?" I just giggled as he turned beet red from embarrassment.

He managed to gather up the courage to ask me out for dinner and we just hit it off from there. Even now, I can't help but smile when I see his droopy, blue puppy eyes looking at me.

Art somehow wound up with both of our redeeming traits, making him that much more adorable. You should see him when I have to change his diapers. I don't know why, but he would start turning red in his cheeks and cover his face with his tiny little fingers.

Could babies his age even get embarrassed?

The next landmark that made it to my baby journal, which is purely for educational purposes, by the way, and not because I am a doting mother, was when he first said mama.

He said Mama!

I told him to say "mama" again and again, just to make sure I didn't hear wrong. Reynolds sulked for the entire day because Art said "mama" before "dada."

Haha, I won!

The rest of the year went by pleasantly with my son sticking by me wherever I went and frequently looking out the window to see his father practice after dinner. I'm glad Reynolds gave up being an adventurer and instead took up a post as a guard nearby for our town. Being an adventurer may have brought in more money, but not knowing when or if my husband would come home was not worth any amount of extra money. More so after that incident...

To our relief, Little Art never got sick, but oftentimes, I would find him sitting still on his butt while closing his eyes. At first, I thought he was having trouble relieving himself, but after checking the first couple of times, that didn't seem to be the case.

How strange, I didn't know what to make of it. I thought babies his age were supposed to be energetic and flighty, but after his episodes of escaping to the study room, he seemed to spend a lot of time sitting still, almost meditating.

I was worried at first, but although it would happen a couple times a day, it only lasts for a couple of minutes and Art would seem strangely happy afterwards. The way he holds his arms up and looks up at me makes me just want to gobble him up.

\*Ahem\* Not a doting mother.

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

About two years have passed since I made my difficult journey to the study room.

From then, I had been constantly trying to gather the little bits of mana spread out in my body and focus it in an attempt to form a mana core. Let me tell you, it was a slow and arduous task. I would find myself having an easier time trying to learn how to walk on my hands and eat with my feet in this damnable body than trying to will my mana core to condense.

I could see why the book said that it'll take until at least the adolescent age for a person to 'awaken.' If I had let the mana particles in my body move by themselves, it would take at least a decade for them to gravitate towards each other to form anything remotely close to a mana core.

Instead... A perk in having the mental capacity of an adult meant that I had the cognitive ability to consciously will my mana particles together. This was something I did as a child in my past life in school, where they taught you from childhood to learn how to control ki. Essentially, it's being able to sense the ki, or mana now, in your own body and force them together near the solar plexus. If left alone, the particles will eventually slowly float towards each other anyway, but I'm just grabbing the feathers and shoving them into the twill sack instead of waiting for them to float down by themselves, figuratively speaking of course.

Daily rituals consisted of me trying to spend as much of my limited energy as possible on gathering my mana while avoiding suspicion from my mother and father. My father seemed to think that throwing a child into the air would be quite enjoyable. While I understand there would be a kind of adrenaline effect that may excite some people, when mana was used to reinforce his arms, and I got thrown into the air like a high-speed projectile, the only feeling I had was nausea and a traumatic fear of heights.

Fortunately, my mother had a pretty firm handle on my father, but my mother scared me sometimes. I often caught her staring at me, half drooling, looking at me like I'm some kind of premium meat.

I tried to adapt to my body by only talking in very simple sentences. After I first said "mama" to let her know I wanted more food, she almost burst into tears of joy. It's been a long time since I received this sort of motherly affection. Since then, I limited myself to just trying to talk enough to get the point across, no grammar necessary.

Besides that, the pace of my training was strenuous and slow, but I was getting a pretty big head start compared to everybody else so I wasn't complaining.

These past two years, have not gone to waste, for I finally gathered all of my mana into my solar plexus and was in the midst of condensing a mana core when...

**\*BOOM\***