

I Transmigrated Then Switched Parents

With the Villain chapter 11

A small laugh burst from Callix, as though something immensely amusing had just happened.

“That’s right, Damian. When you’re scared, you rely on your older brother.”

Carrying Damian, Callix headed toward the dining hall.

As if he hadn’t been fed properly in a long time, the child was so light you could believe he was holding a bouquet of flowers.

The Duke, who was already waiting at the dining hall, raised a single eyebrow when he saw them.

It was a reaction of sheer curiosity as to why Callix was personally carrying and bringing along a younger brother he had never cared about before.

“Your Grace, Damian failed to eat properly and suffered a hypoglycemic shock. He almost died.”

Placing the child in the seat at the very end of the dining table, Callix took a seat right beside the Duke.

“Damian didn’t even have a single servant assigned to him.”

“Ah, I will assign one.”

“Given how young he is, it would be best to assign a nanny as well.”

“I had no idea you cared so much about your younger brother, Cal.”

The Duke showed curiosity as to why Callix was meddling in Damian’s affairs.

Callix quickly manufactured a plausible excuse to explain his suddenly altered attitude.

“Seeing his pink hair makes me think of Mother, so I keep worrying about her. And also.....”

Dropping his eyelids like the most virtuous and kind-hearted boy in the world, Callix acted out a longing for his deceased mother.

He would never allow Damian’s identity as a Gem to be found out.

If it became known that Damian was a top-tier “jewel,” he might end up sharing a Gem with his father just like before.

Having been born later than his father and thus forced to share a Gem was an experience he had had enough of with his mother.

Of course, that didn’t mean he intended to commit an unspeakable taboo with his younger brother Damian.

Since simply holding hands provided more than enough divine blessing, why on earth would he go and filthily mix bodies with his sibling?

His only intention was to be the sole person who held Damian’s hand and hugged him.

This level of possessiveness was, in his view, well within the reasonable bounds for a mage who had discovered his own Gem.

“Ever since I returned to the castle after a long time, I met Mother in a dream. She begged me to take good care of Damian....., sob. Mother.....”

Spinning a fairly shameless lie, Callix covered his mouth and acted as though he were holding back sobs.

Upon hearing that his dead wife had appeared in a dream, the Duke jumped up and pressed Callix for details.

“Cal, Sierra did—what else did she say? Hm? Didn’t she want to see me? How heartless of her. Why won’t she ever appear in my dreams?”

Callix had never once met his mother in a dream.

And he figured the same applied to Duke Maldini.

Having barely escaped the clutches of those obnoxious mages, there was no way she, having found freedom in death, would ever show up in their dreams.

Duke Maldini gazed with fervent yearning at his second son, whose hair color matched his wife’s, as if the boy were a magical key that could let him meet her again in his dreams.

“Ah, Sierra. I’m so sorry. I was wrong all this time.”

Overwhelmed by a sudden wave of guilt for having neglected his second son all this while, the father broke down.

Ignoring whether the Duke was crying or not, Callix summoned a servant and ordered them to bring Damian easily digestible food.

From this moment on, he would begin his jewel hunt.

Very tenderly and secretly. He would become the older brother Damian trusted and relied upon.

Meanwhile, Shushu figured Duke Maldini must be suffering from depression.

Judging purely by looks, he looked like someone who wouldn't bleed even if pricked with a needle, yet he was capable of shedding so many tears.

What did it feel like for a mage to lose their Gem?

Having fled desperately alongside his mother, Shushu had never possessed a mage of his own, so he had no idea what that felt like.

His mother had only ever told him that mages were extremely dangerous beings.

They were hypocrites who treated inferior Gems like slaves while serving superior Gems like kings, she had said.

Eating the warm soup brought by the servant, Shushu let out a soft breath at the warmth spreading straight from his stomach.

He felt like he was finally coming back to life.

Perhaps because he was told to bring easily digestible food, following the thin broth came a bowl of oatmeal porridge, which hardly fit a noble's diet.

Having starved for so long, had they given him meat, he would have failed to digest it properly and ended up with an upset stomach or vomiting.

As he belatedly looked back at the considerate Callix, he caught the eyes of the older boy, who was currently eating.

When the coldest-looking, aloof beauty in the world smiled exclusively at him, it felt like he had become the heroine of an internet romance novel.

Having finished his meal, Shushu stared at the strawberry cake resting on a white plate and swallowed hard.

He poked a strawberry the size of his fist with his fork and popped it into his mouth in one go.

Chewing energetically with chubby, puffed-up cheeks, he tasted the strawberry.

The strawberry coated in sweet fresh cream was so delicious it made his toes curl and the hairs on his head stand on end.

Of course, he had eaten it back in Korea, but because it was his first time tasting it in this world, every single cell in his body seemed to awaken.

Quickly devouring the strawberry cake in an instant, he bit down on his fork with a look of lingering regret.

Glancing sideways at the servant who was continuing to tend to his table service, he debated whether to ask for one more, when Callix—seated far away—brought over his own dessert plate and set it down right in front of him.

“Damian, Big Brother doesn’t really like sweets, so would you eat this for me?”

“.....Yes.”

Shushu decided he liked Callix, who lived up to his looks after all.

A strawberry cake simply didn’t suit the heir of a cold-blooded Northern Grand Duke—hell yeah!

Fearing someone might snatch it away from him, Shushu quickly popped a strawberry into his mouth.

To a seven-year-old’s tongue, it was an overwhelmingly stimulating and thrilling taste.

Shaking his hand holding the fork, he eagerly shoveled spoonfuls of the fresh-cream cake into his mouth.

Had Mom ever tasted something this good? It must be expensive, right?

He drifted into a daydream of becoming rich later and buying a whole cake for his mother.

“Damian. Damian.”

Because it wasn’t his real name, Shushu hadn’t even realized he was being called.

Snapping to attention belatedly, he answered in a rush.

“Yes!”

The Duke asked if he had ever received any lessons before.

Shushu thought about lying that he had taken lessons, but shaking his head felt safer to avoid a bigger problem if he were found out.

“No.”

“Ah, no wonder your pronunciation and accent are poor. Then I suppose you don’t know how to write either.”

“.....Yes.”

He felt smaller and smaller.

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Still, the reason he couldn’t write was because this world’s language boasted a level of difficulty akin to absolute hell, not because he was simply stupid.

While he was reminiscing fondly about King Sejong the Great, who created the Korean alphabet, Callix stepped up and volunteered to tutor his younger brother personally.

Shushu wasn’t the only one who found it unexpected. Even the Duke couldn’t hide his astonishment, letting out a “You?”

“We’ve been separated for a long time, so we haven’t had the chance to get close. I want to use this opportunity to grow closer.”

“Ah, go right ahead.”

Once the meal concluded, the Duke departed for his office to receive reports on castle affairs that had been neglected for a long time.

Having nothing to do and feeling drowsy from eating his fill, Shushu decided to take a nap.

However, Callix trotted along right behind him.

Wondering if they happened to be heading in the same direction, Shushu stopped in his walking to let him pass first.

Callix stopped right alongside him, as if to prove his previous thought wasn’t a misunderstanding.

“Why are we goin’ to-gether?” (Baby talk)

“Didn’t I say I was going to teach you how to speak?”

“Now it’s time for nappy-time.” (Baby talk)

Shushu crossed both hands and mimed using a pillow.

Callix looked down at Shushu with a fascinated expression.

“You just woke up, and you’re sleepy already?”

Gazing down at him quietly, Callix said, “Alright, then let’s meet after you take a nap,” and walked away.

Returning to his bedroom alone, Shushu climbed onto the bed and pulled the blanket all the way up to his chest.

Only when morning arrived did the closet door swing open.

A rich scent of soap wafted from his exhausted mother.

Shushu wrapped both arms around her in a tight hug.

[It was stifling, wasn’t it?]

[No, Shushu slept like a log.]

Her expression, which normally should have looked weary and sorrowful, was unusually bright.

His mother dressed Shushu tightly in a warm coat.

[Let’s go pick wild berries.]

Even though his stomach had been rumbling with hunger all through dawn, Shushu didn’t have the energy to climb a mountain, but wanting to earn money even a little faster, he followed along after his mother.

However, his mother gathered up a money pouch she had buried beneath a tree and headed toward a restaurant.

Tilting his head at a schedule different from usual—yet welcoming it since he was hungry—Shushu went along.

As always, Shushu picked the cheapest potato soup from the menu.

Instead of the 1-shilling potato soup Shushu picked, his mother ordered two servings of mushroom soup, which was 2 shillings more expensive.

The waiter, who had been looking at them with eyes that seemed to ask if those beggar rats were back again, asked with a smile.

[Is there anything else you need?]

[.....Please bring bread too. For two people.]

Anxious because of his mother suddenly spending money so lavishly, Shushu jumped up and blocked the path of the waiter heading toward the kitchen.

[No!]

[Sweetheart, what did you say?]

[Cancel! Cancel it! Not eatin'.]

His mother pulled Shushu away from the waiter and scooped him up into her arms.

[I'm sorry. Please bring the food.]

[No! No!]

[Shushu, it's alright. Even after eating this, we can still buy our house.]

Honestly, Shushu had thought his mother was going to feed him his fill and then abandon him.

Yet she was saying they had finally saved enough money to buy a house.

Could you really make that much money overnight?

He felt dubious, but her expression remained bright.

Terrified of being abandoned, Shushu obediently returned to his table and waited with fluttering anticipation for the food to arrive.

Warm mushroom soup and bread were served.

Whereas he usually ate only a little because he wanted to save food for his mother, this time Shushu wolfed down a whole bowl of soup and even devoured a loaf of bread the size of his own face.

Realizing only then that the child had been holding back for her sake, his mother's eyes grew red and watery.

[Yawn~.]

Filled to the brim, Shushu yawned.

He couldn't remember the last time he felt this full.

Because he had spent all dawn hungry, anxious, and terrified without sleeping properly, sleepiness washed over him in a massive wave now that his stomach was full.

Even the warm glow of the restaurant's fireplace beckoned to Shushu, telling him to hurry up and sleep.

As Shushu nodded off in sleep, his mother scooped him up into her arms.

Snug and cozy, he drifted off to sleep cradled against her.

Shushu decided that even if he woke up to find himself abandoned once again, he wouldn't resent his mother.

After all, she had endured far more hardship than she ever should have because of him.

Yet when he opened his eyes again, contrary to his expectations, Shushu found himself resting with his head pillowed on his mother's lap.

Every time the carriage wheels rolled, the carriage bounced repeatedly, jolting over small pebbles.

Checking the people inside the carriage, Shushu hid his face against his mother's chest.

[Did you sleep well?]

[Where are we going, Mom?]

[We're going to a good place.]

Overwhelmed with emotion, Shushu's heart swelled with the realization that he had finally escaped alongside his mother.

Though the Gems were pushed around by Kevin's tyranny, none of them ever thought of escaping from that place.

After all, having nowhere to stay in the freezing North meant freezing to death on the streets before long.

Hence, penniless as they were, they couldn't easily run away, and Kevin also permitted the Gems to go out to a certain extent anyway.

Where else could you possibly go anyway? that was his attitude.

Yet his mother had relentlessly scraped together money in that hellish place and ultimately pulled off an escape.

It must have been terribly difficult for a lone woman traveling with a child, and the fact that she hadn't abandoned him made him profoundly grateful.

Shushu hugged his mother tight.

[Love you, Mom.]

[Mom loves Shushu too.]

As Shushu smiled, closing his eyes at his mother's soft touch as she stroked his hair, a woman sitting in the same carriage looked over at him with an expression that screamed she found Shushu's cuteness unbearable.

[The baby is so adorable. How old are you?]

[Shushu is sheven.] (Seven)

Fearing that his inaccurate pronunciation might mean he wouldn't be understood, he held out all seven of his fingers.

The middle-aged woman handed Shushu a piece of bread.

[Little one, would you like to eat this?]

[Thang you.] (Thank you)

A grandmother watching them also encouraged Shushu, offering him a boiled potato wrapped in cloth.

Shushu took only the tiniest nibble of it and told his mother that he was full.

The passengers watching the scene couldn't praise him enough, remarking how wonderfully well-behaved the child was.

[Baby's mom, eat some of this. Aren't you hungry?]

[Thank you.]

Seeing his mother accept the potato, Shushu finally opened his mouth wide and took a giant bite, going 'Nom-nom!'

True to the saying that hunger is the best side dish, a bland-tasting potato had never tasted so magnificent.

The carriage finally came to a stop upon arriving at the village.

Cramped and uncomfortable after sitting hunched over inside the crude carriage, the passengers straightened their backs and stepped out.

Shushu waved goodbye to the passengers who had shown him kindness.

[Byebye.]

His mother switched to another carriage heading toward a new village, repeating the process by changing carriages yet again.

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After a full month of continuous travel by carriage, they arrived at a village with a climate so mild it was hard to believe it was located in the North.

[Flowahs! Flowahs!] (Flowers! Flowers!)

Astonished by the fact that flowers could actually bloom even in the North, Shushu pointed his finger at them.

[Shushu, this is Springfield. It's the southernmost part of the North, so it's the warmest place. Let's live here with Mom from now on.]

[Okay.]

Asking around among the locals, his mother sought out the village head.

Introducing herself to him as a seamstress, she explained that she wanted to find a small shop.

After hearing her budget, the village head hesitated and shook his head.

[Can't we find anything?]

[No, you can find something, but... the state of the workshop is absolute trash.]

[It's fine. Let me take a look at it myself first before deciding.]

[Oh dear, well then, go take a look at least.]

Following the village head, they went to inspect the workshop.

As soon as his mother pushed open the old workshop's wooden door, dust billowed out like smoke.

He had thought the workbench was draped with a grayish tablecloth, but it was just a thick layer of settled dust.

Black mold had sprouted in the cracks of the glass windows, and the glass was so cloudy you couldn't see through it from either inside or out.

Still, the workshop still contained fabrics left behind by the previous owner, various colored sewing threads, needles, scissors, a ruler, a sewing machine, and a workbench.

Furthermore, a small living quarters was attached to the back.

Remembering that due to the nature of a seamstress's profession requiring many all-night work sessions, a small resting space was typically built into workshops, it had certainly been worth seeking out.

After looking around the inside of the workshop, she told the village head that she would lease the place. Clicking his tongue, the head went to fetch the workshop owner.

While waiting for the owner, his mother used a handkerchief to cover Shushu's nose and mouth.

Meeting the owner, his mother successfully concluded the sales contract.

Even though a mountain of cleaning awaited her, she spoke with the excitement of an explorer who had just discovered a treasure island.

[From now on, this is our home!]

To other people's eyes it might have seemed like nothing special, but to Shushu, this workshop felt just as wonderful as a noble's grand mansion.

Large, grape-sized teardrops welled up in Shushu's wide, round eyes.

[Shushu's so happy!]

Mother and son rolled up their sleeves in earnest.

Opening the windows wide, she swept away the heavy dust with a broom.

Shushu wiped down the workbench diligently with a dry cloth.

Thanks to his mother's cleaning skills—honed from her time working as a maid—the workshop, which had previously been filthy enough to make one wonder if a human could even live there, transformed into an old-fashioned yet cozy and warm space.

Finishing the cleaning, his mother stripped the foul-smelling bedding from the bed, bundled it up into a large wrapping cloth, and slung it over her shoulder.

[Shushu, let's go do laundry.]

Shushu scampered along right behind his mother.

The people of their newly moved-in village cast curious glances their way.

Following the lead of village women carrying laundry, his mother tracked them down.

Every village had a communal washing area.

A large wooden barrel was installed beneath a waterfall, operating on the principle that when water cascaded down, it spun the barrel like the drum of a washing machine.

His mother tossed the bedding she brought into the wooden barrel and sprinkled in lye powder and salt.

They would act as lye to wash away the accumulated grime from the laundry.

Squatting near the waterfall to watch the wooden barrel spin, Shushu found his thick coat growing uncomfortably warm due to the mild weather.

Shushu shoved his hands inside his woolen hat to wipe away the sweat.

Seeing this, his mother stripped off Shushu's hat, scarf, and coat, tossing them straight into the washing barrel.

She also discarded her own dust-covered coat into the flowing river.

The village women caught sight of Shushu's face now that his hat was off and burst into gasps of admiration.

[Oh my, how pretty.]

His mother deliberately swept Shushu's bangs aside to make his face even more visible.

Beaming brightly, Shushu felt certain they were no longer runaways.

In his dream, Shushu's time flowed rapidly.

After setting up the workshop, not a single customer came by for an entire week.

Displaying handkerchiefs embroidered by his mother on a rack set up in front of the shop, she sold them for 5 shillings each, but business was so sluggish that barely one or two sold a day.

No wonder the village head had looked so worried when she said she was buying this workshop.

The location was far removed from the market, and because all the surrounding shops had gone under, people rarely wandered this far out.

[Mom, Shushu's goin' for wild berries!]

Grabbing a basket, Shushu announced he was going to pick wild berries.

Since they couldn't keep clinging to an enterprise that brought in no money, his mother accompanied him up the mountain to pick berries.

However, unlike their previous location, Springfield's mild weather meant fruit prices were absurdly cheap.

Even after filling an entire basket with wild berries, it brought in virtually no income.

Just as they thought they were heading straight for total ruin, an event occurred: as his mother was walking away empty-handed from a fruit shop that offered an insultingly low price for her goods, a woman accompanied by a child approached her.

[Excuse me, where did you buy your child's clothes?]

[Pardon? Ah, I made them myself.]

[Really? Then could I purchase just one set?]

Looking slightly bewildered, his mother answered that she could.

The mother of the child walked all the way to the out-of-the-way workshop and commissioned a duplicate set of the children's clothing Shushu was wearing.

Thrilled, Shushu clenched his small, pale fists—tiny as pine nut kernels—and shouted out.

[Mom! Shushu wants to go to the playground!]

If he went to the playground, there were bound to be plenty of children his own age.

Holding his mother's hand tightly, Shushu headed to the village playground.

Children were having a blast building sandcastles or riding swings, while parents sat on benches watching over them.

Shushu marched right up in front of the adults with a majestic swagger.

[My, little one. Where did you come from?]

[So cuuuuute.]

To show off the clothes his mother made to the fullest, he spun around in a circle right in front of his future customers.

[My mommy made it for me.]

Just in case, he poked his chubby, baby-fat-filled cheek with his index finger and put on an extra-cute look.

The sales pitch worked wonders.

Inquiries for children's clothing flooded in for his mother, who had been flustered by his bizarre antics in front of total strangers.

Realizing the profound business genius behind what Shushu had done, his mother made a huge fuss over what a genius her Shushu was.

Spurred by that incident, Shushu Atelier became the most famous children's clothing boutique in Springfield within a month.

His mother hired three employees and sewed day and night.

Whenever a new design of children's clothing was finished, Shushu would put it on and head to the playground to host a mini fashion show.

Without fail, every single parent who saw him would visit Shushu Atelier to commission custom outfits for their own children.

As their living expenses grew affluent, Shushu became able to eat meat-filled soup three times a day.

While he was grateful for the suddenly luxurious turn their life had taken, he often felt lonely because, unlike before, he had far less time to spend with his mother.

Still, believing that his mother was only this busy for his sake, Shushu never threw tantrums demanding to play.

To make it up to him, his mother took him out to eat at the market together every single lunch hour.

That day was no exception as they walked toward a restaurant together.

Suddenly, a man rushed out of nowhere, clamped Shushu under his arm, and struck his mother, knocking her flat to the ground as she tried to block his path.

People nearby rushed at the man, but with a sweep of his leg, he sent them tumbling away like leaves caught in a fierce gale.

Terrified, the bystanders no longer dared to challenge him.

It was the first time in Shushu's life he had ever witnessed someone possessing such immense physical strength.

Instantly, his instincts recognized this man as an "alpha."

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No matter how many ordinary people gathered around, they were no match for an alpha.

Hoping that security guards would come to their rescue, Shushu shrieked at the top of his lungs.

[Help me! Help me!]

The man forcefully shoved a handkerchief straight into Shushu's mouth to silence him.

Covered in dust from rolling on the ground, his mother scrambled back up to her feet and lunged at the man.

[You bastard! Give me back my child!]

His mother ripped him away and pulled him tightly into an embrace.

Wrapping his arms around her neck, Shushu trembled violently.

At that exact moment, the door of a speeding carriage flew open, and multiple arms reached out, yanking both his mother and him inside in one swift motion.

Trapped in panic, as Shushu wailed at the top of his lungs, his mother cupped his head with her hands and murmured.

[Mom will protect you, no matter what.]

While Damian was off sleeping, Callix personally met with the young servants assigned to look after his younger brother.

Typically, attendants assigned in childhood grew up alongside their master and maintained a bond as close as brothers.

Therefore, they selected clever boys from good families with pleasing appearances.

Three young attendants stood in a row with tense expressions on their faces.

Chosen personally by the butler, they were all exceptionally talented individuals.

Since he wouldn't regret choosing any of them, all he had to do was pick the one that struck his fancy.

"Your master likes sweet foods. What would you do about that? Answer starting from the right."

The brown-haired boy replied that he would bring him delicious desserts as snacks every day.

The blonde boy next to him gave a similar answer.

Assuming the final boy would offer the exact same response, Callix concluded there were no attendants worth picking among them.

However, the gray-haired boy gave a different answer.

"I will stop my master from eating sweet foods. Because eating too many sweets at a young age rots the teeth and ruins one's health."

"Accepted."

The other attendant candidates expressed deep regret, wishing they had thought to offer similar advice.

However, the reason he favored the gray-haired boy differed from what the other young servants guessed.

Only by having this boy serve as Damian's attendant would Damian be restricted from eating sweets freely, while Callix—who would still provide them—would reap all the generous favor, which was why he chose him as his brother's attendant.

“You probably already know the name of the master you will serve, but it is Damian Vesper. He is my younger brother.”

“Yes, Young Duke.”

The attendant clasped both hands politely, looking far more mature than his age—three years older than Damian—implied.

At a young age, even a three-year-old gap was significant.

No, it was probably because his younger brother’s growth was stunted compared to his peers.

Because not a single person had bothered to feed the child properly, a child of the Vesper bloodline had nearly starved to death.

Saying such a thing out in the common streets would have gotten one mocked as a raving madman.

Now that he knew the child was his Gem, from this day forward until the day he died of old age, there would never be a single missed meal. He would make damn sure of it.

“Damian is taking a nap right now, so once he wakes up, dress him neatly and bring him to my office.”

“Yes, Young Duke.”

Dismissing the boys, Callix then instructed the butler to send in the candidates for a nanny.

While Shushu was napping, a hand gently patted his belly, and he mumbled, “Mom.”

Then a voice replied, “Yes, our baby.”

Startled wide awake, he opened his eyes to see his mother, her hair dyed brown, standing before him.

“Huh? Wh-what?”

How on earth had she found him?

He had clearly sent his mother away back in the village.

“Mom can find our Shushu wherever he is.”

How she had managed to track him down didn’t matter.

Even though he had sent her away for her own safety, the moment he saw her face, tears burst forth.

He had missed her so terribly and yearned for her so much.

Now, even if he wanted to send her away, he couldn't.

"Sob. Waaah. Mom! Mom!"

"Shh! Shushu. Mom is working as a nanny taking care of the second young master of the Vesper family right now. Our Shushu is also on a secret mission, right?"

"Mm-hm. Yes."

Sniffing back his snot, Shushu nodded his head.

"It's a game where Shushu pretends to be Damian, and Mom pretends to be his nanny. If we successfully finish this game, we can go back home."

Shushu buried his face in her embrace.

She was lying to him so that he wouldn't be punished for impersonating a noble.

"So from now on, you have to call Mom Melissa. Understand?"

"Yes."

It was a huge struggle because he kept wanting to act spoiled around her.

Right now, Callix was treating him kindly even after discovering he was a Gem, but there was no guarantee he would keep doing so in the future.

They had to stay as tense as if walking on thin ice.

If he got caught as a fake younger brother, even his mother might be executed.

Pulling himself together from his weakening resolve, Shushu lifted his head from Melissa's embrace.

"Now, Young Master. Let's go wash up that tear-stained, messy face of yours."

Holding Melissa's hand tightly, Shushu headed to the bathroom.

A stepping stool that hadn't been there yesterday was placed in front of the sink.

Climbing up the steps, she washed Shushu's face clean with fresh water.

“I’ll introduce you to an attendant in a little bit. Cain went to fetch clothes for the Young Master, and he’ll be here soon.”

Just as she said, as they stepped out of the bathroom, a gray-haired boy appeared pushing a clothing rack.

Placing his right hand over his chest and putting his left hand behind his back, he bowed at the waist with an elegant gesture to greet them.

“Greetings, Young Master Damian. I am Cain Blanche, the third son of Baron Jordi Blanche.”

Shushu rolled his big eyes, wondering if he needed to do that kind of aristocratic greeting himself, and tried clumsily to imitate it.

Naturally, because it was his first time doing the movement, he staggered around without being able to pull off the posture properly.

Cain quickly reached out and caught him.

“It is quite alright, Young Master. To think a master would show such full respect to his attendant.”

“Hello there. U-um, I’m Damian.”

Since he was the child of a baron’s family, that meant he was a noble.

Shushu worried what the boy might think of him if he couldn’t speak properly and looked at him anxiously.

Contrary to his expectations, Cain burst into a bright smile.

“Forgives me. You were just so cute, I couldn’t help it.”

Looking as though he couldn’t control the corners of his mouth, Cain pressed down on them with his hand.

“If it wouldn’t be too improper, might I touch your cheek?”

Shushu recalled Callix, who during their very first meeting had poked his cheek and warned him not to mistake himself for being cute.

Judging by Cain’s reaction, that must have been what it meant to be called “cute.”

Realizing the true meaning belatedly, Shushu nodded.

Looking thrilled, Cain squished and massaged Shushu's chubby cheek fat.

"Ah, just as I imagined. It feels like a soft, chewy marshmallow."

"Marsh-mellow?"

"Yes, a marshmallow. You haven't had one yet, have you?"

"Yes!"

Shushu waited for a response like, "Shall I go bring you one?" or "I'll give you some later."

Instead, Cain delivered a harsh reality check.

"Don't ever eat them in the future either. If you eat stuff like that, you'll get fat."

"Now, let's hurry up and change clothes to go meet the Young Duke. The Young Duke has been waiting for a long time."

Cain explained that he had brought clothes Callix used to wear when he was little.

Getting a tailor to custom-make clothes would take too much time, and since there was nothing immediately available to wear, it couldn't be helped.

Despite being old garments, they were so well-kept they looked brand new.

He wore a silk shirt paired with a blue velvet jacket and matching joggers.

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The velvet jacket was gorgeously embroidered with gold thread, so when he looked in the mirror, it practically screamed, 'I'm a noble child!'

"It suits you remarkably well."

Looking deeply moved, Melissa clapped her hands.

Shushu rubbed his nose to hide his shyness.

Wearing cool clothes boosted his confidence.

His instinctively hunched shoulders straightened right up.

With his hair styled on top of that, his purely cute appearance shifted into that of a handsome little boy.

As Shushu stepped out into the hallway fully dressed, the servants turned to stare at him in astonishment.

Outside Callix's office, Cain knocked on his behalf.

"Young Duke, it is Young Master Damian."

"Come in."

Before opening the door, Shushu rubbed the blue velvet jacket with his hand to smooth out any wrinkles.

Seeing Shushu enter, Callix, who was seated at his desk, stayed silent for a long moment.

Does it not suit me?

".....You're wearing my old clothes, Damian."

"Ye-es, Big Brother."

"It suits you very well."

A large hand gave the top of Shushu's head a firm, affectionate pat.

He turned out to be a much gentler older brother than expected.

Callix scooped Shushu up into his arms and sat him on his lap.

Telling him he would correct his pronunciation and accent, Callix handed him a prepared book and told him to read aloud.

"I don't know how to read."

"Ah, right. You said you can't read yet. Then listen carefully to me and repeat after me. Ton tonton tond ton thon."

Shushu stared with an absurd look at the older brother who kept forcing him to repeat the exact same repetitive syllables.

"Hurry up and say it."

To Shushu's ears, what he was saying sounded right now like: "Dung-doh-dong tong-tong."

"'Your' is ton. 'Uncle' is tonton. 'Tuna' is thon. I made a sentence using these. You should pronounce it as, 'Ton tonton tond ton thon.'"

What was this nonsense about tong-tong that he was being forced to pronounce?

Annoyed, Shushu crossed his arms and puffed out his cheeks with air.

With a soft chuckle, as if finding him adorable, Callix poked Shushu's puffed cheek with his index finger.

"Damian, ver. Repeat after me. Ver."

"Bur-rae." (Bug)

"ver. Listen closely. ver. That's how you pronounce it."

"Bug."

"That's right."

Callix pronounced it as ver once again.

But Callix pointed out that he wasn't pronouncing it correctly.

"That's not it. It's different from a bug. Vert. Green."

"Beel."

"vert. That's the pronunciation. Can't you hear the subtle difference?"

"Green."

When he finally managed to follow along with "Green," Callix gave him another similar-sounding word right after.

"Toward."

"Bug."

"No, toward. vers."

Keeping up the cycle of repeating 'bug' while being told that wasn't the right pronunciation left him frustrated and upset.

Tears pricked the corners of his eyes, but he held them back because Melissa was watching.

"Glass."

“Bug.”

“verre. Why can’t you pronounce it when the sounds are different? Hm?”

I’m sorry, but Shushu’s patience had already reached its absolute limit, and he felt the strong urge to smack Callix right across the cheek.

Completely oblivious to those inner thoughts of his, the man kept talking about weird sentences, repeating “Ver, ver.”

“Le ver vert va vers le verre vert.”

Shushu repeated it just as he heard it.

“Bug bug bug buuug bug.”

“You have to pronounce it like this: Le ver vert va vers le verre vert.”

Phrases built from similar-sounding words sounded as beautiful as a song when spoken with Callix’s precise pronunciation and accent.

It was still a level of skill too difficult for him to catch up to.

Pressing his lips tightly together, Shushu glared at Callix for teaching such a difficult lesson right from day one.

If he had really been a five-year-old child, he would have thought himself a total fool and never dared to attempt learning how to speak ever again!

You’re supposed to tailor education to the student’s level—teaching calculus to a first-grader in elementary school was insane!

Yet Shushu didn’t want to give up.

Gritting his teeth, he vowed to nail the pronunciation and knock Callix down a peg.

About two hours passed like that. It felt as though his tongue was getting tangled in cramps and his forehead was burning up with heat.

“Le ver vert va vers le verre vert.”

A proper sentence finally came out of his mouth.

“You did exceptionally well, Damian.”

Though it was just a single sentence of praise, Shushu felt a sudden surge of emotion that made his eyes water.

Callix patted Shushu reassuringly on the back.

Even though this guy was the root cause of all his suffering, he ended up getting comforted by the very person who tormented him.

“Since you studied hard today, Big Brother will give you something delicious. What do you want to eat?”

“Marsh-mellow.”

“Alright, will that do?”

The attendant returned carrying freshly baked marshmallows.

Shushu blew gently on the hot marshmallow and carefully popped it into his mouth.

The outside roasted over the fire was chewy, while the inside melted away softly.

He wanted to give some to Melissa too, so he only ate a single bite.

As Shushu wrapped the plate holding the remaining marshmallow in a handkerchief, Callix asked what he was doing.

“I’m gonna eat it later.”

“Eat that one now. I’ll have them pack some more for you later.”

If he was going to get more packed for him, there was no reason to ration it.

Shushu spread out three fingers wide.

“Give me three.”

“If you eat that many, you won’t be able to eat dinner later, you know.”

“I’m gonna give ’em to Melissa and Cain.”

Callix realized that his younger brother was trying to save marshmallows to give to his own people.

The remaining one was probably intended for himself.

“How kind of you.”

Patting Damian's pink hair affectionately, Callix praised him, then hurried him out because his schedule was running two hours behind.

He had the business management tutor brought into his office.

While he was deep in his lesson, the sound of knocking came from an unusually low position.

"Come in."

Seeing an unexpected visitor, he felt a sensation as though his ears had gone deaf from being plunged deep into the sea.

Damian had come to find him, carrying a plate loaded with marshmallows.

"It's a preshent." (It's a present.)

Shushu had brought the super-sweet marshmallows specifically to exact revenge on Callix for putting him through hell today.

He figured that rather than eating one more tasty snack, tormenting an enemy who couldn't eat sweets would be far more satisfying.

"I'll enjoy eating it."

Unaware of that fact, the touched older brother accepted what his younger brother gave him and placed it right on his desk.

"It's yummy. It's sho yummy."

Even after dropping off his gift, Damian showed no signs of leaving.

He seemed intent on staying to watch him eat it.

Left with no choice, Callix tossed the marshmallow into his mouth.

The extreme sweetness made his expression twist into a deep scowl.

He hurriedly chugged black tea to wash out the stinging sweetness from his mouth.

Seeing him eat the marshmallow, Damian looked thrilled, lifting his heels off the ground and bouncing up and down in delight.

"Bye-bye!"

Having completed his business, Damian left as he pleased.

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