

I Transmigrated Then Switched Parents With the Villain chapter 16

The business management tutor praised Damian's looks, remarking how truly adorable the younger brother was.

"What good is an alpha having a cute face anyway? If anything, it's a flaw."

"Given an appearance like that, I'd wager he'll manifest as an omega."

"Being of Vesper blood, he will naturally manifest as a dominant alpha."

Was it because of the tutor's useless chatter?

Callix ended up imagining Damian manifesting as a dominant omega.

Judging by his current looks, when he grew up, countless alphas would likely send him party invitations and beg him for a dance.

However, since Damian was his Gem, he could never leave the North.

His marriage partner had to be a weak and impoverished noble alpha youth willing to marry into the Vesper family as a matrilocal husband.

While Callix personally wished Damian would manifest as an alpha and stay by his side to assist him, since when did a person's secondary gender manifestation go the way they wanted?

Either way, thinking that Damian might well manifest as an omega, he figured it wouldn't hurt to look into potential marriage matches for Damian ahead of time.

A month passed since Damian began receiving lessons from Callix on correcting his pronunciation and accent.

Because Damian quickly mastered sentence structuring and vocabulary, his conversational skills improved rapidly, and he no longer spoke with a babyish lisp.

For Callix, seeing his younger brother transform to match the dignity of the Vesper house brought a twinge of lingering regret.

Deep down, he had found the child's lisp rather cute.

Regardless, it was time to move on to teaching him how to read and write.

Sitting his younger brother—who was ten years his junior—on his lap, he read him fairy tales.

Merely through that physical contact, his rampaging mana calmed down like the surface of a quiet lake.

Damian learned letters while Callix received divine protection, striking two birds with one stone.

As the same fairy tales were read repeatedly, Damian began recognizing letters naturally on sight.

Callix taught him vowels, and in the following lesson, consonants.

Pointing out where they appeared in the fairy tale books, he meticulously explained how they were applied.

Watching Damian grip a pencil with his tiny hand and diligently scribble letters on paper, Callix sometimes felt as though this child were his own son.

Slowly and steadily, Callix opened his heart to Damian.

Over the past four months, Shushu had scurried all over the inside of the castle, completing a map to use for his future escape.

With Melissa's help, he had even managed to add the passages used exclusively by the servants.

However, the real problem was that no matter how well he managed to slip out of the castle interior, in order to get past the massive, sturdy outer walls—which wouldn't even crumble if a giant attacked—he absolutely had to pass through the main gates.

Naturally, the guards protecting the gates had no intention of letting him walk away unbothered.

How wonderful it would be if he could shoot spiderwebs out of his wrists like a spider-man and scale the outer walls, but he was just a seven-year-old child with garbage-tier physical strength who couldn't even manage a single push-up.

Furthermore, the issue was that no matter how much he practiced, he didn't think he'd ever become good at scaling castle walls by the time he reached the age of twenty, when he was scheduled to die in the original novel.

While Shushu was spreading out his map and deeply agonizing over escape routes other than the main gates, Melissa, watching him, grumbled with dissatisfaction.

“Seriously, why? What on earth is your problem with this place?”

Though Melissa had listened to Shushu’s escape plan and helped him, deep down she secretly kept hoping he would continue playing the role of fake Damian.

In the beginning, she had been panicked out of her mind for fear of getting caught as a Gem and urged him to look for a chance to run away quickly.

But after seeing him live with mages for four months without getting his identity discovered, her attitude had flipped completely.

She didn’t want her son to leave this place.

She had concluded that rather than living a life of hardship on the run out in the world, it was far better to live out his life as fake Damian—being served by others forever, eating to his heart’s content, and wearing fine clothes.

Well, any parent would naturally prefer their child to live as a wealthy aristocrat rather than a poor commoner.

Even if she couldn’t step forward openly as his parent.

If he could, Shushu would have loved to stay here with Melissa forever, playing the part of Damian. But because he knew the future, he couldn’t do that.

When he turned twenty, Callix would develop his name-mark, and he would discover that Damian was a fake younger brother.

Of course, even if he managed to survive that hurdle, another crisis loomed ahead.

In the future, the ‘real Damian,’ healed by the female protagonist Tang Miyuan, was scheduled to awaken as an archmage and return to the North.

In the original novel, he only killed Meiyoun for abusing him and left it at that, but if he saw someone else living and stealing the life that belonged to him, it was obvious he would retaliate.

Because he couldn’t share such things with Melissa, Shushu still hadn’t been able to persuade his mother, who desperately wanted her child to live as the Grand Duke’s second son.

As a result, four long months had slipped away while they dawdled inside the ducal estate.

Still, the silver lining was that after receiving lessons from Callix, he had grown remarkably close to him.

It had even reached the point where Shushu occasionally harbored secret hopes: if he pushed Callix into an early marriage and made him a father, maybe when Callix's name-mark manifested later and rendered him infertile, he might spare Shushu's life.

As it happened, today was the day all the men of the Vesper family departed for the Thanksgiving hunt, and Cain was bustling around from early morning, busy organizing his clothes and grooming him.

Shushu dressed in a comfortable linen shirt paired with tight-fitting white riding breeches.

Over the shirt, to protect his internal organs and bones in case he accidentally took a fall while driving horses hard through the forest, he wore a thick leather vest, alongside tall riding boots that reached up to his knees.

Stepping outside the castle, all the servants working in the Vesper household were gathered for the occasion.

Large crimson flags emblazoned with the family crest fluttered in the wind.

Autumn had arrived in full bloom.

I Transmigrated Then Switched Parents With the Villain chapter 17

"Damian, truly my son. To look so valiant already—today at the hunt, Damian is sure to bag the most game of all."

Duke Maldini, mounted on a warhorse, spotted Shushu and praised him lavishly before the officials.

Whether it stemmed from a guilty conscience over having neglected Damian all this time, or because of the sheer effectiveness of Callix's manufactured lie about 'receiving a request from his mother in a dream,' he couldn't quite tell.

"Ha-ha-ha. Spoken like a true Duke. Truly, the Vesper bloodline is peerless. To be this reliable at such a tender age, how delighted the Grand Duke must be."

"Indeed. If I might venture an opinion, Young Master Damian is bound to manifest as a dominant alpha. The firstborn an ultra-dominant alpha, and the second a dominant alpha within the same household—what an immense divine blessing. Though counted among the collateral branches, imperial blood is imperial blood. There is always something exceptional about them."

Flattered by the sycophancy of the officials, Shushu almost fell under the delusion that his height had suddenly shot up to 180cm.

Looking down at his white hands, which were much smaller than a maple leaf and well below the size expected of his peers, he barely managed to recover his reason.

So this was how aristocrats grew up to be so arrogant and out of touch.

Surrounded entirely by people like this day in and day out, it was no wonder they completely lost all self-objectivity.

“Your Grace, look forward to it. Since this is his first time attending a hunt, Damian will surely capture the most game.”

Callix swept Shushu up in his arms and hoisted him onto his own warhorse.

In reality, any game caught under Damian’s name today would undoubtedly be brought down by his older brother, Callix.

The Duke and the officials alike were well aware of that fact, yet they praised Damian until their throats ran dry.

Riding a horse for the very first time, Shushu froze stiff with terror.

Callix, seated right behind him in the saddle, slowly guided the horse forward and issued a warning.

“Damian, horses are clever animals; they read the mood of the rider they carry very well. If it senses that you’re afraid of it, it will start acting up and eventually throw you off. So don’t let it catch you being scared.”

Every time the horse took a step, his lightweight body bounced up and down.

If he fell off and rolled right now, breaking arms and legs would be the least of his worries.

As Shushu squeezed his eyes shut in pure panic, Callix said in a low voice.

“Didn’t I tell you before? If you’re scared, rely on your older brother.”

Shushu pressed his back tightly against Callix.

Having Callix’s arms acting like safety barriers on both sides of him as he held the reins brought a modest sense of reassurance.

Flanked by soldiers carrying red banners, the nobility passed beyond the castle gates.

The people of the North had gathered outside to watch the Grand Duke's procession depart for the hunt.

"Callix! Callix! Callix!"

"Have a safe return, Young Duke!"

Callix's popularity was immense.

Everyone chanted his name with the fanatical zeal of hardcore fans attending an idol concert.

Naturally, he was an ultra-dominant alpha and a 9th-circle archmage—wonders that hadn't been born in the imperial family for over a century.

Add to that his raven-black hair, crimson eyes, and the classic cold-blooded, devastatingly handsome looks of a Northern Grand Duke.

Who wouldn't idolize someone born with the archetypal appearance and power straight out of a romance fantasy novel?

Yet Callix, sitting right behind Shushu, showed no sign of pleasure or warmth at the sight of people cheering themselves hoarse for him.

In this world, the prevailing mindset was that whatever commoners yelled out meant nothing more than the squeaking of ants to aristocrats dwelling in the heavens.

As the heir to the highest-ranking ducal family second only to the imperial house, it was only natural that his pride reached stratospheric heights.

Passing through the massive crowds, they arrived at a forest where the leaves were dyed in autumn's deep crimson hues.

The procession came to a halt in front of the maple forest.

The Duke instructed the officials attending the Thanksgiving hunt to return safely without injuries.

The soldiers immediately set about erecting large formation tents on flat ground.

Despite joining the hunt, Meiyu had come dressed in a gown with voluminous skirts because her purpose differed entirely from the alphas'.

As the sole concubine of the Grand Duke within the ducal estate, she intended to spend her time socializing and chatting with the wives and lovers of the nobles attending the hunting festival.

Contrary to her expectations, she caught sight of the cheeky fake Damian—who had completely bewitched both the Duke and the Young Duke—and glared daggers at him as she passed by.

Catching Meiyou's gaze, Shushu experienced the terrifying sensation of his limbs locking up stiff as a corpse.

Judging by the fact that he was suffering this level of post-traumatic stress disorder just from getting hit in the head once, he could fully understand why the real Damian—having suffered far more brutal atrocities over the span of five years—had grown up to hate the world and go mad.

Fortunately, failing to notice Shushu's sudden internal panic, Callix slowly guided his horse forward into the forest.

His personal attendants gripped the leashes of the hunting hounds and walked along the perimeter to escort them.

Shushu glanced back with his eyes to confirm whether Melissa was keeping up properly.

He was worried she might be exhausted, having walked continuously without a break for the two hours it took to reach the forest without riding a horse.

Catching Shushu's eye, she smiled reassuringly to let him know she was fine.

Though he felt guilty for riding comfortably by himself while she walked, seeing her smile brought him relief.

Just then, a chilling voice rang out from right above his head.

The raw killing intent buried in that low voice caused goosebumps to break out all over Shushu's silky skin.

"Damian, it seems you find that woman quite pleasing."

With a mere flick of his chin, Callix ordered Melissa to approach them.

Looking flustered at the disrespectful treatment directed at her by the Young Duke—who was young enough to be her son—Melissa hurried over.

Though the insult wasn't aimed at him directly, watching such high-handed bullying inflicted upon his beloved mother bruised Shushu's pride and filled him with heartache.

"What is your name?"

"It is Melissa, Young Duke."

Melissa lowered her head in a polite bow.

I Transmigrated Then Switched Parents With the Villain chapter 18

After staring down at her for a long moment, Callix declared that he didn't like the look in her eyes and struck her cheek with his riding crop.

"Aah!"

Melissa screamed, clutching her cheek with her hand.

Losing his reason entirely, Shushu lashed out and punched Callix right in the face.

Taking the blow, Callix didn't flinch, turn his head away, or even blink an eyelid, showing no sign of injury as he glared down at Shushu.

"What is the meaning of this, Damian?"

"You started it by h-hitting, no—you hit my nanny!"

"No matter how much you were neglected and raised like a commoner by yourself while the Duke was away, you are still an aristocrat by birth. If a noble shows excessive favoritism toward a mere servant, it invites all sorts of scandals and tarnishes the family's honor. Do you desire that woman?"

Shushu glared at Callix as if he wanted to murder him.

Callix let out a soft, mocking scoff, as if finding that glare amusing.

"If you say you don't need her, I'll brand her with a slave mark and sell her off."

"I... I want her! Big Brother, Melissa is a precious nanny to me."

Tears spilled unbidden from his wide-open eyes.

Overwhelmed by excessive agitation, Shushu's chest heaved rapidly as he panted for breath.

"Perhaps you wish to marry that woman?"

"You crazy bastard, what are you even saying? Waaah."

Ignoring Callix's insane babble, Shushu just cried.

At that, Callix grabbed Shushu by the shoulders and shook him gently.

“Answer me. Do you wish to marry that woman?”

What on earth was going through this madman’s head?

He had no inkling of why the man was acting this way, and simply sharing the same saddle with him felt horrifyingly repulsive.

The massive waves of pheromones radiating from Callix washed over him, stinging like sharp needles.

“Waaah, Mom! Momaaaah!”

Gripped by a towering terror, Shushu stretched out both arms toward her, begging to be held.

Though terrified of the Young Duke, Melissa snatched Shushu right off the horse and pulled him tight against her chest.

Shushu buried his face in her bosom, inhaling her familiar scent.

The pheromones of an ultra-dominant alpha, felt from a proximity close enough to induce muscle spasms in his limbs, were lethal.

He had heard that an ultra-dominant alpha could exert pheromonal influence even over betas, but he had never imagined it could be this terrifyingly chilling.

“Looking at it now, my little brother seems to be a baby who still needs his mother.”

As if his ill humor had vanished instantly, Callix let out a hearty laugh.

Yet far from easing the tension, not a single one of the attendants following him dared to utter a peep, holding their breath in absolute fear.

No matter how deeply Shushu breathed in Melissa’s embrace, Callix’s pheromones continued pressing down on him, crushing his lungs to the point where he couldn’t catch his breath.

Gasping and choking as spasms wracked his body, Melissa lifted Shushu and rocked him back and forth, soothing him just like when he was an infant.

“It’s alright, Shushu. It’s alright.”

Watching the scene with a steady gaze, Callix spoke to Shushu.

“Shushu, come back to your brother.”

Shushu trembled, his eyelashes fluttering as he peered up from Melissa’s embrace at the Young Duke perched atop the gigantic warhorse.

Looking down at him from a height that felt as close to the sky as the heavens, the man terrified him.

After all this time of teaching him letters with gentle patience and acting like a one-of-a-kind older brother to him, how could he suddenly transform into a completely different person?

He had thought that by growing close to him, he had managed to change something, but it had all been an illusion.

This period of time hadn’t been mentioned in the novel at all.

Which meant that before his own transmigration, the original Shushu in the novel had likely run into a rampaging Callix while sneaking chocolate chip cookies from the kitchen, and that incident was probably how Callix had taken an interest in him back then.

If it were Callix, he would have killed a ‘fake younger brother’ who tainted the family’s honor without a second thought.

Discovering his real name ‘Shushu’ through such an absurd accident was probably just a plot device designed to kill him off in the future.

To keep from getting caught as the very person whose name-mark would appear on Callix when he turned twenty, he had desperately hidden the fact that his name was Shushu—but now it was all over. If he stayed trapped in the ducal castle any longer, he would inevitably end up dying at age twenty just like in the novel.

He didn’t want to die.

Gripping Melissa tightly, he screamed out.

“Run!”

She bolted like a madwoman.

The soldiers instinctively raised their bows at the nanny’s sudden action of fleeing with the second young master, but the Young Duke raised a hand to stop them.

“Leave the rest of you here. I will hunt them down myself.”

Callix struck his horse’s flanks hard with his riding crop, driving it forward at a gallop.

Naturally, no matter how fast Melissa ran on foot, she was quickly overtaken by the horse's speed.

For a moment, Callix felt as though he were losing his mind.

How dare she? How dare she try to steal what is mine?

It was the first time he had ever realized his emotions could churn with such violent intensity.

Truly, a Gem with a high matching rate possessed the power to drive a mage stark raving mad.

Seeing Damian cast his gaze toward another woman filled him with a rage as if his entire country had been plundered, and when that woman attempted to steal Damian away, lightning seemed to flash from his eyes.

Yet it was only natural; if anyone were to have the precious jewel they kept securely locked away in a safe stolen from them, they would inevitably feel the despair of losing the entire world and rage against the thief.

Callix seriously debated whether he should trample Melissa to death under his horse's hooves, and leave Damian crippled so he could never leave his bed again.

Instead, as she fled, she tumbled straight into a pit along with his Gem, rolling over and over together.

The way she shielded Damian by pulling him tightly into her arms was as desperate and fierce as any birth mother protecting her child.

For a mere commoner to harbor maternal affections for the Grand Duke's child—truly overreaching and utterly absurd.

He looked down at them trapped at the bottom of the pit.

As if heaven itself had chosen to witness this tragedy, cold raindrops began to fall from the ash-gray clouds.

If left as they were, hypothermia would claim their lives.

Even so, seeing the fact that Damian was trapped in a pit with nowhere left to run, Callix wore the sated, fulfilled smile of a lion that had finally cornered its prey.

What an overwhelming sense of satisfaction.

He finally realized with absolute clarity what it was he truly desired.

He simply wanted to possess that jewel.

“Shushu, shall Big Brother come rescue you?”

Callix asked, wearing the most beautiful smile he could possibly muster.

I Transmigrated Then Switched Parents With the Villain chapter 19

Rain lashed fiercely into the pit, making it hard to even open one’s eyes properly.

They were trapped like rats in a trap anyway, and Shushu realized belatedly that he couldn’t escape using such a half-baked method.

Even so, he didn’t want to take the hand Callix was holding out.

It was a rotten rope anyway.

Grabbing onto it wouldn’t change a thing.

However, the condition of his mother—who had rolled down the stony, protruding ground to protect him—looked critical.

She had been struck across the cheek, injured while rolling, and exposed to the rain, causing her body temperature to plummet to an icy chill in an instant.

Hearing the faint sounds of breathing escaping her lips, Shushu made up his mind to keep up the charade of pretending to be the fake Damian a little longer.

“Yes, please help us.”

Callix looked at Shushu, who was shivering from the cold, and asked, “Shushu, I am going to become the Grand Duke who rules the North. Even the weeds in the North will belong to me in the future. In that sense, even you belong to me. Let’s make this crystal clear. You are mine. Do you understand?”

He kept calling him Shushu.

Although it was a common pet name used for a younger sibling, knowing that this very name would lead to his death made his spine tingle as if a sword were pressed against the back of his neck.

“.....Yes.”

Terrified, Shushu barely managed to reply in a choked voice.

At that, Callix tossed a rope hanging from his horse's saddle down into the pit.

If it were just Melissa by herself, she could have grabbed it and climbed back up, but doing so while carrying a child was too difficult.

Gracefully sliding down the slope, Callix descended into the pit.

He told Melissa—who was shivering on the muddy ground pooled with rainwater—to grab the rope and climb up first. Callix scooped Damian up into his arms.

“Hold on tight.”

Shushu wrapped his arms around Callix's thick neck and clung to him, wrapping his legs tightly around his chest.

Waiting at the top of the rope for Callix was the sinner who had dared try to escape with a noble child, kneeling on the ground.

“I-I'm sorry, Young Duke. Please spare me.”

Soaked to the bone, her lips were tinged a pale, frightened blue.

Shushu tightened his grip around Callix's neck and shouted, “I'm the one who ordered it! Melissa did nothing wrong.”

“Shushu, I was just about to let your nanny off. But your current words are the very things that will cause her to be punished.”

It was infuriating.

Why on earth was this guy acting up again?

With hands too small to even wrap fully around Callix's nape, Shushu glared as if he were trying to choke the life out of him.

Receiving that absurd wave of killing intent, Callix decided to spare Damian's weakness.

Later on, if the child ever grew up, realized he was a Gem, and tried to leave his side, he could use her as a useful leverage.

Melissa belonged to the Vesper household, and as long as she remained within his grasp, Damian could never live as another mage's jewel.

“Melissa, your wages will be docked for a month.”

“Thank you for your merciful judgment, Young Duke.”

She pressed her forehead directly into the filthy mud, offering her gratitude.

It felt as though Shushu’s heart was crumbling to pieces.

Yet Melissa genuinely seemed to feel that Callix’s punishment was light, wearing a bright expression on her face.

“Let’s return.”

Callix placed Shushu back upon the horse and told Melissa to mount as well.

Hesitating nervously, it was only after Callix snapped at her coldly that she scrambled hastily up into the saddle in fright.

Grabbing the reins, he turned the horse around and headed back the way they came.

To escape the sudden downpour, the servants—who had been forbidden from leaving their posts under the Young Duke’s orders—were busy setting up tents.

Amidst the pouring rain, several people bustled about erecting poles, unfurling large canvas sheets, and pulling taut ropes.

Loud hammering sounds echoed repeatedly as stakes were driven firmly into the ground.

“Achoo.”

Shushu sneezed and wiped his runny nose with the back of his hand.

Spotting them soaked to the skin, attendants hurried over holding umbrellas.

“Prepare hot bathwater.”

“Yes, we will have it ready immediately.”

Considering they were out erecting tents in the driving rain, one would expect them to show some sign of difficulty at the Young Duke’s order for hot bathwater, but they didn’t show even a hint of hesitation.

Shushu once again keenly realized that in a class-based society, a noble’s word was law.

While everyone else was busy setting up tents, Shushu didn’t lift a finger, glancing sideways at Callix, who stood beneath an umbrella held by someone else.

Truly, he was a boy born to nobility.

He was so thoroughly arrogant and authoritative that it made one think: if this boy wasn't an aristocrat, who on earth could be?

"Young Duke, the bathwater is ready."

Since there was no river nearby, Shushu had assumed it would take a long time to prepare hot water, but the attendants quickly heated the rainwater gathered in a large cauldron using magic.

They must have anticipated the master's orders and prepared beforehand.

"Move the bathwater inside the tent."

Shushu naturally expected that Callix, who was also drenched in the rain, would wash first.

Instead, Callix scooped Shushu up from the horse and set him down gently on the ground.

"Shushu, go wash up quickly. If you catch a cold, your nanny will pay the price."

Shushu hurried inside to wash.

If he washed quickly before the water cooled, Melissa would also be able to soak and warm her body.

Urging Cain—who had followed him eagerly into the tent—to wash him quickly, Shushu changed into soft, dry clothes.

"Melissa!"

Shushu called out for her the moment he stepped out of the tent.

Fortunately, a mud-covered Melissa was standing right outside.

"Go wash up. Hurry, hurry. The water's going to get cold."

"Thank you, Young Master."

While Melissa washed, Shushu sheltered from the rain under the awning set up by Cain at the entrance of the tent.

The sound of water droplets pelting against the canvas continued endlessly, sounding like the steady beating of a drum.

When would this rain ever stop?

I Transmigrated Then Switched Parents

With the Villain chapter 20

As he stood shivering from the sudden drop in temperature, wrapping both arms around his shoulders, Cain went off to fetch a blanket, opening an umbrella.

While waiting for his personal attendant, Shushu stretched his hand out from beneath the awning to touch the rain.

Then, Callix—who had been issuing orders to the soldiers in the distance—strode over swiftly and caught his hand.

Shushu tilted his head in confusion at the man's incomprehensible behavior.

Arriving so hurriedly that he had even dropped the umbrella he was holding, Callix gripped the tips of Shushu's fingers.

"You stuck your hand out."

".....I just wanted to touch the rain."

Realizing it was a misunderstanding, Shushu expected him to let go now, but Callix simply stood there in the pouring rain, staring down at him.

Shushu looked up in surprise at Callix, whose sharp chin was pelted by raindrops streaming down his smooth cheeks, causing them to drip off rapidly.

His thoroughly soaked black hair was split into strands, revealing his clean, straight forehead.

Because he stared down at him for so long like a man with a hidden story, Shushu's heart raced anxiously, wondering what weighty words were about to drop.

What if he said he knew Shushu was a Gem and started threatening him?

Having once believed that Callix cherished him only to be betrayed, Shushu couldn't help but feel suspicious of him.

"Big Brother, you're going to catch a cold. Please hurry inside the tent."

"Shushu..... I should have been the very first one to call you by that pet name....."

Watching him exhale a deep sigh as if carrying an immense regret, Shushu sensed the subtle shift occurring deep within Callix's heart.

Though he didn't know what it was, he desperately hoped it had changed for the better where he was concerned.

Because of the puddles scattered everywhere, Cain took a roundabout path back to the tent.

The gray-haired attendant draped a blanket over his young master's head first.

Shushu pulled his hand away from the older brother who still wouldn't let go. "You should go wash up too, Big Brother. If you keep this up, you really will catch a cold."

Despite saying that, on that day, the one who actually caught a cold and spiked a burning fever was Shushu.

Even after taking the antipyretic prescribed by the doctor, the heat wouldn't subside from his whole body.

As he tossed and turned in agony on the makeshift bed, Callix stepped inside the tent.

"How is his condition?"

The doctor worriedly stated that today would likely be the critical turning point.

High fevers were fatal to young children; if they didn't subside even after taking medicine, it was common for them to suffer permanent disabilities or even die.

Yet giving him more fever reducer would only cause severe side effects without bringing the temperature down.

Callix grabbed Shushu's hand, which felt like a ball of fire.

"Shushu, I told you I'd punish your nanny if you caught a cold."

"No, no. Don't punish Mom."

Delirious with a blazing fever, Shushu begged earnestly without even knowing what he was saying—crying out that they mustn't do it, pleading for his mother to be forgiven.

Feeling both a pang of pity that his younger brother—who had lived without parents—was clinging to his nanny as a mother figure, and a twinge of jealousy toward that nanny, Callix warned him, "If you don't want that, get better quickly."

"Bring some sugar water."

He picked Shushu up in his arms, scooped up spoonfuls of sugar water, and trickled them past his lips.

After that, he pressed a handkerchief soaked in cool water against his forehead, replacing it with a freshly dampened cloth whenever it grew lukewarm.

Cain offered to take over nursing his master, but Callix stubbornly refused to let his younger brother out of his arms.

‘Please, please don’t die. Shushu. My jewel.’

The words he whispered by his ear acted like an ancient spell, pulling Shushu back up every time the fever dragged him down into the abyss.

Eventually, the wall of fire that had threatened to consume the small child faltered and retreated. Callix did not sleep a single wink as he tended to his Gem.

Fortunately, the rain that had poured all through the night finally ceased, and the sun rose with the morning.

As bright sunlight streamed into the tent, the younger brother—who had fallen asleep as if passing out—opened his eyes with a disheveled expression.

Bathed in the morning light as if he were the center of the universe, the child’s lovely face greeted him.

“Thank you, Big Brother, for nursing me all night.”

The moment he saw Damian looking up at him with a shy smile of gratitude, Callix felt an overwhelming surge of emotion.

Swept away by a wave of feeling akin to a tidal wave, he found himself utterly unable to speak.

Was this what sibling affection felt like?

Stirred by a deep fondness and preciousness toward another person for the very first time, Callix felt that he had truly come to cherish Damian as a genuine younger brother.

At first, he had kept him close pretending to be a gentle older brother simply because Damian was a Gem with a high matching rate, but now he no longer cared for the child for such simple reasons.

Even if Damian weren’t his Gem, he knew he would still take good care of his little brother now.

“I want to wash up.”

Shushu said this, lifting the lukewarm handkerchief off his forehead.

Cain, who had been nodding off while sitting on a chair, jumped to his feet and scurried out to prepare the bathwater.

Shushu slipped out from Callix's arms—whose arms must have been completely numb from holding him in the exact same posture for so long—and stood up.

“Big Brother, did your arm fall asleep?”

Shushu looked back with concern at the boy who remained seated like a stone statue.

“Meow, meow!” He made a playful joke often used when hands went numb.

Callix let out a soft huff of laughter, shook his head, and walked out of the tent.

After washing in the bathwater prepared by Cain, Shushu changed into fresh clothes and stepped outside.

Due to the unceasing rain, the drainage ditches the soldiers had dug with shovels to keep the tents from flooding were clearly visible.

He figured everyone must have had a rough time.

“We will resume the hunt after breakfast.”

At Callix's command, the knights lit fires with magic while the attendants prepared the ingredients.

Watching warm smoke billow up into the sky like a dragon, Shushu—who had barely escaped death—began his new day with vigor.