

I Transmigrated Then Switched Parents

With the Villain chapter 21

After breakfast, the soldiers worked in unison to pack the tents away neatly into cargo carts.

At the forefront, soldiers holding banners bearing the Vesper family crest marched down the muddy path.

The overgrown trees and weeds in the forest radiated a deep, wet green from the moisture.

The hounds sniffed the ground intently, searching the air for the game's musk.

"Woof! Woof!"

A hound barked and bolted somewhere.

The soldiers swiftly gave chase, flushing out the game.

Several men surrounded a single deer to cut off its escape.

Mounted on his horse, Callix pulled back his bowstring and struck the deer squarely between the eyes.

"Direct hit!"

An attendant confirmed the dead deer and hoisted a red flag.

The group of nobles following Callix applauded in unison and began showering praise upon Shushu, who had simply sat on his horse blankly doing nothing.

"To possess such exceptional martial prowess at such a tender age, Young Master Damian is truly remarkable."

"I look forward to what the future holds."

"Magnificent, Young Master Damian."

Everyone praised him even though they all knew Callix was the one who had hunted the deer.

It made him think once again that if he had been born an aristocrat, he probably would have fallen head over heels for the flattery of such sycophants and lived completely deluded.

Dazed by the dizzying wave of compliments, Shushu kept his head down, nervously fiddling with his fingers with a gloomy expression.

“Ah-ha-ha-ha. It seems my little brother is shy. Excessive praise is little more than teasing, so let us all exercise restraint.”

The fifteen-year-old boy skillfully reined in his officials.

Shushu let out a secret sigh of relief.

The hunt continued for a while longer.

Shushu felt sorry for the deer, but lacking the courage to step forward and tell them to stop hunting, he could only watch.

Amidst it all, a hunting hound discovered a white hare.

The moment he laid eyes on the tiny, adorable rabbit that looked like a rolled-up ball of snow, Shushu turned back to look at Callix sitting behind him.

“The rabbit..... Please don’t hunt the rabbit. Okay?”

“Shushu, do you feel sorry for the rabbit?”

“Yes.”

“Then I suppose you didn’t feel sorry for the deer.”

“That’s not it..... But rabbits are smaller and cuter than deer. It’ll hurt my heart even more if it dies.”

Hearing those words, Callix found a clue as to why he cared so deeply for Damian.

It was simply because Damian was as small and cute as a rabbit.

Only then did his restless heart settle down from the moment his fever-stricken younger brother had looked up at him and smiled brightly.

“Nobody is to hunt the rabbit.”

“Understood, Young Duke.”

The party pressed deeper into the forest.

Having only managed to catch three deer so far, Callix felt a slight twinge of impatience.

Results like this weren't quite enough to properly celebrate Damian's hunting debut.

He scattered his mana into the air to probe for areas resonating with life energy.

"We are heading south. Change direction."

Hearing his command, a soldier blew the horn.

The vanguard, unable to hear the command due to the distance, halted their march.

In sync with three heavy beats of a drum, the front turned its direction.

Shushu watched in fascination as a multitude of people moved in unison under tight control without a single deviation.

The hunting party encountered a massive brown bear in the south.

The soldiers formed a circle with their shields, surrounding the beast.

Callix rapidly loosed arrows, blinding the bear by piercing both of its eyes.

Startled by the bear's roar, Shushu's teeth chattered together.

"Shush, it's alright. Big Brother will protect you."

At his gentle voice, the trembling throughout his entire body gradually subsided.

Callix used up all thirty arrows in his quiver.

Yet even then, the bear did not die; writhing in agony, it lunged at the soldiers surrounding it.

'Thud! Thud!'

Ramming its body against the shields protected by defensive magic, the bear suffered as it failed to breach the encirclement.

Pitying the suffering bear, Shushu began to cry.

"Shushu, why are you crying?"

"The bear is pitiful."

“That bear is neither small nor cute, you know.”

“Even so, it’s pitiful. It looks like it hurts so much.”

“Really, it is impossible to figure you out.”

Saying that, Callix drew a line through the air with his hand.

The head of the bear, which had been suffering from its arrow wounds, was cleanly severed and dropped to the ground.

“From now on, do not hunt bears either. Move out.”

Callix instructed the soldiers loading the bear onto a cart.

Touched by the way his older brother listened to his words, Shushu reopened his closed-off heart.

He searched visually among the female attendants and spotted Melissa.

A glossy ointment was applied thickly across her cheek.

According to Cain, the Young Duke had given her a very precious medicine, so fortunately, no scars would remain on her face.

Shushu leaned his back, held slightly away from Callix, comfortably against the man’s chest.

Having spent the full five days in the forest, the party returned to their base.

The butler checked the captured game and recorded the figures in a ledger.

Duke Maldini had caught twenty foxes, thirty-two rabbits, and five deer, while Callix had bagged thirty-five foxes, ten deer, one bear, and three tigers.

Hearing that, the Duke declared that Damian had won and tried to take Shushu—who was still seated atop his horse—away, but Callix blocked his hand.

“What is the meaning of this, Cal?”

“.....If it pleases you, may I be the one to introduce the winner of this hunting festival to the nobles?”

“Very well, go ahead.”

Preventing the Duke from discovering the truth that Damian was a Gem, Callix helped his younger brother down from the horse.

He then told him to step up onto the podium prepared by the butler for the winner.

With a woebegone expression at all the gazes focused solely on him, Shushu climbed up like a child being sent to take punishment.

“The winner of the hunting festival is Young Master Damian Vesper. Esteemed guests, please congratulate him with a round of applause.”

The butler drew cheers from the aristocracy.

Shushu glanced sideways and let out a secret sigh of relief upon seeing Melissa looking immensely proud that her child had received a prize.

It was a big problem that she had grown so fond of this life of lies.

After stepping down from the podium, Shushu was scooped up by Callix and hoisted onto one of his broad shoulders.

The Duke had forced a prize onto his second son, and even the Young Duke had openly shown affection for him; from now on, treatment within the castle would surely change.

Though he felt guilty for stealing what rightfully belonged to the real Damian, seeing Melissa’s ecstatic expression directed at him—now living as a grand aristocrat—felt like being intoxicated by a sweet poison.

He knew he ought to run away, yet he didn’t want to escape.

Knowing full well that staying on this path meant death, Shushu thought he would maintain this lifestyle just a little longer—just a tiny bit longer.

Since there were still thirteen years left before his identity as a Gem would be found out, he decided to think about running away again when that time came.