



- Mei's Story Chapter 1 -

Mei: "Um... Sena?"

Sena: "Yes?"

Mei: "I smell something like vinegar... Is the cap of the acetic acid open by any chance?"

Sena: "Oh my! Look at me! I must have forgotten to close the lid after taking it out for the experiment. But how did you know? It's heavily diluted, so there should be almost no scent... I didn't notice it at all."

Mei: "Hehe... I've got a really sharp sense of smell."

My sense of smell is far more sensitive than most. A few years ago, I even detected a faint burning smell from the building next door and prevented a fire. While it can be helpful at times, it's not exactly a welcome talent. More often than not, I end up smelling things I'd rather not.

For instance, the scent wafting up from Sena's feet in her slippers. Naturally, when one wears stockings, the nylon fibers concentrate the scent, making the aroma more intense. But objectively speaking, Sena isn't someone who has a bad odor or neglects her hygiene. It's just that my nose is excessively sensitive. I can't exactly scold her for something others can't even perceive.

I was alone in the lab after Sena left for the day, looking over records, when my phone suddenly buzzed. 'Bzzzzt—' It was a call from Mia. Right, we were supposed to meet today. She comes here every two weeks for a check-up. Fortunately, she has been recovering her old self at a rapid pace, but since she underwent treatment that puts significant strain on the brain, she requires special observation for the time being.

Mia: "Doctor! I'm in the lobby. Could you open the door for me?"

Mei: "Ah, just a second... wait right there!"

I logged into the access control system and opened the gate. When I stepped into the hallway, I saw Mia waiting for me in front of the elevator.

Mei: "Ah, Mia... Huh?"

A strange sense of dissonance washed over me. There was no obvious change in her appearance. Her expression and the way she greeted me brightly were no different from before. But as I drew closer, the identity of that dissonance became clearer. The scent of nicotine. Though she had masked it with heavy perfume, clear traces remained on her body. I wanted to believe she had just been around someone else's smoke, but even her breath carried a faint, lingering hint of it.

Mei: "Did you... smoke by any chance?"

Mia flinched at my question, looking exactly like a high schooler caught smoking by a teacher.

Mia: "Whoa... how did you...? I thought I'd completely erased the smell. I didn't think you'd notice at all..."

Mei: "There's no need to hide it. If you're still having withdrawal symptoms, you have to be honest with me. That's the only way I can help you."

Mia lowered her head and answered in a small voice.

Mia: "I'm sorry... I endured the withdrawals for a while, but lately, it's been so hard to bear..."

Mei: "It's okay. That's perfectly understandable. Even if you've regained your sense of self, you lived as a heavy smoker for nearly half a year. It's natural for your body to crave the stimulation."

I comforted Mia as we moved together to the neurological examination room. While I was busy starting up the MRI machine and preparing for the scan, Mia pulled a box of orange juice from her shopping bag.

Mia: "Oh, Doctor. Have some of this while you work. I felt bad coming empty-handed, so I brought some."

Mei: "Oh... I'll enjoy it. Thanks!"

Mia opened a bottle and placed it on my desk. I was too preoccupied with setting up the test program to touch the juice immediately. Mia took another bottle from the box, gulped it down, and spoke again.

Mia: "Wow... they said this was blowing up on Twitter lately, and it really is amazing!"

Mei: "Hmm... really?"

Because I was immersed in the computer screen, I only gave a half-hearted response. Mia stopped talking. Or rather, she was standing beside me, staring at me intently. Why? Did she have something to say?

Mei: "All set... Take off your coat and shoes and lie down over there."

Mia: "Ah... okay."

Mia seemed to hesitate for a moment before taking off her coat and high heels. Her legs, clad in a blue dress and stockings, were revealed. Following my guidance, Mia climbed onto the machine and lay down.

Mei: "Now then, let's see..."

Wait. What is this smell?

I didn't notice it while she was wearing her heels, but a peculiar scent was wafting from Mia's feet. Something else was mixed in with the typical scent of stockings. Something very musky and fishy... I leaned closer to the source of the smell, and a chill ran down my spine.

Mei: (There's no mistake... this is... the smell of a man's semen...)

This was impossible. Mia has deep trauma regarding men. She hasn't even opened her heart to Carter, the man she trusts most. There was no way a girl with such deep wounds was already sleeping with a man. A withdrawal symptom craving debaucherous sex? No, that couldn't be it. This was on a different level than cigarettes. Mia's most fundamental trauma couldn't change so easily.

Mia: "Um... Mei?"

Mei: "...Ah! Y-yes?"

Startled by her sudden voice, I answered awkwardly.

Mia: "Please, have some of the drink while you work. I went through all the trouble of bringing it, and you won't even look at it..."

Mei: "Ah... sorry."

Mia spoke with a pout, looking playfully annoyed. Why was she constantly pushing the juice? Had she put something in it? Doubts began to pile up. Come to think of it, even her sleeveless dress felt suspicious. Until now, Mia had always worn long sleeves to hide her tattoos. Even if she had a coat over it, wearing something sleeveless was excessively bold.

Could her past personality have returned? It was buried deep in her psyche; it should have been impossible for it to resurface on its own... What on earth happened during this time? Once the MRI results came out, everything would be clear. For now, I'd just focus on the exam and pretend nothing was wrong.

Mei: "I'm starting now. Tell me if you feel dizzy or if your body reacts strangely."

Vroom, vroom—

The low hum of the MRI machine echoed through the lab. While the scan was in progress, I called Kate just in case. If her evil personality had indeed been resurrected, this was a very dangerous situation. All my colleagues had already left for the day, so there was no one else to ask for help. And above all, if I didn't report this, even Kate could be in jeopardy.

But Kate didn't pick up. Just as I was about to send a text out of anxiety, Mia sat up.

Mei: "Huh? You can't just move like that! You have to stay lying down!"

Ignoring my words, Mia slowly walked toward me.

Mei: "What's wrong? Is there a problem?"

I asked with a composed face, trying my best to hide my racing heart.

Mia: "I think I underestimated you a bit, Doctor."

Mei: "What? What does that... mean..."

Mia: "You look so innocent, but you're sharper than you look. How exactly did you catch on?"

Mia gave a cold, sinister smirk and swept back her hair. It was an expression I had never seen before. It was hard to believe this was the same person who, just moments ago, had been smiling so gently and clearly. Every small gesture exuded a lewd aura, as if a succubus from legend had possessed her.

Mia pulled a cigarette from her bosom and lit it. Her face suggested there was no longer any need for useless pretenses. She picked up my juice bottle and slowly poured it onto the lab floor.

Mia: "I should have been more thorough. What a waste of good drugs."

Mei: "D-don't come any closer!"

I pulled a utility knife from my desk and pointed it at her. It was a pathetic excuse for a weapon, but it was all I had to protect myself right now.

Mia: "Pffft! You're holding that as a weapon?"

Mia didn't even blink. Even though it was a weapon that couldn't easily cause a fatal wound, her expression was far too calm. Far from being afraid, she actually seemed to be enjoying the situation.

Mia quickly grabbed my wrist holding the knife. I resisted with all my might, but Mia's physical strength was unexpectedly powerful. In the violent struggle, the lab chair flipped over, and items on the desk spilled everywhere. When I fought back desperately, Mia, looking like she'd had enough, tripped my back leg and sent me crashing down. Even then, when I wouldn't let go of the knife, she slammed my hand violently against the floor.

Mei: "Aaaagh!"

As I dropped the knife from the impact, Mia began to suppress me in earnest. She pinned me down, straddling my body so I couldn't move, and slapped me across the face repeatedly.



Mia: "I'm nothing compared to Kate... but taking down a bitch like you is child's play."

It was a savage beating, with strength hard to believe came from an ordinary woman. Perhaps because I had been hit in the head several times, my mind was hazy, and I felt the strength draining from my body.

As I went limp, Mia looked around and spotted my phone on the floor. After confirming that I had tried to text Kate, she spoke with a look of relief.

Mia: "Wow... that was a fucking close call. I guess you're a lot crafter than you look, huh bitch?"

Then, she reached into her handbag and pulled something out. It was a small Ziploc bag containing red pills. I didn't need an explanation to know what they were.

Mei: "N-no! Don't do it!"

Ignoring my desperate plea, Mia forcibly pried my mouth open.

Mei: "Mmph!! N... no!!"

Mia: "Sorry... I have no choice. If we're going to make Kate one of us, we need you. It's nothing personal."

Mia poured the red pills into my mouth. I resisted with everything I had, but the pills that fell into my mouth were helplessly swallowed down my throat.

- To be continued -