

# SICKLY GIRL, BUT A DRUG ADDICT

16 - 4. There Are Some Things You Can't Avoid

After what felt like the longest week ever, the weekend finally arrived.

My theft was discovered.

The Thunder Emperor destroyed Count Train's company.

The sudden dormitory inspection notice.

And my name starting to gain attention.

It truly was nothing short of chaotic.

However, thanks to the newly appeared status ailment, the variable of "death" has now disappeared.

---

<< Shana Midgard >>

Regin Academy / Aesir Dormitory / 2nd Year

— Enhancement effect 'Vermilion Heart' active

(Time remaining: 36 days 13 hours 54 minutes)

— Enhancement effect 'Disguise' active

[ Status ]

Vitality 6/12

...

---

What's interesting is that the hidden effect of "I Love Strawberries," which I expected would return with an even bigger penalty, hasn't activated yet.

While I'm anxious about the side effects, there's also a certain comfort in one corner of my mind.

Unlike usual when I'd constantly fiddle with the Vermilion Heart in my pocket, today I didn't even need to.

How long has it been since I felt this peace of mind?

Maybe the hidden effect of "I Love Strawberries" is something good rather than bad?

How would I know if a god or some absolute being of this world gifted it to me thinking, "Oh my, Shana Midgard, you've been through so much hardship"?

I may not be able to feel the warmth of the sun on my skin, but doesn't it look truly warm?

People's expressions seem brighter than usual too.

Somehow, I find my mood lifting along with them.

I can't help the corners of my mouth turning upward.

With a lighter step than usual, I flung open the café door.

The interior of the café was thick with cigar smoke like a fog.

Over one partition, the red-hot tip of a cigar swayed as if giving a signal.

I walked over with leisurely steps and took a seat opposite the guest who had arrived before me.

"Only absolute power."

"Will save the world."

The burly man removed his strangely small-looking sunglasses and held them in his hand.

The familiar mustache and bulldog-like features.

It was Count Train.

By the way, the Count has some nerve.

Of all places, he chose a café right next to his company that had burned down.

Is he taking advantage of the saying that the darkest place is under the lamppost?

Removing my white gloves and placing them aside, I asked him.

“How is the progress on sealing the secret passage, Count?”

“It should be completed by tomorrow at least.”

“That’s good to hear.”

“More importantly... There’s no one following you, right?”

I nodded twice to indicate everything was fine.

Rukia’s skill “Disguise” is an illusion magic that only appears properly to designated individuals.

So right now, people other than Count Train can’t tell that I’m Shana Midgard.

I didn’t even bring Rukia along in case she might draw lightning.

“So, will you be going to the company now?”

Count Train shook his head.

I guess he means there are things he can do without going to the company.

It seems to be to prevent an attack from the Thunder Emperor, but I should look more carefully at the contract.

I don't want to make a losing deal either.

"First, read this contract."

"Yes."

Inside the envelope Count Train handed me was a paper folded vertically four times.

When I unfolded it, it was a neatly typed contract.

Party A is Count Barak Train.

Party B is blank.

"After reading it, let me know if you have any questions."

The contract period is just for today.

Party B will consume all drugs provided by Party A and report the symptoms.

If Party B requires it, Party A will provide sufficient original Vermilion Heart.

... This is sweet!

'A one-day contract, and I can get as much Vermilion Heart as I want?'

It feels so much like a trap that it's giving me goosebumps.

Is it really okay to accept this as is?

I'm starting to get a little scared.

'He's definitely not purely kind.'

He must have some purpose for presenting such a contract.

What could it be, that purpose?

Is there something he can gain from me with such a simple experiment?

‘Wait a minute...’

The ultimate goal of the Fire Sword Ghost, the final boss in the story, is to subjugate all Athenas to himself.

To achieve this goal, he created the Scarlet Heart.

Unlike Vermilion Heart, which is used once for training and treatment, he made it addictive so that once you touch it, you can’t stop.

‘Ah...’

So that’s why Count Train is so focused on me.

‘He wants to use me as a clinical test subject.’

I guess I must look addicted since I’ve been desperately asking for the drug.

But unfortunately for you, Count Train.

I’m just drinking it to survive, so I’m not addicted at all.

I recently drank 90 bottles in succession, but I haven’t felt anything remotely like addiction.

If I were addicted, would I be thinking this clearly?

I’d be going crazy asking for the drug as soon as I woke up.

Isn’t that right, pudding?

— Li~.

The strawberry pudding that appeared as a side effect has gradually grown larger, and now it’s big enough to fill both my hands.

As it got bigger, it started making cute sounds it hadn’t made before.

When I put it on my hand and fiddle with it, it gives a strange feeling like I’m kneading someone’s chest.

... It's definitely different.

Mine and others' are completely different.

Above all, the pudding is much bigger!

"What are you doing?"

"... Ah."

Even now, Count Train probably thinks I'm seeing things.

Well, I am seeing things, that's true.

But since I can actually feel it, isn't it real rather than a hallucination?

This pudding is surprisingly cute.

It's fun to touch too.

"How much Vermilion Heart can you provide?"

"As much as you want. However... our company's stock is limited, so there will be constraints."

"Which means getting hundreds of bottles would be difficult."

Count Train sighed as if exasperated at the mention of hundreds of bottles.

"We do have exactly hundreds of bottles. But do you really need all of them?"

Of course.

Now I've become like a sponge that can absorb an infinite amount of strawberry flavored drinks.

So the more Vermilion Heart, the better.

"For now, I'd like to receive 50 bottles when today's work is done."

"50 bottles. Understood."

"I'm truly grateful."

I bowed deeply, my forehead nearly touching the table.

Thank you, thank you.

No matter how much of a trash villain you are, I'm grateful as long as you provide Vermilion Heart.

After I completed the contract and handed it to the Count, he immediately took out a velvet jewelry box containing several bottles from his bag.

"Well then, would you kindly drink these bottles one by one and tell me about them?"

Inside the opened jewelry box were five bottles of Vermilion Heart, similar but in different colors.

I assume the leftmost one is the original.

And as we move to the right, they become more addictive counterfeits?

I can roughly tell from the increasingly vibrant red color.

"Would it be better if I explain each one slowly?"

"I would appreciate that."

The Count took out a small notebook and pen, preparing to write down my words.

Well then.

I'll gratefully drink them.

The original Vermilion Heart should taste the same as always.

"Mmm... Ummm..."

Although I can't properly taste things.

Only the strawberry flavor of Vermilion Heart is distinct.

Why, they say the human body remembers foods containing essential nutrients for survival, right?

Similarly, my body seems to only remember the taste of Vermilion Heart.

[ You have used Vermilion Heart ]

[ Vitality fully restored ]

“Ahh...”

As my vitality was fully replenished, the duration of the enhancement effect increased by 12 hours.

This is definitely the real Vermilion Heart.

The taste is the strawberry flavor my body remembers, and no side effect message appeared.

“How is it?”

“It’s an ordinary Vermilion Heart.”

“Accurate.”

An indifferent expression.

The Count didn’t seem to expect much reaction to the first bottle.

“May I move on to the next one?”

“Please do.”

Just as I picked up the next bottle, I suddenly had a feeling.

It’s time to choke.

‘I can’t walk around with red liquid stains on my clothes...’

“Count.”

The liquid I spit out when choking isn’t that much anyway.



The problem is the bottle I might drop, which would roll on the floor.

The moment it breaks, the staff will rush over, and everyone in the café will look our way.

“Excuse me for a moment.”

“Uh... what?!”

I abruptly stood up and took the seat next to Count Train.

He hurriedly moved inward on the long bench where he had been sitting in the middle.

“I tend to choke frequently. Just in case, could you prepare a handkerchief?”

“I certainly have a handkerchief.”

“And, I might drop the bottle and it could break... could you hold that for me too?”

Though his expression was bewildered, Count Train complied with my request.

It would be troublesome for him too if the bottle broke.

“You choke frequently, you say?”

It seems the Count hasn't seen that state of mine yet.

Since we'll be meeting often from now on, it wouldn't hurt to show him in advance.

Without paying any attention.

I put the bottle to my mouth in one go, as if in a hurry.

25% is a higher probability than you might think.

... It certainly didn't trigger this often when enhancing.

“Keh-hak! Kek...!”

The Count immediately covered my mouth with his handkerchief.

Thanks to that, at least my dress didn't get stained red.

Despite appearances, the Count's movements were quite swift.

He even managed to catch the bottle I dropped while coughing.

“Kek... kugh... thank... you.”

While the Count was wiping around my mouth with his handkerchief, I held the bottle with more than half of the liquid still remaining.

Once I choked, the effect was already gone, but.

Since I need to evaluate the taste and efficacy, I'd better drink it again.

Gulp, gulp.

After slowly swallowing to avoid choking, I shared my thoughts with the Count.

‘I've drunk a lot, so I just need to convey the feeling, right?’

Not much difference in taste from the first bottle.

However, the initial hyper-awareness state that comes with first consumption felt slightly shorter than the original.

The Count's expression brightened as he heard my evaluation.

I thought it was quite a harsh assessment.

Was he actually waiting for this kind of response?

“Now, the third bottle—”

Ding-ding.

The small bells on the café door rang as a customer entered.

The Count's seat faced the door, so I could also see the customer's appearance sitting next to him.

It was a girl with attractive long, glossy black hair.

Though she tried to divert attention with plain casual clothes—a hoodie and glasses—her cool gaze and sparkling lemon-colored eyes drew people's attention—

“Welcome, how many in your party?”

“Just me...”

The Count, following my gaze, also recognized her identity and flinched in surprise.

“Why is that Athena here...”

One of the five Athenas who completed the game together.

An Athena who inevitably gets caught up in major events where Minerva's Owl, an important growth resource, is offered as a reward.

And a key figure who accounted for 99.9% of my confirmed future vision last year.

It was Flash Black.