

The Tower 248

Chapter 248: Side Story 1

Inside the spacious training ground, Cha Yu-Min positioned himself while holding a wooden sword. He gripped the sword firmly with both hands and swung it towards an imaginary opponent, resulting in a solid thudding sound.

"Haah..." After achieving his goal, Cha Yu-Min let out a sigh.

Sweat drenched his hair and uniform, leaving evidence of his hard work on the floor. He slowly sheathed the sword and took a deep breath, scanning his surroundings.

Clap, clap, clap!

His fellow trainees, who had been silently watching him, applauded.

"Wow! No matter how many times I watch him do it, I never get tired of it."

"He's the only sword athlete who leaves us in complete admiration."

"That's why he's still on the national team. I mean, who even is close to his level? No one, I say."

His comrades looked at him in awe. Who could beat this prodigy? Besides, they did not think that Cha Yu-Min would weaken as he got older.

"Great job!"

"Thanks," Cha Yu-Min replied.

Cha Yu-Min received a towel and a bottle of water. After gulping down the entire bottle, he wiped away his sweat.

"Senior, have you heard about that popular instructor named Park Hye-Won on NuTube these days?"

"Oh, the instructor who gained overnight fame for smiling during her lecture?"

"Yes, that's her."

"She's gorgeous. But I heard that she's usually very chic and bold."

"Senior, how do you know so much about her? Are you stalking her on SNS or something?"

"Hey! No! I... I just heard about her from somewhere."

Listening to such chatter, Cha Yu-Min sat on the nearby couch and organized his belongings.

"Senior Yu-Min, do you know her?"

"Yeah, I've seen her before," Cha Yu-Min replied.

Cha Yu-Min usually did not watch things like NuTube, but he had come across one of her videos that had gone viral due to its immense popularity.

"Wow, if Senior Yu-Min knows her too, she must be really popular."

"But what about her?" Cha Yu-Min asked.

"She claimed to have seen something like a fragment that helps you remember past lives during her lecture, which caused quite a buzz."

"Someone can remember their past lives? That's nonsense!"

"Come on, just watch this video."

The junior immediately opened NuTube on her smartphone. The video displayed a green chalkboard in the background, featuring a beautiful young woman with brown hair tied back sharing her story.

- I had an unusual experience on a recent trip. It was a small violet fragment, and it was said to be a special item that helps you remember your past life. So, just for fun, I touched it once, and you won't believe what happened. I really did see my past life. Can you believe it?

- Hey, don't lie about things like that!

- I'm serious. Well, not exactly at that moment, but I saw it in a dream that night...

- Booo! So it was nothing but just a dream then!

- But still! It was fascinating.

- What kind of dream was it then?

- Ah... well... It's kind of embarrassing to talk about... Haha

- Oh, come on! Just tell us!

- Okay fine... So, in my dream, I basically went to another world, and there, I used magic to slay monsters and stuff. Haha, it was quite vivid and fun in its own way, even though the ending wasn't very pleasant.

The part about her talking about her past life in the video ended here.

The female junior nudged the senior with her smartphone as if to say, "See? I'm right."

"See?" said the junior student.

"I guess it's true. But why did this become a hot topic?" the senior asked.

"Well, it's the first time this kind of story has come out in South Korea, but it has been circulating in foreign countries here and there. And that's why it's a sensation," the junior replied.

"Huh? Really? There have been similar cases in foreign countries, too?" the senior asked.

"Yes, and it's not just one or two cases," the junior replied.

"Wow, that is really amazing—" the senior replied.

"I'm gonna get going," Cha Yu-Min was not particularly interested in past lives and such, so he picked up his things and got up from his seat.

"Senior, are you just going to leave? Don't you want to grab some late-night snacks with us?" the junior asked Cha Yu-Min.

"No, not today. You guys have fun, but don't go home too late. It's already past midnight," Cha Yu-Min replied.

"All right..." the junior replied.

"Ugh, not another lecture. We got it, just go!" the senior replied.

Leaving his colleagues behind, Cha Yu-Min stepped out of the building and looked up at the sky. The moon seemed unusually bright today.

'I've been here for too long. I hope the buses are still running.'

Due to the unexpected delay, it was too late to use public transportation. Since it was already late at night, he thought of doing more training and decided to just run home. As he walked through the long alleyway, he couldn't help but feel a sense of unease.

The dark, uninhabited houses on both sides and the tightly closed doors made the atmosphere eerie. Would anyone come to help if he knocked on those doors in an emergency? Cha Yu-Min felt a pang of sadness, knowing that the residents in this neighborhood were unlikely to lend a helping hand. While he understood that helping each other and making sacrifices wasn't easy, he believed it was the right thing to do.

"Hmm?" As he jogged slowly, he heard a strange voice from somewhere. He stopped and tried to focus on it.

"Hey! Let me go! What are you d—"

It was the desperate cries of a woman. Cha Yu-Min's steps quickened as he raced through the narrow street. When he reached the end of the long alley, he heard other voices as well. Carefully pressing himself against the wall, Cha Yu-Min turned his head slightly to find the sound's origin point. He saw three masked men forcibly dragging a woman, trying to force her into a black van.

'Wait a second... That person is...!'

That person was the woman from the NuTube video that his junior had shown him earlier: Park Hye-Won, the popular instructor. Was it a coincidence? By chance, Cha Yu-Min had finished his training late at night, heard about Park Hye-Won, and even witnessed her being kidnapped on his way.

The situation was incredibly coincidental; if someone heard about it, they would think it was a made-up story. Cha Yu-Min wondered whether he could defeat them and save her if he rushed out to stop them

now. He also wondered why those men were trying to kidnap Park Hye-Won. Did they really think they could get away with kidnapping a famous person?

‘Now is not the time for these random thoughts.’

Cha Yu-Min decided to intervene first. He darted toward the van; fortunately, he still had his wooden sword. He used the wooden sword to jab the man's pit of the stomach.

"Argh...!" The man, startled, gasped before crying out as if he couldn't breathe.

He then shouted and rolled on the ground in pain. Two more men came out from the van with blue switchblades in their hands. However, Cha Yu-Min was not afraid of such things, as he had spent quite a lot of time working with the real sword.

"This son of a bitch!" shouted the man.

The man spoke roughly and looked tough, but his movements were surprisingly agile. He quickly jumped forward, reducing the impact of the wooden sword and trying to deliver a fatal blow with his switchblade. Considering his attack pattern, the man seemingly knew the significance of having a knife in a fight. Furthermore, the man used his switchblade with some skill.

‘Hmm... It seems like he’s not an ordinary thug...’

Cha Yu-Min's left hand quickly pressed on the opponent's elbow, altering the man's attack trajectory.

Thunk!

His jacket's waistline was ripped, but the switchblade got stuck to his clothes, losing its momentum.

Baaam—!

Cha Yu-Min struck the thug's neck with his wooden sword next, making the latter collapse.

"Huh? This kid is quite skilled, isn't he?" The man, smirking, was about to close the van's door.

Just as this man tried to join the fight, someone emerged from the passenger seat.

Swoosh—! Baaam—!

"You son of a bitch! What the hell are you doing!" shouted the newcomer, irritated.

Cha Yu-Min glared at him with raised eyebrows. He was dressed differently from the other thugs and had a half-closed left eye. The numerous scars on his forearm indicated that he was no ordinary thug. The man pulled out his knife and skillfully played with it, helping Cha Yu-Min realize that this man had a lot of experience with weapons.

"Ugh! What's so hard about killing a little bitch like this... Tsk," the man muttered and clicked his tongue.

He kicked the ground and swung the knife. As the sharp blade came toward Cha Yu-Min, he used his wooden sword to block it. However, a powerful kick struck Cha Yu-Min's abdomen almost simultaneously.

"Gah!" Cha Yu-Min groaned.

Even as he stumbled backward, Cha Yu-Min kept an eye on the opponent. The man reached into his pocket and, in the blink of an eye, threw some kind of powder on Cha Yu-Min's face.

"Ugh!" Cha Yu-Min groaned again.

He could not keep his eyes open and thought about the man's cowardice briefly. Cha Yu-Min had always had this feeling that he had to become the world's greatest swordsman, and that very feeling allowed him to sense the impending danger.

Clang!

"What the hell? How can you block this?" The man seemed surprised to see Cha Yu-Min react without being able to see anything.

Cha Yu-Min blocked the knife with the wooden sword, relying solely on his intuition. Had he not blocked it, the knife would have pierced his throat, leaving a gaping hole. The realization that he had narrowly escaped death sent shivers down his spine. Determined to overcome his blindness, Cha Yu-Min forcefully opened his eyes, guided by an eerie sensation.

"Just forget about him and come! We can't waste any more time!"

"Tsk."

The man clicked his tongue; gradually, his footsteps faded away. Soon after, the car's engine started, and they disappeared.

"Ha... Ha..." Cha Yu-Min was out of breath.

After wiping the cold sweat from his forehead, he rubbed his eyes and surveyed his surroundings. He caught sight of the car's license plate. He pulled out his smartphone and promptly made a call.

- Yes, Hyung.

A familiar voice came through the receiver. Cha Yu-Min got up and began running again, speaking into the phone.

"08M 77xx. Please check the vehicle registration for this car. Park Hye-Won just got kidnapped," Cha Yu-Min said.

- What? What do you mean? Oh, wait. Did you just say Park Hye-Won? The one that I know?

"Excuse me, Sir, over here, please!" Cha Yu-Min managed to grab a passing taxi. "Drive ahead, please. Can you see that black van over there at the end? Please follow that van."

"Sorry? You want me to follow that car? What's going on?" the taxi driver asked with a look of surprise.

"Just hurry up! We don't have much time!" Cha Yu-Min shouted desperately.

The surprised taxi driver started chasing the van.

- Hyung! Are you in the taxi now? What on earth is happening right now?

"Did you check it?" Cha Yu-Min asked anxiously.

- I'm already home, so I can't do that right now. I would have to ask someone else to do it. But what's going on?

"It's just like I said earlier. Some suspicious guys have kidnapped Park Hye-Won. I confronted them a while ago, and those guys had knives," Cha Yu-Min explained.

"Someone was kidnapped?" The taxi driver looked at Cha Yu-Min in bewilderment.

- So you confronted them but let them go?

"Hey, I almost died just now. I don't know about the other thugs, but one of them seemed North Korean. He didn't hesitate to kill," Cha Yu-Min explained.

- Huh? Are you serious? This doesn't look right. Hyung, how are you going to handle this on your own? I'll join you. I'll be there soon.

"I'll send you my real-time location, so be quick if you're going to come," Cha Yu-Min said.

- Okay. I'll request backup and head over.

After sharing his real-time location with Baek Kang-Woo, Cha Yu-Min looked forward and could still see the black van in the distance. He finally saw the face of the taxi driver through the rearview mirror. The man trembled uncontrollably, clearly terrified.

"I'm sorry. I won't put you in a dangerous position, so please help me a bit more," Cha Yu-Min said.

"I mean... I should, of course, help out if someone got kidnapped. But... aren't you Cha Yu-Min? South Korea's national representative for Kendo?" asked the taxi driver, recognizing him.

"Oh, yes. That's me," Cha Yu-Min replied.

"Oh my! What an honor! If our pride, the great Cha Yu-Min, is stepping up like this, I should help, too. So what if my wife scolds me a bit!" the taxi driver said and laughed.

"Thank you. I promise I won't put you in a dangerous position," Cha Yu-Min replied.

"Haha, buckle up tightly. I'm going to speed up," said the taxi driver.

After confirming Cha Yu-Min's identity, the taxi driver seemed somewhat relieved and started to speed up. The engine roared as they picked up speed. At this late hour, there were hardly any other cars on the road.

"But you know that if we continue chasing them, they will realize we're onto them?" the taxi driver asked.

"Well, there's nothing else we can do. I've contacted a detective I know, so he'll catch up soon," Cha Yu-Min replied.

"Okay, then," the taxi driver said.

As Cha Yu-Min and the taxi driver had anticipated, the van suddenly changed direction as if the thugs had become aware of the pursuit.

"Oh no!" the taxi driver muttered.

Screech—!

The taxi suddenly swerved on the highway, skidding along the guardrail before finally regaining control.

"If something breaks, I'll compensate you," Cha Yu-Min said.

"Haha! Well then, I'll have to drive more skillfully. After all, I'm the best driver!" said the taxi driver confidently.

Baek Kang-Woo called Cha Yu-Min again.

- Hyung! Look behind you! It's me! I'm here!

Cha Yu-Min glanced back and saw a white sedan following closely.

"Huh? If we go this way, it will be difficult to pull back, though," said the taxi driver.

The van was heading for a narrow mountain path, making it challenging to reverse once entered.

"Thanks for bringing me this far. Here's my business card. And I'm really sorry, but can you contact me later? I will compensate you properly," Cha Yu-Min said to the taxi driver.

"Oh, it's fine. It's an honor to help out Cha Yu-Min, the national athlete," the taxi driver said.

"No, I'll leave my business card with you, so please, please contact me," Cha Yu-Min said.

Cha Yu-Min got out of the taxi. When he looked to the side, the black van was navigating the narrow road.

"Hyung!" Baek Kang-Woo shouted.

The sedan following the taxi closely pulled up. Cha Yu-Min immediately jumped into the front seat.

"They're over there! Let's go after them," Cha Yu-Min said.

"Okay!" Baek Kang-Woo replied.

He then sharply turned the steering wheel and entered the mountain path.