

## The Tower 249

### Chapter 249: Side Story 2

Confined within the van, Park Hye-Won couldn't comprehend why she had been kidnapped. Just moments ago, she was on her usual route home, unaware of the impending danger.

'Why the hell did these crazy people kidnap me?'

She was an influencer; apart from that, she was an ordinary girl. And there had to be a reason for them to target someone famous like her rather than an ordinary person. After all, influencers' lives were quite public, so if one went missing, people would quickly notice.

'Is it because I'm pretty? Or is it because I look rich?'

Neither seemed plausible upon closer examination. Countless individuals were more beautiful than her, and her wealth was modest compared to the truly affluent. If they had done anything after kidnapping her, she could have at least guessed their intention. Moreover, it all felt too intricate to attribute it solely to mere misfortune.

'First, there's that person who keeps chasing this car.'

Based on the snippets of conversation she had overheard, the individual tailing them appeared to be Cha Yu-Min, the national representative in Kendo. He was renowned for his exceptional fencing skills, unmatched even in his thirties. His prowess extended beyond the realm of sports, as he had proven himself unbeatable in fights against athletes and ordinary individuals.

However, these men had subdued that skillful Cha Yu-Min and escaped. Park Hye-Won could discern that these individuals were highly trained, with one of them even hailing from North Korea.

'Are these people spies? But why would they involve me in this?'

They hadn't harmed her or shown any interest in her presence. She could only rely on her hearing because her eyes remained covered, listening intently to their conversations.

"Ugh... Help! Someone help me!"

A male voice abruptly came from the side. It seemed like he had just woken up from his sleep. He then started shouting as if he was having a seizure. However, for some reason, Park Hye-Won found his voice familiar.

'Huh? Is he Kang Ji-Hoon? Could it be that Nutuber Kang Ji-Hoon?'

The kidnappers had covered their eyes and mouths, so she could not hear him clearly, but the muffled voice definitely belonged to Kang Ji-Hoon. He was also somehow connected to this incident. Both of them were Nutubers and had some ties to the memory fragment.

Reflecting on that fragment now, the supposed catalyst for unlocking past life memories, Park Hye-Won found it peculiar. Initially, she had treated it as an intriguing episode. She had casually discussed the topic in a recent collaboration with Kang Ji-Hoon, where he mentioned that similar incidents had also occurred in foreign countries. Therefore, she just took it as a joke and moved on.

'I'm not sure, but why do I have this nagging feeling that it's somehow related?'

Deciding to remain silent with her eyes covered, she patiently waited for time to pass. What difference would it make even if she resisted here? She even entertained the thought of giving Kang Ji-Hoon a firm smack on his head to silence him and stop his resistance.

"We're here," said one of the thugs.

The door opened with a rattling sound, and the wind rushed inside. Park Hye-Won's blindfold was removed, revealing the familiar surroundings outside.

'This place is...'

As she stepped out of the car, she found herself standing in front of Yuhwa Middle School—the place she had discussed in her broadcast with Kang Ji-Hoon. She had mentioned that she had met someone with the memory fragment here. She started to blame herself for saying that.

"You said you met someone with the memory fragment here, right? Who was it?" asked one of the men.

"I don't know," Park Hye-Won replied.

"Tsk. Don't play dumb," said the thug.

The thugs dragged Park Hye-Won and Kang Ji-Hoon into the empty middle school.

"Who would stay in school at this hour anyway!" Kang Ji-Hoon resisted.

"Of course, nobody is here right now. That's precisely why we're here now. If you don't want to die, you better speak up," said the thug.

"I really don't know! How can I tell you something I don't know?!" Kang Ji-Hoon shouted.

Clang—!

With a swift hammer strike, the thugs broke the locked door and entered the premises. They crossed the silent corridor and entered a classroom where they bound Park Hye-Won to a chair while treating Kang Ji-Hoon like an animal, dragging him on the floor.

"Even if you don't know, try to remember if you don't want to hear your friend scream," the thug threatened Kang Ji-Hoon.

One of the thugs dragged a heavy hammer across the ground menacingly.

"Friend? Just do whatever you want! We just met for the first time back then," said Kang Ji-Hoon.

"Ha... Trying to act all cool—" said the thug.

"Oh yeah? Is that so? Then I guess we can kill this bitch," the man from North Korea chimed in.

Pushing the thug aside, the North Korean man flicked his cigarette away. He picked up the hammer, irritated, approaching Kang Ji-Hoon with the intention to strike.

"Wait! Fine, I'll tell you!" Park Hye-Won exclaimed, turning around and looking at the man in shock.

The man halted his impending attack. Park Hye-Won then opened her eyes and looked at the laughing North Korean man. As soon as she saw his face, she realized that she had been tricked. The man never wanted to kill Kang Ji-Hoon; he had done that to evoke a strong emotional response from her.

'Darn it!'

Kang Ji-Hoon was trembling on the ground. Park Hye-Won clenched her teeth and glared at the man.

"What do you want to know!" Park Hye-Won asked the man.

"Everything you know about the person with the memory fragment. Tell me their appearance, age, name, affiliation, occupation—everything!" the man replied.

After hesitating momentarily, she decided to speak.

"She was a teacher at this middle school. She was a bit short, with a cute face," Park Hye-Won replied, describing the person with the memory fragment.

"Is that all?" the man asked, wanting to hear more information.

"And her hair color was black—" Park Hye-Won muttered.

Baaam—!

The North Korean man, with a disgusted expression, kicked the table over and grabbed Park Hye-Won by her cheeks.

"Are you mocking me, you little brat?" the man yelled at her.

Park Hye-Won tried to open her trembling mouth, but his strong grip ensured that she couldn't respond.

"You know the name, right? Say it properly!" the North Korean man shouted, glaring at her.

His eyes began to turn red with madness. Trembling, Park Hye-Won told him the teacher's name.

"I-it was... It was J-Ji Eun-Ju. Her name was Ji Eun-Ju," Park Hye-Won replied, shuddering.

"You better be telling the truth," threatened the man.

"Of course," Park Hye-Won replied with a terrified voice.

The man got up and signaled to the thugs. After receiving that signal, the thugs started to kick Kang Ji-Hoon mercilessly.

Baaam—!

The man from North Korea left the classroom, and the thugs interrogated Park Hye-Won again.

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"Huh? Who's here at this hour?" Shin Ha-Neul muttered, looking at what was happening inside the school.

Shin Ha-Neul was used to having the schoolyard to himself at night. So, when a group of strangers barged into the middle school, dragging in two tied-up people, a man and a woman, he couldn't help but find the whole situation strange.

"Damn... This is insane," Shin Ha-Neul muttered.

He had already informed the cops; since the school was in the mountains, he anticipated a significant delay in their arrival. He also had a nagging feeling that the two captives could find themselves in serious trouble if he simply stood by and observed.

"Let's just take a quick look," Shin Ha-Neul muttered.

Unable to determine their whereabouts, he cautiously began searching the first floor of the building. Suddenly, he heard the sound of a doorknob turning from inside.

'Hmmm... It seems like the noise came from the teachers' office.'

Thump... Thump...

Step by step, Shin Ha-Neul listened carefully, even suppressing his breath to avoid drawing unnecessary attention. Moments later, he detected faint sounds emanating from within the teachers' office. He gulped and peeked through the slight opening of the door. He could see a man in black going through some stuff in the office.

His heart raced uncontrollably. Despite his background in boxing, he realized that he was not immune to nerves in a potentially dangerous situation. He worried about the possibility of the intruder possessing a weapon, questioning his ability to fight someone armed with a knife. Nevertheless, he had some confidence in his evasive skills.

'Oh well... It will be better this way. It's probably easier to take them down individually if they're out of the group.'

Shin Ha-Neul positioned himself next to the door, patiently waiting for the man to emerge from the room.

'I'll take him by surprise the moment he comes out. '

The rustling sounds grew closer, and the door, once ajar, began to open wider.

'He's coming out. One, two, three... Now!'

Shin Ha-Neul lunged forward, throwing his entire weight into the attack.

'Huh?'

He quickly noticed the absence of sensation in his fingertips, indicating that his opponent had evaded his attack.

'He managed to avoid this?'

Whoosh! Thud!

Without giving Shin Ha-Neul any time to think, his opponent forcefully grabbed the doorknob and slammed it into Shin Ha-Neul, pushing him back. Then, a sharp blue blade rushed toward Shin Ha-Neul's waist.

'When did he...!'

There was no room for hesitation in the face of such an unrelenting assault. Shin Ha-Neul twisted his torso, evading the attack at the last moment. The relentless attacks made him feel cornered.

'Darn it!'

Shin Ha-Neul had overlooked the limitations of the narrow space when planning his surprise attack. He had intended to finish the attack quickly, but his opponent, on the other hand, seemed well-acquainted with the surroundings, launching a close-range assault.

"Argh!" Shin Ha-Neul groaned in pain.

The knife had scratched his arm, making him bleed. The man holding the dagger frowned and looked at Shin Ha-Neul.

"Are you the minion of South Korea?" the North Korean man asked.

"What? What the hell are you talking about?" Shin Ha-Neul replied with a confused look.

The man tilted his head slightly in confusion and attacked again.

Babababam—!

Shin Ha-Neul quickly realized that his boxing skills were ineffective against the opponent. The man was a true combat expert, just like the ones he had seen on TV. Shin Ha-Neul's resolve to fight dwindled rapidly, and he soon suffered a stab wound to his abdomen.

"Oh, spare me..." Shin Ha-Neul groaned.

"Why did you interfere, you little brat?" the man said, looking at Shin Ha-Neul.

Suddenly, a new set of footsteps rang.



"The interrogation is over," said one of the thugs interrogating Park Hye-Won.

"I've also found the woman's address," said the North Korean man.

"Oh, who's this? A school staff member?" the thug asked, looking at Shin Ha-Neul. "Looks like it. Do whatever you want with him," the man replied.

The North Korean man pulled out his knife again and left the room. Annoyed by Shin Ha-Neul's interference, the two thugs seized him by the hair and dragged him away.

"Let's just bury him here," said one of the thugs.

"All right," the other one replied.

As the two thugs dragged Shin Ha-Neul behind the building and began digging a hole with a shovel, a car with blinding headlights arrived there, its engine roaring.

"What's going on?" The thugs seemed shocked.

Squeak!

The car stopped, the car doors creaked open, and two men exited the vehicle.

"Huh?" Cha Yu-Min seemed surprised, looking at Shin Ha-Neul.

"Is that Cha Yu-Min?" Shin Ha-Neul muttered, looking at one of the newcomers.

"Hmmm, it seems like that North Korean guy isn't here anymore," Cha Yu-Min muttered.

"Oh really? Ugh, I wanted to face him for once, though," Baek Kang-Woo replied, disappointed.

"Haha, it's probably for the best. Messing with him could lead to instant death," Cha Yu-Min replied.

Cha Yu-Min had his sword hanging around his neck, and Baek Kang-Woo started to warm up. The two of them looked relaxed, making the two thugs chuckle.

"Ugh, these bastards," one of the thugs said.

"Let's bury them as well while we're at it," replied another thug.

"Come on, you brats! I'm a detective in the violent crimes division!" Baek Kang-Woo shouted, looking at the two.

Baek Kang-Woo swiftly rushed forward, kicking the shovel away with a back-kick and punching the opponent's ribcage.

"Keugh!"

Shin Ha-Neul grabbed the thug by his collar and slammed him on the ground.

Thud.

The thug, on the ground, gasped for breath. Looking toward Cha Yu-Min, he saw Cha Yu-Min smacking the other thug's head with his sword.

"Hey Hyung, don't kill them though, okay?" Baek Kang-Woo said.

"Don't worry," Cha Yu-Min replied.

Baek Kang-Woo swiftly restrained the two incapacitated thugs and attended to Shin Ha-Neul.

"Are you okay?" Baek Kang-Woo asked Shin Ha-Neul.

"No... I don't think I'm okay," Shin Ha-Neul weakly responded.

Indeed, his condition looked critical.

"I called the police, so we should get you to the hospital first—" Baek Kang-Woo said to Shin Ha-Neul.

"No! Take me with you. Please, take me too," Shin Ha-Neul asked.

"Huh? What are you talking about?" Baek Kang-Woo asked Shin Ha-Neul.

"I need to get revenge on those bastards. I can't live like this. So, please take me with you," Shin Ha-Neul said.

Baek Kang-Woo and Cha Yu-Min looked at him as if he were crazy. However, he clung to Baek Kang-Woo's leg, refusing to let go unless he was taken along.

"W-well, alright then. But let's try to stop the bleeding and bandage your abdomen first," said Baek Kang-Woo.

"You an athlete? Your physique is impressive," Cha Yu-Min asked.

"I used to be a boxer," said Shin Ha-Neul.

It was quite dark, so Cha Yu-Min could not see Shin Ha-Neul's face clearly. However, Shin Ha-Neul thought he recognized this person from somewhere.

"Oh, wait a second. Weren't you the lightweight champion from last year?" Cha Yu-Min asked.

"Yes, that's right," Shin Ha-Neul replied.

Cha Yu-Min realized that he could be useful, so he nodded and began treating Shin Ha-Neul's injuries.

"They took the man and the woman there," Shin Ha-Neul said, pointing toward the building.

"Okay then, let's get inside quickly," Baek Kang-Woo said.

"Alright," Cha Yu-Min replied.

The trio swiftly entered the building. While searching the second floor, they noticed several shadowy figures moving outside the windows.

"Hyung! Those guys are trying to get away!" Baek Kang-Woo pointed out.

"Damn it! How dare they!" Shin Ha-Neul shouted.

"Let's chase them," Cha Yu-Min said.

"Understood," Baek Kang-Woo replied.

They pursued the culprits and hopped into their car. However, the black van was already speeding away from the school.

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Kim Kang-Chun, a corporate employee, had finished his work late and returned to the countryside for a vacation. It was a serene neighborhood with no late-night traffic. As he was about to enter his cousin's empty house, he saw a black van pull up near the apartment complex entrance.

'Huh? Who are those people? Who would be here at this hour?'

An inexplicable sense of anxiety washed over him. Kim Kang-Chun stopped when he saw the people disembarking from the unfamiliar vehicle. They were all dressed in black, looking highly suspicious. Scars marred their bodies, and Kim Kang-Chun could catch snippets of their rough, uncouth conversations.

"Hmm, so you don't know her apartment number?" the North Korean man asked.

"No," one of the thugs replied.

"The teacher from Yuhwa Middle School does live here, right? Her name was Ji Eun-Ju? Just pretend to be a delivery person and ask for her personal information," the North Korean man said.

"Yes, Sir!" said the thug.

Kim Kang-Chun frowned as soon as he heard their conversation. He wondered if he had misheard something.

'Eun-Ju? I mean, if it's Yuhwa Middle School... then it must be her. Are they really here to get Eun-Ju?'

Kim Kang-Chun did not know what was happening, but it looked dangerous. He could tell that getting caught by them would result in a dire situation. Fortunately, they first moved toward the apartment building on the opposite side. Therefore, Kim Kang-Chun headed to Ji Eun-Ju's place instead of his cousin's house.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

"Eun-Ju, open the door!" Kim Kang-Chun shouted urgently.

There was a momentary delay before the door opened; Eun-Ju must have been asleep. However, when he kept knocking, Ji Eun-Ju eventually opened the door. He briefly considered taking Eun-Ju and leaving, but when he looked out the window, he saw that the intruders were already close.

"Ugh, let's just get inside and have a talk first," Kim Kang-Chun said.

"Oppa? What brings you here at this hour?" Ji Eun-Ju seemed very confused.

Kim Kang-Chun locked the door and explained the situation.

"What?" Ji Eun-Ju's face turned pale, frightened.

"Listen carefully. You don't live here, alright? So just stay quietly inside," Kim Kang-Chun said, reassuring Ji Eun-Ju.

"Alright," Ji Eun-Ju replied.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Suddenly, someone knocked on the front door. It was undoubtedly the intruders.

"Is anyone there?"

Kim Kang-Chun's heart started to race uncontrollably.