

The Tower 252

Chapter 252: Side Story 5

The mushy ground and misty forest enclosed them. Monsters lurked in the swamp, their eyes peering out, seizing every opportunity to attack. They crouched and surrounded the area.

- Grrrraaah!

Hundreds of monsters charged through the swamp. Swiftly, the North Korean agent pulled out his knife and bombs, and then, his mind snapped back to reality.

Woong—!

Clang—!

"Keugh!" the North Korean man groaned.

"Huh, even amidst all this chaos, you managed to block that?" A combatant from SWCG, with dark hair tightly tied back, ambushed the North Korean agent and muttered with a smirk.

"But still..."

Plop...

The fragment of memory dropped to the ground. While the man from North Korea defended himself against the ambush, he accidentally dropped the fragment. In fact, that was her intention behind the attack from the start.

"Who are you?"

"Oh I'm Baek Hyun-Ah, a member of the SWCG team. Please just grab that fragment and step back," Baek Hyun-Ah said.

Baek Hyun-Ah did not make the mistake of picking up the fragment herself. She already knew what that violet fragment was. She knew that it possessed the power to trigger past memories. Initially, she had been skeptical about the government's obsession with this fragment, but judging from the reactions of those who had held the fragment, it seemed to be something substantial.

"I'm going to kill you!" The North Korean agent glared at Baek Hyun-Ah.

"Come and try," Baek Hyun-Ah replied.

Clang!

The two clashed fiercely. The North Korean man pushed aggressively with his attacks, while Baek Hyun-Ah calmly defended herself.

'Is he in a hurry?'

The truth was, this was indeed an urgent mission, since it was the members of the government's Task Force who had been gathered to eliminate them. However, Baek Hyun-Ah had a feeling that all of this urgency had something to do with the fragment.

Clang! Clang! Clang—!

Their daggers kept clashing. If it weren't for the rush the opponent was in, Baek Hyun-Ah's body would have been soaked in blood. That would have been a real show of how impressive the man's skills were; but, the tide was turning in her favor.

"Seems like you're in a hurry," Baek Hyun-Ah said to the North Korean man.

"You little punk!" the North Korean man shouted.

As the two were locked in a fierce fight, Ji Eun-Ju, who had remembered her past by holding the fragment, took Park Hye-Won and approached the people who had been tied up and thrown into a pit.

"Are you okay?" Ji Eun-Ju asked, looking at those people.

"Ugh! Ugh!" They were crying for help.

"Please help us!"

Kang Ji-Hoon and several others cried out for help. Ji Eun-Ju looked at the people inside the hole and then tossed the fragment to one of them.

Swoosh—!

The one who caught the fragment was Cha Yu-Min, whose hands were bound behind his back. As he received the fragment, his body trembled.

"This is...!" Cha Yu-Min muttered.

The next moment, numerous memories inundated his mind. He could remember the moment he first entered the Tower and when he became the top-ranking challenger on Earth. He also remembered meeting Lee Shin. Many other scenes flashed through his mind.

- Do you finally remember?

A voice echoed from somewhere, briefly.

‘Where is this voice coming from?’

Perplexed, Cha Yu-Min looked around and then suddenly looked down. The ground was completely dark, because it was covered in darkness. However, he started to feel like the shadow under him was moving for some reason.

‘Shadows...’

It was the ability he had used in his past life, and now, that shadow was responding to him once again.

"Help me," Cha Yu-Min muttered, looking at the shadow.

- Alright, but the responsibility that comes with it is yours.

The shadow beneath Cha Yu-Min's feet surged all of a sudden and cut all the handcuffs and ropes binding those inside the pit.

"What's happening?"

"Why did something suddenly spring up?"

"What is this?"

While the other people were stunned and puzzled, Cha Yu-Min used the shadow to toss a grappling hook upward and climbed out of the pit.

"Grab this and climb up, everyone," Cha Yu-Min said to the rest who were in the pit.

Once everyone had climbed out, Cha Yu-Min handed over the fragment he had been holding to others.

"What is this, Hyung?" Baek Kang-Woo asked.

"You'll know once you take it," Cha Yu-Min replied.

Following Cha Yu-Min's words, Baek Kang-Woo received the fragment of memory in his palm. As soon as he held it, his eyes opened wide.

"No way...!" Baek Kang-Woo was amazed to see the memories from his past life.

"Why? What is it?" Shin Ha-Neul asked with curiosity.

"Try it. Hold on to this," Baek Kang-Woo said, and handed the fragment over to Shin Ha-Neul.

As Baek Kang-Woo extended his palm, Shin Ha-Neul reached out and put his hand over the fragment. As his past memories washed over him, Shin Ha-Neul opened his mouth in shock.

"Wow! This is insane! I was this powerful?" Shin Ha-Neul shouted with excitement.

Cha Yu-Min quickly covered Shin Ha-Neul's mouth.

"Keep it down," Cha Yu-Min said to Shin Ha-Neul.

"Give it a try, everyone," Cha Yu-Min said.

Kim Kang-Chun, Yu Jia, and Kang Ji-Hoon took turns holding the fragment of memory. As soon as they held it, their facial expressions changed instantly.

"No way... Does this even make sense though?"

"Isn't this some kind of a drug that makes you hallucinate or something? I mean, this could have been made to manipulate our memory ..."

"Damn... This is insane... This is supposed to be my past life?"

They looked at each other in astonishment, as if they could not believe what they had just seen. The people in front of them had been fellow comrades with whom they climbed the Tower, and they had helped each other in their past lives.

"If these memories are true, then I guess we were destined to meet again," Kang Ji-Hoon said to the people gathered there with an excited voice.

"Yeah exactly... I can't believe we knew each other already..."

"But hey... who exactly is that Master?" Ji Eun-Ju brought up the topic of 'that Master' for the first time.

As she brought that up, everyone who had been gathered in that place started to recall that 'Master' person. Scenes flashed through their minds like a gallery, and although these scenes did not make up a large majority of all the memories they had regained, a deep sense of nostalgia washed over them.

"... I'm not really sure... because a lot of our memories are coming in bit by bit. And there are just so many of them," Kim Kang-Chun replied with a frustrated voice.

"Hmm... Master... I'm sure I called him 'Master' too, but..."

"Yeah, me too. There's definitely someone who I called 'Master' in my memories as well."

Park Hye-Won, Kim Kang-Chun, Ji Eun-Ju, Shin Ha-Neul, and Kang Ji-Hoon all nodded in agreement.

"Oh really? But then how come I don't have strong memories of that 'Master' that you guys are talking about?" Baek Kang-Woo said, shaking his head in confusion.

"Yeah exactly. I don't remember anything about that Master either, unless you guys are talking about that person who was more of a Hyung to me..." Cha Yu-Min also agreed with Baek Kang-Woo.

"Yeah, me too. I don't remember that Master much either, but I keep seeing this person's silhouette in my memories," Yu Jia replied.

Then, she frowned because it felt like her memories were about to return, but remained just out of reach.

Swoosh—!

A man was shoved to where these people were, and he stumbled his way across the ground. It was the North Korean agent who had been tormenting these people a little while ago. This time, he was followed by a masked individual.

"Let me introduce myself again. My name is Park Joo-Hyuk, team leader of the Task Force SWCG under the Republic of Korea's Information Ministry," Park Joo-Hyuk said to everyone, introducing himself.

Then, Park Joo-Hyuk recognized Cha Yu-Min and shook hands with him. He also extended his hand to the others.

"We are going around to find fragments of memory that are scattered around the world. Would it be okay for you to take that fragment from you?" Park Joo-Hyuk asked politely.

"Oh, yes! Yes of course! Here you go." Ji Eun-Ju quickly handed over the fragment of memory to him.

"And may I ask how you obtained this fragment of memory?" Park Joo-Hyuk asked.

"Oh um... it was about two months ago, I think? It fell from the sky like a shooting star. It happened to fall right in front of me, so I picked it up. I thought it was a symbol of good luck and kept it," Ji Eun-Ju explained what happened.

"Oh, I see. Anyway, could you come with us separately and share the detailed story?" Park Joo-Hyuk asked.

"Yes, I can," Ji Eun-Ju replied.

"All right. Then we'll take the fragment of memory for now," Park Joo-Hyuk said.

The next moment, Park Joo-Hyuk took the purple fragment into his hand.

"Ah...!" Park Joo-Hyuk let out a low groan as soon as he touched it.

Those who had seen the reactions of others as they held the fragment were curious about what memories Park Joo-Hyuk received.

"Leader, what are you doing here?" Baek Hyun-Ah asked when she saw Park Joo-Hyuk who was frozen on the spot.

Baek Hyun-Ah approached him and discovered the fragment in his hand.

'Is it because of this?'

If this fragment really allowed one to remember one's past life, she also wanted to touch it once.

'Well, since the situation is over. Shall I try touching it once too?'

The next moment, she put her hand over Park Joo-Hyuk's palm and touched the fragment of memory.

"Whoa..." Baek Hyun-Ah exclaimed in amazement.

At the very similar reactions of the two, Hye-Won and Kang-Woo chuckled.

"Wait... So we used to be colleagues in our past lives?" Park Joo-Hyuk looked at everyone with disbelief.

However, his memory was too vivid to say that he did not believe it.

"Leader," Baek Hyun-Ah called Park Joo-Hyuk with a voice full of complex emotions.

At that moment, a dim glow of energy gathered in the air, emitting light in a circular shape.

Ziing—

"What is that?" Kang Ji-Hoon muttered, looking at the energy.

Unable to resist his curiosity, he brought his finger up, close to that spot.

Woong—!

At the same time, all of the people who touched the fragment of memory disappeared in an instant.

A vast field unfolded in front of the peoples' eyes.

"Where are we? What's going on?"

The field looked somewhat familiar to them. In the middle of it lay a portal. The party, who had been suddenly sucked into this place, felt their hearts pounding as they saw the place they had known from their past lives.

"Isn't this the place we saw with the fragment of memory?"

"But I think it feels slightly different from the place we saw."

They could see an open field and a blue sea in the distance. However, beyond a certain point, the sea became rough, as if the waters were divided into two. Unlike this calm place, the sea on the other side was turbulent.

"Look over there!"

They could see the rocky terrain on the left. Though the surrounding area was quiet, a massive dust storm was swirling in the distance near the horizon.

"Why does this place look so desolate?"

"I don't know."

"Could the memory be wrong? In the memories, this place was a calm world with nothing."

"Maybe we might not be in that place right now."

They could not come to a conclusion, but a portal caught their attention.

"Should we go in?"

"Do you think it will be okay for us to go in?"

"I don't know what's going to happen, but let's give it a try!"

Shin Ha-Neul stepped forward first and took the lead.

"That's right! We've had to cross that place in our memories anyway," Kang Ji-Hoon said in agreement with Shin Ha-Neul.

It was only then that the others finally nodded.

"Yeah, you're right."

"Let's give it a try."

The next moment, they stepped into the portal. The gloomy and dark cave they had thought would materialize did not appear. Instead, in front of them was a giant temple atop a towering cliff, and beneath them was the land they were on just moments ago.

"Let's try going in," Park Hye-Won said.

Park Hye-Won, growing impatient with the hesitation of others, boldly took big steps toward the temple. As they passed the entrance, its interior came into view.

There were pillars adorned with intricate patterns on both sides, and a man sitting on a large chair at the end of a gray carpet.

The man had purple hair and was wearing round glasses. Their hearts started to pound hard the moment they saw the sharp-looking man.

Park Hye-Won, who was standing at the front, hesitated and then continued walking. Her breathing started to be slightly unstable. Those behind her acted no different.

They started to question what made them feel nervous. Who was that person who could make their heart beat fast and fill them with such a poignant and longing emotion?

"M-Master..." Park Hye-Won mumbled subconsciously.

Without even realizing what she had just said, Park Hye-Won approached the man whom she called Master. As she got closer, his facial expression became clear. It was an emotionless, stoic expression.

"Who are you?" the man asked in a monotone voice. "Did you come here for a challenge?"

Sitting on the throne, the man created a purple arrow with just the movement of his hand. This was undoubtedly the image of the person whom she called Master in her memories.

"Ha..." Her eyes became teary seeing this man.

It felt like the fog in her mind had been completely lifted. It was Lee Shin. That name came to her mind at last. It was the person who sacrificed everything and disappeared in her past life. It was the person who said he would go back to being the terrifying boss of the first floor, to sacrifice everything and carry the burdens of others. The moment when she had to send him away helplessly appeared in her mind.

"Die," said the man, who appeared to be Lee Shin.

The Dark Arrow flew toward Park Hye-Won, with a sound of breaking the air. Seeing the incoming Dark Arrow, Park Hye-Won thought to herself whether she had the right to block his attack. Instead of defending herself, she sat down helplessly, staring blankly at the arrow. At that moment, Cha Yu-Min jumped in front of her with a sword.

Clang—!

A black shadow lingered over his sword.

"Are you okay?" Cha Yu-Min asked.

"Sob... Yes..." Park Hye-Won replied.

"Get up. It's not just you who remember the whole situation about this man," Cha Yu-Min replied.

The moment she looked into the eyes of Cha Yu-Min, she realized how foolish she was. Unlike hers, his gaze was filled with intense desire.

"Thank you," Park Hye-Won said.

The next moment, Cha Yu-Min stood up and glared at the boss.

"Is that all you've turned into, a heartless doll? Is that why you decided to do this all on your own?!" Cha Yu-Min shouted, tearing up. "Why! Why! Why does it have to be you who is always sacrificing like this!"

Deflecting another Dark Arrow, Cha Yu-Min approached the boss step by step.

"Because of you we are able to live so comfortably!" Cha Yu-Min shouted.

The next moment, a blue sword emerged from his shadow.

Baaam—!

The sword that aimed for Cha Yu-Min's ankle disappeared in the explosion.

"I'll help, too," Park Hye-Won said and stood beside him.

Hundreds of Undead soldiers emerged from the ground.

"Is this... really the first floor?" Cha Yu-Min, bewildered, bit his lip.

Others also joined to help Cha Yu-Min.

"Hyung! I'm here too. I also owe something to Lee Shin, so let me help as well." Saying that, Baek Kang-Woo raised his dagger.

The next moment, a white aura enveloped his body, and another dagger appeared in his empty left hand.

"Did you train me so hard just to be turned into this kind of helpless doll? You can't do this to us!" Shin Ha-Neul cried out.

Shin Ha-Neul, who was standing next to Park Hye-Won, wrapped his fist with mana and sent a punch forward.

Babababam—!

Four Skeletons who were hit by the mana exploded and disappeared. Kim Kang-Chun, Kang Ji-Hoon, Baek Hyun-Ah, and Ji Eun-Ju stood side by side.

"I will use my unique ability," Park Joo-Hyuk said, going behind Cha Yu-Min and Park Hye-Won.

"What do you mean by that?"

"My unique ability is called 'Power of Transformation.' And with that, I might be able to restore the state Lee Shin is in, I mean our Master," Park Joo-Hyuk explained.

The eyes of those who heard his words opened wide. Park Joo-Hyuk's Power of Transformation was a skill that could reverse the outcome. Perhaps it was really possible to return Lee Shin to who he was.

"Alright, that seems to be the most likely possibility."

"Let us break through, and Mr. Park Joo-Hyuk, you can conserve your strength, and pour it all into that Power of Transformation."

After saying that, everyone exchanged glances and nodded at each other.

"Let's go!"