883 Episode 48 Avatar (6)

When I was halfway done with the omelet rice, Kim Namwoon took me to the third floor of the base. I thought we were going to meet Han Sooyoung right away, but the place I arrived was the emergency room.

"You've worked hard, Namwoon-ah."

Lee Seolhwa, who was waiting in front of the emergency room, greeted me as she handed me the wheelchair.

Kim Namwoon bashfully frowned and patted my shoulder.

"Then let's meet later, sir."

After Kim Namwoon disappeared, Lee Seolhwa took me and stood in front of the mirror in the supplies room. She busily went around the room, put down a package full of cosmetics on the table, and started to fix my hair.

"What are you doing?"

"Makeup."

"Why all of a sudden?"

"Hmm, because the captain told me to?"

I couldn't figure out Han Sooyoung's intentions at all.

Why did you make me do that? Do I look so ugly? Or did the 'Ugliest King' effect activate while I was getting the Kim Dokja fragments?

I stared blankly at my face reflected in the mirror. The face in the mirror that I hadn't seen in a long time felt unfamiliar.

Since I had acquired a large quantity of Kim Dokja, my face had become much closer to Kim Dokja than Cheon Inho.

Lee Seolhwa, who had been observing my expression, opened her mouth.

"You look a lot like him."

"Because I'm an avatar."

Without realizing it, A self-deprecating remark. However, Lee Seolhwa tilted her head and smiled as if she had not read my feelings at all.

"Even avatars change their impressions slightly depending on what kind of memories they receive."

It was the first time I heard that story.

Well, Han Sooyoung of the 1,863rd round was more skilled at using [Avatars] than anyone else.

The colleagues who spent time with her might be able to discern the subtle differences.

"What kind of 'avatar' do I look like?"

"Well..."

She added while cutting my bangs that had grown out a lot.

"I can see that you are someone who neglects self-care."

Self-care.

I smiled bitterly for no reason. I had forgotten for quite some time that such a combination of words was possible.

"Isn't that a luxury in this world?"

"The captain said that at first too. Until Namwoon went without washing for over two months."

I suddenly remembered that everyone I met after entering the base had clean faces.

"The captain said that no matter how ruined the world is, we sometimes need to maintain a luxurious lifestyle if we want to exist as humans."

"..."

"Well, it sounds like she just said that for Namwoon to wash."

Lee Seolhwa hummed as she took care of my hair. She cut off my messy hair and trimmed my eyebrows.

"You're good with your hands."

"My hobby is touching up children's hair."

I never thought Lee Seolhwa would have such a hobby.

So Kim Namwoon and Lee Jihye's hair were all Lee Seolhwa's creations.

"When I was young, I wanted to work in the beauty industry."

"Why didn't you?"

"Well, it's an obvious reason. My parents were against it."

The general picture was drawn.

I forgot which round it was, but I remembered reading that Lee Seolhwa graduated from medical school.

"What about Dokja-ssi?"

"Yes?"

"What did Dokja-ssi do before the scenario started?"

"Oh, I was... a writer."

"You're just like our captain."

I smiled bitterly. Can I say that I'm 'just like' Han Sooyoung?

The styling was finished with the sound of the hair dryer ringing in my ears.

"Okay, done!"

Lee Seolhwa looked into the mirror with a satisfied smile.

"Look, it's much better than before, right?"

It's definitely Kim Dokja's face, but it's subtly different from before. It felt like my impression had come alive.

Lee Seolhwa looked at my face carefully and added with a smile.

"Looking at it like this, it looks like a different person."

I also looked at my face quietly and nodded.

"Thank you."

"Then shall we move?"

Lee Seolhwa personally pushed the wheelchair and guided me to another floor. I thought I would head to the penthouse office, but unexpectedly, I arrived at a large lobby on the 4th floor of the base.

"I haven't been here many times either. The captain seems to be in a good mood."

As Lee Seolhwa muttered as if she was jealous, the guard waiting at the lobby entrance let me in.

[The 'Soundwave Blocking' skill is activated in the area.]

[The 'Interference Screen' skill is activated in the area.]

…

After passing through the strict security system and narrow entrance, a small living room appeared. The living room, which had a more simple feel than the penthouse office, had a sense of life everywhere.

I realized something for a moment.

This was Han Sooyoung's 'real home.'

The sound of boiling water coming from somewhere, a smell that made my mouth water even though I had just eaten.

Han Sooyoung was boiling ramen in the makeshift kitchen.

"Oh, you're here?"

She must have been reading a book until then, because there was a book with a folded spine on the kitchen table.

『Recorders and Old Thoughts』.

It was a book I had never seen before.

"Do you live here?"

"Yeah."

"What about the penthouse?"

"I can't sleep in a place that's too big."

"There's a chef downstairs, so why ramen?"

Instant ramen.

It was amazing that something like that still existed in this world.

Is it sold at the 'Dokkaebi Bag'?

"If you're going to eat it too, I’ll boil two."

"Then... Let’s just taste it."

"What about eggs?"

"I tend to put them in."

"What about green onions?"

"It would be nice if there were some."

"What about kimchi?"

"Is there something like that?"

As I heard the sound of eggs breaking, I felt as if I had gone back to before the scenarios had started.

If the scenarios hadn’t started, if Han Sooyoung and I had happened to meet in the same worldline… what would we have talked about?

"Your hair looks good together."

"Seolhwa-ssi touched it."

"You looked happy with Lee Seolhwa."

"Were you watching?"

Han Sooyoung didn’t answer and put kimchi on a small piece of paper and handed it over. I picked up a piece with my chopsticks and tried it. It was definitely the kimchi I knew.

"How are you feeling?"

"I’ve recovered a lot."

I was slowly regaining sensation in my lower body. I thought I could get up if I pushed myself a little harder.

Soon, a bowl of well-cooked ramen was placed in front of me. I swallowed without realizing it. Han Sooyoung said, perhaps sensing my state of mind.

"Eat."

I picked up a chopstick without hesitation. The moment I filled my mouth with the moderately chewy noodles, an ecstatic sensation captured the tip of my tongue.

How long has it been since I ate ramen?

I don't know if I can say this, but it was as moving as the first time I ate Yoo Joonghyuk's cooking.

They say that the taste you know is the scariest.

"Is it delicious?"

"It is delicious."

We ate ramen in a quiet silence.

"Do you eat ramen every day?"

"Not every day, but maybe once every two days?"

"It's not good for your health."

"You're saying the same thing as Lee Hyunsung."

Han Sooyoung laughed as she said that.

It was the first time I saw her laugh so clearly, so I blankly stared at her for a moment before going back to eating the ramen.

"There's something I need to apologize for."

"An apology?"

"When you fell asleep, in your incarnation, I saw your stories."

Han Sooyoung handed me water as I coughed.

"I didn't try to see it on purpose. Really."

Han Sooyoung's words must be true.

I was hit by the attack of the 'Divine Being of the Other World' and collapsed, so it wouldn't have been strange if she had confirmed some of my stories while healing me.

The problem is how much of my stories she's seen...

If she's seen things she shouldn't have seen, then I've caused a great deal of damage to the worldview of the main story just by existing.

"How much have you seen?"

"That you come from a very unique worldline."

"And?"

"That you're not just an 'avatar'."

My heart felt cold. All sorts of thoughts came and went in my head.

I wonder if it's okay. Maybe Han Sooyoung found out information she shouldn't know.

Whether she knew what I was thinking or not, Han Sooyoung spoke while cracking the half-broken egg with her chopsticks.

"It's not easy to endure. The fact that there is another me besides me."

The sentence flowed naturally like cracking an egg. Perhaps Han Sooyoung in front of me was the one who understood such a life better than anyone else.

For a moment, I was overcome with the desire to tell her everything I knew.

"Am I real or fake? Who am I, and how much of me am I? Are my memories truly mine?"

Maybe I could change this messed-up story that I ruined.

Maybe I could bring Kim Dokja back to this world that has lost him.

"Kim Dokja."

"Why do you call me Kim Dokja?"

"What do you think determines existence?"

I hesitated, unable to answer the sudden question right away. However, Han Sooyoung didn't seem to be waiting for my answer in the first place.

"I think it's actions."

Actions.

"The actions we choose at crucial moments. Those actions pile up and become history, and history becomes a story."

And the story again determines who we are.

"In that sense, I thought you were Kim Dokja. That’s why I’m calling you Kim Dokja."

I didn’t know what to say, so I lowered my head for a moment.

"What’s that expression? Are you happy or sad?"

"Both."

Han Sooyoung smiled bitterly.

"You asked me to send you back to your worldline."

"Yes."

"Do you really want to go back?"

"I have to go back."

"You have to go back."

Han Sooyoung repeated that answer as if it was funny.

"In the worldline you lived in, you must have risked your life countless times for the people you cherished. You must have constantly created things you had to protect and obsessively protected them. That must have been how you, and how Kim Dokja, existed as Kim Dokja."

I couldn’t say anything.

"But you know. Will you be able to be happy in the ending of a story made that way?"

Happiness.

I flinched involuntarily at the unfamiliar word I had never thought of.

"What choice will a being who can only feel useful by saving someone make when there is nothing left to save?"

A faint shiver ran down my spine.

For a moment, such a thought occurred to me.

I wondered if she already knew everything, what had happened to Kim Dokja, or if she had anticipated everything.

Han Sooyoung put down her chopsticks and stood up, saying,

"You can still choose your ending."

Before I could even ask what that meant, Han Sooyoung started pushing my wheelchair.

She crossed the living room and headed toward the balcony. When she opened the balcony window, the incarnations waiting under Gwanghwamun all looked up at us.

"Oh—!"

"They're finally out!"

Along with the commotion, people's cheers could be heard from below the balcony.

I asked, a little flustered.

"Why are all these people gathered here?"

Han Sooyoung waved at them and answered.

"I called them. I wanted to introduce you to the people."

"So why..."

"You don't have a scenario yet."

Han Sooyoung added with a grin.

"There are several ways to get a scenario."

There were incarnations here, and the constellations they had contracted with.

In other words, Han Sooyoung is now.

[The constellation, 'Maritime War God', admires your spirit.]

[The constellation, 'Bald General of Justice', asks if that man is really the hero who protected Gwanghwamun.]

[The constellation, 'Abyssal Black Flame Dragon', likes your hairstyle.]

[A very small number of constellations say that you look more neat than they thought.]

She wants to imprint my existence on the constellations of the last scenario.

[All the constellations of the Korean Peninsula are looking at you.]

The last scenario.

The few stars left in this world were focused on me. Following the desires of the stars, I could hear the faint sound of probability moving.

[The Management Bureau acknowledges your contribution in this scenario.]

[You will be assigned a new scenario.]

The moment I heard the message echoing in my head, I thought I knew why Han Sooyoung had dressed me up and why she had called me to this place.

"You don’t have to save anyone anymore. You don’t have to live as the Demon King of Salvation. You don’t have to become the Kim Dokja that people want."

Han Sooyoung was now showing me her world.

A world nearing its end.

Before the end of that story, Han Sooyoung was telling me.

"You are one here."

That there is a place for me in this world too. No, maybe this is the world where I can exist as my 'real me'.

"You don’t necessarily have to see the 'ending' in the worldline you lived in. So—"

Han Sooyoung’s hand was faintly shaking. With her hand firmly wrapped around my shoulder, Han Sooyoung said.

"This time, let’s see the ending of this world together."