891 Episode 49 tls123 (1)

「Do you think there is anything more lonely than knowing the future?」

—Anna Croft, the Prophet

\*

If asked to choose a scene from her childhood that could be the introduction to a novel, Han Sooyoung couldn’t help but think of that scene.

"Wake up."

The one who said those words was the 'uncle' who took care of the young Han Sooyoung.

The young Han Sooyoung was the only one who called him uncle. Her father called him a 'manager' and her mother called him a 'housekeeper'.

"No one will protect you."

He made Han Sooyoung’s breakfast at 8 a.m. He was such a good cook that Han Sooyoung never missed a single breakfast he made.

"Is this your country’s food?"

"It’s similar."

Han Sooyoung asked, looking back and forth between the pad thai and banh mi he had made.

"Pad Thai is Thai food, right?"

"That's right."

"Banh Mi is Vietnamese food."

"That's right."

Han Sooyoung didn't ask any more questions. She wouldn't know just by looking at it. Maybe her uncle's mother is Thai and his father is Vietnamese.

Just like her mother is a teacher and her father is a member of the National Assembly.

Her uncle also had a peculiar habit. After doing the washing machine, he would do strange movements by himself in the living room.

"What is that?"

"Baekbo Shin Kwon."

Her uncle answered in a tone like an AI translator and repeated the strange movements.

"You have to be proficient in various martial arts to survive."

In fact, he knew various martial arts other than Baekbo Shin Kwon.

Han Sooyoung imitated her uncle's posture and asked.

"But is there any use for this? Our country has pretty good security."

"If you learn it, you'll use it someday."

My uncle was a man who firmly believed that an apocalypse would come to this world someday.

"A new world needs new rules."

Now in her fading memory, Han Sooyoung followed her uncle's movements diligently. After repeating the movements and finishing dinner, her uncle would always leave work with the following greeting.

"No matter what happens, don't give up."

Han Sooyoung thought that greeting was hilarious. If she had known that her uncle would soon be replaced by her aunt, Han Sooyoung would have talked more with her uncle.

"Han Sooyoung."

After a long silence, her uncle grabbed Han Sooyoung's small head and said this.

"The apocalypse is coming."

"You always say that."

"It really will come."

"Yes, yes. I understand."

"No matter what happens, don't give up."

What was the last thing she said to her uncle? Her memories after that are unclear. Since it happened when she was so young, it was probably natural. Still, when she thinks back, there were a few things she remembered.

The last day her uncle worked, several valuables disappeared from the house. Her uncle used the Baekbo Shinkwon he had taught her right before he was caught by the police. Rumors that he had gone to prison. Rumors that he had escaped from prison. Rumors that he had threatened to reveal the secrets of his father, who was a member of the National Assembly, and had been forcibly repatriated to his home country.

Where did her uncle end up?

Once, when she visited her mother on the weekend, she asked about her uncle.

Her mother tilted her head for a moment at her question and then asked back,

"What on earth are you talking about?"

Han Sooyoung frowned and talked about her uncle. She talked about the breakfast he had made her, the Baekbo Shinkwon he had taught her, and the impending apocalypse.

Her mother took Han Sooyoung to a psychiatrist. The doctor who had often prescribed propofol to her mother was impressed after hearing Han Sooyoung's story.

"Your daughter seems to have an imaginary friend."

That couldn't be true. Her uncle definitely existed. He made her breakfast.

He told her about a monster that looked like a dog, a monster with long horns, and a dragon that led the world to its end.

He also told her about the constellations. When he talked about the constellations, her uncle would look up at the sky with deep eyes.

All of that couldn't have been fake. No one could have forgotten someone like that. But people collectively didn't believe her as if they had taken propofol.

The only one who remembered him was young Han Sooyoung, and so her uncle remained an imaginary friend that Han Sooyoung had created.

Not long after that, Han Sooyoung began writing a novel.

When she woke up from a deep sleep, she felt a deep sense of fatigue and ideas welled up. Han Sooyoung wrote everything that came to mind into a novel.

In the novel, there was the apocalypse that her uncle had spoken of. The main character of that world was a regressor. A regressor who fought alone against the destruction of the world.

"What was your uncle's name?"

Han Sooyoung couldn’t answer the psychiatrist’s question properly. Instead, Han Sooyoung said the name that most closely resembled her memory.

"Yoo Junhyun."

Yoo Junhyun gathers his colleagues and struggles with life in endless regression.

He doesn’t give up.

What if her uncle wasn’t just her imagination, what if her uncle really lived somewhere in this world?

In fact, if his home country wasn’t this world but another world, in a sense, the novel was written to overcome Han Sooyoung’s childhood.

Every time Yoo Junhyun’s regression was repeated, the uncle in her memory became blurred. Her childhood memories turned gray, and Han Sooyoung gradually became an adult.

One day, while she was writing the novel.

—Isn’t this a plagiarism of 'Three Ways to Survive in a Ruined World'?

She read a strange comment.

\*

When she came to her senses, Han Sooyoung realized that it was all a dream.

Tsk tsk tsk. As the faint spark illuminated the surroundings, the incarnation bodies of her colleagues on the verge of death came into view.

[Exclusive skill, 'Special Preservation', is activated.]

To be exact, they were the incarnation bodies of her colleagues who were frozen in a state just before death.

Kim Namwoon with both arms ripped off. Lee Hyunsung with a large hole in his stomach. Lee Jihye with critical injuries to her major organs. Lee Seolhwa, who was barely breathing after being burned beyond recognition, and Shin Yoosoung, whose vital signs had weakened after a strong blow to the head.

In addition to them, all of the colleagues of <Han Sooyoung Corporation> were stuffed and trapped in pale flasks.

As if time had stopped just before death.

Han Sooyoung looked at her colleagues with her piercing eyes and thought about her 'uncle' once more.

Perhaps the existence of an 'uncle' was a memory that was reassembled after she became an adult—a memory created after she met Yoo Joonghyuk, for example. Because stories tend to flow towards 'empty spaces'.

"Why is it Yoo Joonghyuk and not Yoo Joonhyun?"

Yoo Joonhyun in her memories says.

「"No matter what happens, don't give up."」

"How can you not give up in a situation like this?"

Mumbling in a tone that made it unclear who she was talking to, Han Sooyoung slowly started typing on the keyboard.

「Lee Hyunsung thought. I need training. I need painful and harsh training to stop my thoughts from continuing.」

「Shin Yoosoung asked worriedly, "But is it okay to just leave that ahjussi alone?"」

「Lee Jihye frowned. "Then what are we going to do? Seolhwa took him away."」

「Kim Namwoon shook his head. "I told you I didn't like that guy in the first place.」

「Lee Seolhwa shouted. "Dokja-ssi! Where are you!"」

All of [Avatar]'s actions were being created at her fingertips. The created sentences flowed through the story link extending from her and directly toward her colleagues stuffed in the flask.

The story of [Avatar] she wrote will one day become her colleagues' memories. So that they can reminisce about this moment together when they are resurrected in the distant future.

This is her world where she can see the ending without losing anyone.

「Avatar World.」

Han Sooyoung thought she knew why she had been dreaming about her 'uncle'.

Perhaps the uncle in her memory was the first avatar she had created. A strong avatar that would comfort her loneliness and protect her childhood.

The tips of her fingers began to tingle a little. Her vision felt dizzy with a slight chill. This had been happening often recently.

Suddenly, her figure was reflected on the flask fragments. Her figure was much smaller than before.

[Your incarnation body has reached its limit.]

Now, both body and mind were at the limit.

Her story was losing its center and gradually scattering.

But she had to hold on. At least until the end of this story, until the scenario ended.

Tsutsutsut.

Han Sooyoung instinctively put her hand into her bosom. What she was holding in her hand was a small notebook.

A note left by Kim Dokja, who had visited the 1863rd round.

「"Don't throw it away, and look at it whenever you have time."」

Han Sooyoung read it.

For some reason, whenever she read that notebook, the aftermath that threatened her would calm down.

However, that effect had been weakening a little recently.

A faint spark flew from the surface of the notebook, which had been scorched by the probability spark.

"Damn it."

A half-happy mutter.

"I really didn't plagiarize."

Soon, the notebook fell from her hand with a spark. Han Sooyoung began to nod off.

Then, signs of the probability aftershock began to appear all over her body. The world she had maintained for so long was collapsing.

At that moment, a door opened somewhere and someone's voice was heard.

"I know."

Han Sooyoung looked up at the man who opened the door and came in with a hazy consciousness.

She couldn't tell if this was a dream or not. Maybe she had created another 'imaginary friend'. In this world where only she and her avatar remained, she couldn't bear the extreme loneliness, so she created another 'uncle'.

The uncle nodded as if he understood her feelings.

"That's enough."

The uncle said while holding the half-collapsed Han Sooyoung in his arms and laying her down.

"I'll write from now on."

The uncle began to tell a story.

Like when she was a child, Han Sooyoung leaned against the soft sofa and listened to her uncle's story. Even though she knew that she shouldn't do this, even though she knew that if she didn't write, the world would collapse, Han Sooyoung couldn't help but listen.

Maybe it was because she had been writing for so long. Perhaps it was because she wanted to be a reader, listening to another story made by someone else, even if only for a moment. It was a story of a reader. A story of a reader who loved novels more than anyone else. A story about meeting characters from a novel he likes and meeting the author of a novel that he likes. A story about going on an adventure together.

A story about a man who loved that story so much that he became the story itself.

"That story."

Han Sooyoung asked.

"Is it okay for you to tell it to me?"

The uncle thought for a moment and answered.

"Yes."

Han Sooyoung continued to listen to the story with her eyes closed.

As the story continued, the aftershock gradually disappeared.

That day, Han Sooyoung had a dream.

It was a dream about meeting a man she had wanted to meet for a long time.

\*

When she opened her eyes the next day, Han Sooyoung was looking at me.

"Kim Dokja, do you know what you did?"

On a devastated world where all the avatars had disappeared, she spoke to me with an expression that did not contain any lies.

"I will not become tIs123.”