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\*\*CHAPTER START\*\*  
  
<h1>Solo Leveling - Chapter 29</h1>  
  
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<p>Chapter 29</p>  
  
<p>Thrashing in pain is easy, but the missed opportunity won’t return once it’s gone. If you lose consciousness, it’s over.</p>  
  
<p>‘...178, 179, 180!’</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo, who had been waiting for three minutes from the start, finally revealed his hidden trump card. ‘Accept Reward 1!’</p>  
  
<p>He deliberately chose not to accept the Daily Quest Reward 1 earlier, but now he accepted it.</p>  
  
<p>[Reward 1. Status Recovery has been applied.]</p>  
  
<p>Whoosh!</p>  
  
<p>A blue light enveloped his entire body, and his health was instantly restored.</p>  
  
<p>[Health: 3,602/3,602]</p>  
  
<p>His injured arm was also back to normal.</p>  
  
<p>‘This is my chance!’</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo’s eyes gleamed.</p>  
  
<p>In this close proximity, even the most agile creature wouldn’t be able to evade. Jin-Woo swiftly wrapped his left arm around Cerberus’s neck and stabbed the center of its neck with ‘Kasaka’s Venom Fang.’</p>  
  
<p>Stab! Stab! Stab!</p>  
  
<p>Cerberus, perhaps out of its enraged state, began to struggle to break free from Jin-Woo’s grasp.</p>  
  
<p>\*Growl! Snarl! Bark! Bark!\*</p>  
  
<p>But Jin-Woo didn’t let go, tightening his grip with all his strength. The more Cerberus struggled, the more he tightened his hold on its neck.</p>  
  
<p>Meanwhile, his dagger repeatedly pierced Cerberus’s neck.</p>  
  
<p>Stab! Stab! Stab!</p>  
  
<p>\*Snarl! Yelp! Whine!\*</p>  
  
<p>Cerberus made a final desperate attempt to bite Jin-Woo, but the battle was already over.</p>  
  
<p>Stab! Stab!</p>  
  
<p>\*Bark! Growl!\*</p>  
  
<p>Kasaka’s Venom Fang slid down from Cerberus’s neck to its chest.</p>  
  
<p>Stab! Stab! Stab!</p>  
  
<p>Cerberus’s resistance visibly weakened.</p>  
  
<p>\*Whine…\*</p>  
  
<p>Finally, Cerberus’s head slumped to the side.</p>  
  
<p>Ding!</p>  
  
<p>[You have defeated Cerberus, the Gatekeeper of Hell.]</p>  
  
<p>[Your level has increased!]</p>  
  
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<p>[Your level has increased!]</p>  
  
<p>In an instant, his level increased by four. It was that tough of a battle.</p>  
  
<p>Only after witnessing Cerberus’s limbs go limp did Jin-Woo release its neck.</p>  
  
<p>Cerberus’s body collapsed lifelessly to the ground.</p>  
  
<p>Thud.</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo leaned on his knees.</p>  
  
<p>“Phew.”</p>  
  
<p>He finally let out a sigh of relief.</p>  
  
<p>A monster that could use skills… If he hadn’t prepared his trump card, he would’ve been finished without a doubt. Just thinking about it sent shivers down his spine.</p>  
  
<p>‘Right… the items.’</p>  
  
<p>Would the rewards be worth the struggle?</p>  
  
<p>After catching his breath, Jin-Woo reached out to Cerberus’s body.</p>  
  
<p>Ding!</p>  
  
<p>[Item: Gatekeeper’s Necklace] has been found. Would you like to acquire it?</p>  
  
<p>[Item: Gate Key] has been found. Would you like to acquire it?</p>  
  
<p>[Item: Cerberus’s Fang] has been found. Would you like to acquire it?</p>  
  
<p>‘Acquire all.’</p>  
  
<p>A steel necklace that had been around Cerberus’s neck, a gray key, and three fangs appeared on the ground.</p>  
  
<p>[Item: Gatekeeper’s Necklace]</p>  
  
<p>Acquisition Difficulty: A</p>  
  
<p>Type: Necklace</p>  
  
<p>Agility +20, Senses +20</p>  
  
<p>[Item: Gate Key]</p>  
  
<p>Acquisition Difficulty: A</p>  
  
<p>Type: Key</p>  
  
<p>A key that can open the gates of the Demon Castle. You must defeat the Gatekeeper to obtain it.</p>  
  
<p>[Item: Cerberus’s Fang]</p>  
  
<p>Acquisition Difficulty: None</p>  
  
<p>Type: Miscellaneous Item</p>  
  
<p>“Wow.”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo’s eyes widened.</p>  
  
<p>‘It increases Agility and Senses by 20 points each?’</p>  
  
<p>The necklace’s stats were jaw-droppingly good. Its acquisition difficulty was also A-rank, the highest he’d seen so far.</p>  
  
<p>‘Well, I did struggle quite a bit to get it…’</p>  
  
<p>It couldn’t possibly have a low difficulty.</p>  
  
<p>But when he actually tried to put the necklace on, he hesitated. The circular metal band with sporadic spikes looked, no matter how you looked at it, exactly like a dog collar.</p>  
  
<p>“Hmm…”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo closed his eyes, deep in thought, but eventually decided to give it a try. He brought the necklace to his neck.</p>  
  
<p>A message popped up.</p>  
  
<p>Ding!</p>  
  
<p>[Would you like to equip ‘Item: Gatekeeper’s Necklace’?]</p>  
  
<p>After a moment of hesitation, Jin-Woo reluctantly answered, “...Sure.”</p>  
  
<p>The necklace disappeared in an instant.</p>  
  
<p>[You have equipped ‘Item: Gatekeeper’s Necklace.’]</p>  
  
<p>“Huh?”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo quickly opened his Stat Window.</p>  
  
<p>[Stats]</p>  
  
<p>Strength: 60, Health: 39, Agility: 80, Intelligence: 37, Senses: 67</p>  
  
<p>(Available Stat Points: 0)</p>  
  
<p>Physical Damage Reduction: 20%</p>  
  
<p>“Holy cow!”</p>  
  
<p>His Agility and Senses had indeed increased by 20 points each. The item’s effects were applied as promised. It seemed he didn’t have to visibly wear the item for its effects to work. He felt relieved that he wouldn’t have to walk around with a dog collar.</p>  
  
<p>‘Next, the fangs.’</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo called up the Shop. He sold the miscellaneous item, ‘Cerberus’s Fang,’ and was given 150,000 gold per fang. He had three fangs in total, earning him 450,000 gold.</p>  
  
<p>[Current Gold: 562,362]</p>  
  
<p>‘Why is this junk item so expensive?’</p>  
  
<p>It was a good indicator of the dungeon’s difficulty. It meant the Demon Castle was that much harder. But it wasn’t bad news. In just one monster kill, he had earned more than four times what he made grinding in the Hapjeong Station Instant Dungeon all day.</p>  
  
<p>If he kept earning gold at this rate, buying items worth tens of millions from the Shop wouldn’t be a distant dream.</p>  
  
<p>‘If I can clear this place, that is…’</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo looked up at the burning tower.</p>  
  
<p>\*\*\*Whoosh!\*\*\*</p>  
  
<p>The upper part was shrouded in a thick mist. What lay inside could only be known by entering.</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo shook his head. ‘It’s not time yet.’</p>  
  
<p>Even after using the title buff and Quest Reward as a trick, he had barely managed to defeat the guard at the entrance. There was no telling what dangers lurked beyond the gate. Now was the time to retreat.</p>  
  
<p>But one thing was certain. The ‘Demon Castle Key’ was indeed what he had been looking for, just as the description said. The Blessed Reward hadn’t been wrong.</p>  
  
<p>Leveling up, items, and gold—everything was here. When the right time came, he would be able to obtain it all. Just not today.</p>  
  
<p>Reluctantly, he stored the gray key in his inventory.</p>  
  
<p>‘I’ll be back.’</p>  
  
<p>Soon, without fail. Jin-Woo turned around with a smile.</p>  
  
<p>3. Coincidence</p>  
  
<p>A few quiet days passed. Yoo Jin-Ho called once a day to report on the progress. Exactly three calls had come in since the day after their last meeting.</p>  
  
<p>-Hyung-nim! It’s me, Yoo Jin-Ho.</p>  
  
<p>“Get to the point.”</p>  
  
<p>-Yes, hyung-nim.</p>  
  
<p>It seemed things were going smoothly. He kept repeating that the team members were almost fully assembled and asked for just a bit more patience.</p>  
  
<p>‘He must be really scared of me leaving.’</p>  
  
<p>But Jin-Woo couldn’t just sit around and wait for the team to be complete. So, he logged into the Hunter Website again today.</p>  
  
<p>He had been searching for a private raid party for a while, but as expected, no team was willing to accept an E-rank Hunter. The first day had just been good luck. Even if Hwang Dong-Seok had ulterior motives, at least he had managed to join a private raid party.</p>  
  
<p>‘Thanks to that, I earned money, leveled up, and even got a new skill.’</p>  
  
<p>Should he thank Hwang Dong-Seok for that? Jin-Woo chuckled. Honestly, he was in the mood to meet even the most shameless Hunters now.</p>  
  
<p>No private raid parties were available, no cooperation requests from the Association, and no Instant Dungeon Keys appeared. He was spending his time idly.</p>  
  
<p>Gurgle. ‘Is it already time for a meal?’</p>  
  
<p>While browsing the recruitment board, Jin-Woo felt hungry and headed to the kitchen.</p>  
  
<p>Clank. He opened the fridge, but it was empty.</p>  
  
<p>‘…’</p>  
  
<p>He had been so busy with various things lately that he had neglected grocery shopping for days. Maybe he should go shopping today.</p>  
  
<p>Yawning, Jin-Woo closed the fridge door.</p>  
  
<p>One of the few perks of the apartment he lived in now was its proximity to a large supermarket.</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo left the house in casual attire. It took him only 10 minutes to reach the store.</p>  
  
<p>Once inside, the spacious interior came into view.</p>  
  
<p>It seemed it wasn’t sale season, as the store was quieter than he expected. Grabbing a basket, he slowly walked around.</p>  
  
<p>Since his mother had been hospitalized, Jin-Woo had taken on the role of the head of the household and had grown relatively accustomed to chores like grocery shopping.</p>  
  
<p>‘There’s not much to buy today.’</p>  
  
<p>As he was pondering what to make for dinner, staring at the products on display, a familiar voice called out to him.</p>  
  
<p>“You there, feeling better now?”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo turned around. ‘Who is it?’</p>  
  
<p>The high Senses stat had already alerted him to the presence of a Hunter nearby. But since this was a public place frequented by many people, including Hunters doing their shopping, he hadn’t paid much attention. He hadn’t expected the Hunter to approach him, let alone recognize him.</p>  
  
<p>“Mr. Song?”</p>  
  
<p>Jin-Woo’s face lit up with recognition.</p>  
  
<p>Mr. Song, Song Chi-Yeol, looked at Jin-Woo with a mix of surprise and delight.</p>  
  
<p>“I heard rumors that you were safe, but seeing you in person is hard to believe.”</p>  
  
<p>Song Chi-Yeol’s expression was filled with emotion.</p>  
  
<p>Feeling a bit awkward under Song Chi-Yeol’s intense gaze, Jin-Woo scratched his temple.</p>  
  
<p>Song Chi-Yeol continued, “I should’ve gone to see Mr. Sung sooner, but the Association kept their mouths shut, so I couldn’t get any news about Mr. Sung. Did you know Ms. Joo-Hee has been anxiously waiting for word from you?”</p>  
  
<p>“Ms. Joo-Hee?”</p>  
  
<p>“Yes. She said she quit being a Hunter, but last week, she came to the raid site just to see you.”</p>  
  
<p>“Last week…?”</p>  
  
<p>Listening to Mr. Song’s story, it seemed that coincidentally, on the day Jin-Woo joined Hwang Dong-Seok’s team, there had been a raid organized by the Association.</p>  
  
<p>‘So, that’s why the Association has been quiet these past few days.’</p>  
  
<p>It wasn’t that the Association hadn’t contacted him; it was that he hadn’t been available when they did. A small mystery was solved.</p>  
  
<p>Song Chi-Yeol continued to examine Jin-Woo with a look of disbelief. ‘But didn’t Mr. Sung used to be this tall? His legs shouldn’t be fully healed yet.’</p>  
  
<p>Song Chi-Yeol’s gaze drifted downward, and his eyes widened.</p>  
  
<p>“You… your legs?”</p>  
  
\*\*CHAPTER END\*\*  
  
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