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\*\*CHAPTER START\*\*  
  
<h1>Solo Leveling - Chapter 5</h1>  
  
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<p>Chapter 5</p>  
<p>All the Hunters heard Jin-Woo’s voice.</p>  
<p>"-!"</p>  
<p>"Instruments?"</p>  
<p>Hope flickered in the eyes of the Hunters.</p>  
<p>Unlike when they were told to kneel, the Hunters moved quickly this time.</p>  
<p>Of course, if Jin-Woo was wrong, they would be killed the moment they approached the statues holding the instruments.</p>  
<p>But at this moment, no one doubted Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>Mr. Song was the first to arrive in front of the statue holding an instrument.</p>  
<p>"..."</p>  
<p>Mr. Song steadied his breathing and raised his head.</p>  
<p>Then, as if by magic, the statue holding the harp began to move its fingers.</p>  
<p>\*Twang~ Twang~\*</p>  
<p>The melody was beautiful.</p>  
<p>"It’s true!"</p>  
<p>"Everyone, to the statues with instruments!"</p>  
<p>The Hunters scrambled towards the nearby statues.</p>  
<p>The statue holding the trumpet blew into it, the one with the flute began to play, and the one with the lyre plucked its strings.</p>  
<p>"Huff, huff, huff."</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim, who was on the verge of collapse, dropped to his knees in front of the statue holding the bouzouki.</p>  
<p>\*Ding~ Ding~\*</p>  
<p>As the statue began to play, the Divine Statue chasing Mr. Kim stopped in its tracks.</p>  
<p>Overwhelmed with emotion, Mr. Kim knelt and shed thick tears.</p>  
<p>"Ugh... Ugh..."</p>  
<p>The Divine Statue turned around sharply.</p>  
<p>It quickly found its next prey.</p>  
<p>"Damn it."</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo cursed as his eyes met the Divine Statue’s.</p>  
<p>His heart began to pound as if it would burst.</p>  
<p>His back was already soaked in cold sweat.</p>  
<p>'Why! Why here!'</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo glared resentfully at the statue in front of him.</p>  
<p>The statue holding the drum showed no signs of moving.</p>  
<p>\*Thud, thud, thud!\*</p>  
<p>The Divine Statue closed the distance at a terrifying speed.</p>  
<p>The gap between the Divine Statue and Jin-Woo, which had been almost end to end, was gradually shrinking to zero.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo swallowed hard.</p>  
<p>'Could it be that the statue isn’t playing because Joo-Hee and I are both under the same statue?'</p>  
<p>He couldn’t help but think that.</p>  
<p>After all, the statues where the others stood were all playing without any issues.</p>  
<p>'There’s no time to think.'</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo put Joo-Hee down and prepared to run somewhere else.</p>  
<p>"Jin-Woo..."</p>  
<p>Terrified, Joo-Hee grabbed Jin-Woo’s sleeve.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo whispered calmly into her ear.</p>  
<p>"If we stay together, we’ll both die."</p>  
<p>Tears began to well up in Joo-Hee’s eyes.</p>  
<p>The fingers holding his sleeve trembled.</p>  
<p>But there was no time to explain.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo carefully removed her hand and ran blindly in the opposite direction.</p>  
<p>\*Thud, thud, thud.\*</p>  
<p>Looking back, he saw the statue behind Joo-Hee slowly begin to beat the drum.</p>  
<p>'Thank goodness.'</p>  
<p>Now there was only one task left.</p>  
<p>To safely run to another statue!</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo was the only one not yet under the protection of a statue.</p>  
<p>Naturally, all the Divine Statue’s anger was focused on him.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo desperately dodged the house-sized feet of the Divine Statue as he ran across the room.</p>  
<p>\*Thud!\*</p>  
<p>\*Thud!\*</p>  
<p>Despite tripping and rolling, Jin-Woo barely managed to avoid being crushed by the Divine Statue’s feet.</p>  
<p>"Huff, huff."</p>  
<p>Even though he was only an E-rank, the physical abilities of a combat Hunter came in handy at times like this.</p>  
<p>'Just a little more, just a little more!'</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo focused on the Divine Statue’s movements and pushed his legs harder.</p>  
<p>His speed increased.</p>  
<p>He was only a few steps away from the statue.</p>  
<p>"Not that one!"</p>  
<p>Mr. Song shouted.</p>  
<p>Startled, Jin-Woo turned his head to look ahead.</p>  
<p>"Ah!"</p>  
<p>Wasn’t that a statue holding an instrument?</p>  
<p>Only then did he realize that what he had mistaken for an instrument from a distance was actually a shield.</p>  
<p>The statue mercilessly slammed its shield down.</p>  
<p>"Huff!"</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo flung his body to the side.</p>  
<p>"Kyaaah!"</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee screamed.</p>  
<p>As Jin-Woo rolled across the floor, he looked up to see the Divine Statue right in front of him.</p>  
<p>"One hurdle after another..."</p>  
<p>Blood trickled into his eyes from a cut on his forehead, blurring his vision.</p>  
<p>His field of view narrowed, and he couldn’t see far ahead clearly.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s head moved rapidly from side to side.</p>  
<p>'An instrument, an instrument...'</p>  
<p>But no matter how hard he looked, he couldn’t see a statue holding an instrument nearby.</p>  
<p>The Divine Statue raised its foot toward Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>"Huff!"</p>  
<p>\*Thud!\*</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo flung his body again, narrowly avoiding the Divine Statue’s foot.</p>  
<p>But now, he was truly at his limit.</p>  
<p>He felt intensely dizzy, and strangely, it was hard to keep his balance.</p>  
<p>'Please...'</p>  
<p>If there was a god, he would have prayed.</p>  
<p>Then, Jin-Woo’s eyes fell on a statue holding something that was neither a weapon nor an instrument.</p>  
<p>'What’s that?'</p>  
<p>He placed his last hope on it.</p>  
<p>He crawled across the floor and reached the statue.</p>  
<p>Then, with great effort, he flipped his body to face the direction of the approaching Divine Statue.</p>  
<p>He had no strength left to move.</p>  
<p>"Haah... haah..."</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo faced the oncoming statue, breathing heavily.</p>  
<p>The Divine Statue, annoyed by Jin-Woo’s constant evasions, had a more twisted expression than before.</p>  
<p>The Divine Statue stood directly in front of him.</p>  
<p>With the towering figure blocking his path, Jin-Woo felt suffocated.</p>  
<p>"Haah... haah..."</p>  
<p>Did it think it had him cornered?</p>  
<p>The Divine Statue simply stared down at him.</p>  
<p>'This is the end...'</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo sensed his inevitable death in the Divine Statue’s eyes.</p>  
<p>But then.</p>  
<p>\*Huuu~\*</p>  
<p>A beautiful, otherworldly voice flowed from behind.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo turned his head to look.</p>  
<p>\*Huu, huuu~\*</p>  
<p>As the statue holding a book moved its lips, a sacred song echoed through the chamber.</p>  
<p>\*Huuu, huu~\*</p>  
<p>The Divine Statue’s face gradually returned to its previous expression.</p>  
<p>The twisted muscles of its face smoothed out.</p>  
<p>Once the song and music from the statues ended, the Divine Statue turned away.</p>  
<p>Then, like the other statues, it returned to its original position as if nothing had happened.</p>  
<p>\*Thud!\*</p>  
<p>The sound of the Divine Statue sitting down reverberated through the temple.</p>  
<p>"Haah, haah... Are we safe now?"</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo managed a faint smile.</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee, who had been on the other side, ran towards him.</p>  
<p>"Jin-Woo!"</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee, tears streaming down her face, dropped to her knees beside Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>"What do we do... What do we do..."</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee poured all her remaining Mana into casting healing spells.</p>  
<p>But nothing changed.</p>  
<p>The scattered Hunters began to gather around Jin-Woo one by one.</p>  
<p>Their expressions were uniformly dark.</p>  
<p>"What do we do... Jin-Woo..."</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee continued to sob miserably.</p>  
<p>Why is everyone acting like this?</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo opened his mouth to ask, but his voice wouldn’t come out.</p>  
<p>Unable to do anything else, Jin-Woo forced his creaking upper body to sit up.</p>  
<p>"...?"</p>  
<p>His lower body was a bloody mess.</p>  
<p>Only then did Jin-Woo realize the change that had occurred in his body.</p>  
<p>"Ah..."</p>  
<p>Everything below his right knee was gone.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s gaze shifted to the statue holding the shield.</p>  
<p>He could see bloodstains on the edge of its shield.</p>  
<p>His severed leg lay beneath it.</p>  
<p>\*Drop~ Drop~\*</p>  
<p>Blood began to drip from Joo-Hee’s nose.</p>  
<p>It was a sign that her body had reached its limit.</p>  
<p>Even with the healing magic of a B-rank Hunter, restoring a severed limb was impossible.</p>  
<p>It was like pouring water into a bottomless pot.</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee’s stamina was rapidly depleting.</p>  
<p>"It’s okay... Joo-Hee. That’s enough..."</p>  
<p>"I’ll heal you! I’ll make you better!"</p>  
<p>The Hunters watched the two with somber expressions.</p>  
<p>Out of the 17 people who had entered, only six remained.</p>  
<p>And of those six, two had suffered horrific injuries. Mr. Song had lost an arm, and Jin-Woo had lost a leg.</p>  
<p>Even though they had survived, no one could smile.</p>  
<p>Then, another loud rumble echoed.</p>  
<p>\*Grooooaarrr~!\*</p>  
<p>The center of the temple, marked with a magic circle, suddenly rose.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo knew what was coming.</p>  
<p>'Prove your faith...'</p>  
<p>He had a vague idea of what it meant.</p>  
<p>5. The Final Trial</p>  
<p>The circular magic circle engraved on the temple floor rose to the height of two steps before stopping.</p>  
<p>"An altar..."</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s muttered words caught the attention of the Hunters.</p>  
<p>'An altar?'</p>  
<p>'Did he just say altar...?'</p>  
<p>In the previous two crises, it wasn’t the high-rank Awakened who had saved their lives, but Jin-Woo, whom they had dismissed as an E-rank.</p>  
<p>'If it weren’t for Mr. Sung, we would be...'</p>  
<p>The Hunters all shared the same thought.</p>  
<p>In the current situation, Jin-Woo’s words were a lifeline.</p>  
<p>And the word he casually uttered—'altar'.</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim, quick-witted as ever, grasped the implication.</p>  
<p>"I get it, I get it."</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim drew the sword at his waist.</p>  
<p>Originally, it was meant for slashing Magic Beasts.</p>  
<p>But now, it was needed for a different purpose.</p>  
<p>"Even I, as ignorant as I am, can roughly figure out what’s going on."</p>  
<p>The Hunters swallowed hard as they looked at Mr. Kim’s sharp blade.</p>  
<p>"Hey, Mr. Kim. Why are you suddenly taking out your weapon?"</p>  
<p>"Let’s talk this through, let’s talk."</p>  
<p>With Mr. Song, the highest-ranking member and a C-rank Hunter, severely injured, there was no one among the D-ranks who could stop Mr. Kim, who was quite strong even among them.</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim pointed his sword at the altar.</p>  
<p>"The final commandment, prove your faith. And that altar that suddenly appeared in the center."</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim’s gaze shifted to Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>"In short, we need to offer a sacrifice, right, Mr. Sung?"</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo nodded.</p>  
<p>He thought the same.</p>  
<p>One of the six survivors had to become the sacrifice.</p>  
<p>'That’s probably the final commandment...'</p>  
<p>That was Jin-Woo’s conclusion.</p>  
<p>As he raised his head at the sound of footsteps, he saw Mr. Kim approaching with a dangerous glint in his eyes.</p>  
<p>A bead of sweat rolled down Jin-Woo’s temple.</p>  
<p>"Old man... What are you—?"</p>  
<p>"You just stay quiet!"</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim barked and pointed his sword at Mr. Song, who was sitting beside Jin-Woo, checking his condition.</p>  
<p>"Who was it that dragged us here? Wasn’t it Mr. Song? Then it’s only right that he takes responsibility until the end, right?"</p>  
<p>"Old man!"</p>  
<p>As Jin-Woo tried to rise in indignation, Mr. Song’s hand, rough like tree bark, stopped him.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo turned to look at Mr. Song.</p>  
<p>"..."</p>  
<p>Mr. Song silently shook his head.</p>  
<p>His eyes pleaded with Jin-Woo not to say anything.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo had much he wanted to say but swallowed it all.</p>  
<p>Mr. Song slowly stood up.</p>  
<p>"Mr. Kim is right. I should take responsibility."</p>  
<p>"Now you’re making sense, old man."</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim gestured toward the altar with his sword.</p>  
<p>"If you get it, then move it. Over 10 people have already died because of you."</p>  
  
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\*\*CHAPTER END\*\*