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6

\*\*CHAPTER START\*\*  
  
<h1>Solo Leveling - Chapter 6</h1>  
  
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<p>Among the victims was Mr. Park, who had been close to Mr. Kim.</p>  
<p>Entering the Double Dungeon had been decided by a unanimous vote before they set out, but in Mr. Kim’s mind, which had already lost all reason, the memory of that time had been completely erased. Mr. Song spoke to Mr. Kim.</p>  
<p>“Since you’re willing to go yourself, will you put the knife away?”</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim refused outright.</p>  
<p>“How can I trust you? Stop talking and lead the way.”</p>  
<p>Mr. Song let out a quiet sigh and walked toward the Altar. Mr. Kim followed, keeping his sword pointed at Mr. Song’s back. Jin-Woo bit his lower lip as he watched the two.</p>  
<p>‘It’s not Mr. Song’s fault.’</p>  
<p>It was something everyone had agreed to.</p>  
<p>To shift all the blame onto Mr. Song now that things had gone wrong was an act of cowardice.</p>  
<p>‘But...’</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo didn’t have the strength to stop Mr. Kim.</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim, who was among the top of the D-rank, and Jin-Woo, who was among the weakest of the E-rank.</p>  
<p>The difference in power was clear.</p>  
<p>Moreover, Jin-Woo’s leg was still not fully healed.</p>  
<p>If he confronted Mr. Kim, not only would he be in danger, but Joo-Hee, who was dedicated to treating him, could also be harmed.</p>  
<p>“Damn it.”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo clenched his eyes shut.</p>  
<p>Never before had he resented his own helplessness as much as he did today.</p>  
<p>Meanwhile, Mr. Song stepped onto the Altar.</p>  
<p>\*Whoosh!\*</p>  
<p>Then, a red flame shot up from the outer part of the Altar.</p>  
<p>Everyone swallowed hard and watched intently to see what would happen.</p>  
<p>But nothing happened.</p>  
<p>The only thing that occurred was the appearance of a single flame.</p>  
<p>“...?”</p>  
<p>After waiting for a long time with no change, not only Mr. Kim, who had pushed Mr. Song onto the Altar, but also the others began to panic.</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim turned to Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>“Hey, Mr. Sung. Is this not it?”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo also shook his head.</p>  
<p>“I’m not sure either...”</p>  
<p>He had thought that when the person to be sacrificed stepped onto the Altar, the third commandment, ‘Prove your Faith,’ would be fulfilled.</p>  
<p>‘Wasn’t it demanding a sacrifice?’</p>  
<p>But it wasn’t bad news.</p>  
<p>If it wasn’t demanding a sacrifice, then there was a way to save Mr. Song.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s expression brightened.</p>  
<p>As Jin-Woo tried to stand up, sweating profusely, two nearby Hunters quickly supported him.</p>  
<p>“Please move me over there so I can examine the Altar.”</p>  
<p>“Jin-Woo, your injuries are still...”</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee also stood up to follow Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>Having expended too much Mana, Joo-Hee’s complexion had turned pale.</p>  
<p>Thanks to her efforts, the bleeding and pain had been minimized.</p>  
<p>‘We need to hurry.’</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee’s condition, Mr. Kim’s anger, Mr. Song’s injuries, and the fear of the other Hunters.</p>  
<p>There wasn’t much time left.</p>  
<p>With the support of the Hunters, Jin-Woo arrived at the stairs.</p>  
<p>“Let’s go up to the top of the Altar.”</p>  
<p>The two who were supporting him hesitated for a moment but soon trusted Jin-Woo and stepped up.</p>  
<p>Then, three more flames rose.</p>  
<p>\*Whoosh!\*</p>  
<p>\*Whoosh!\*</p>  
<p>\*Whoosh!\*</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo’s eyes lit up.</p>  
<p>‘It matches the number of people.’</p>  
<p>Mr. Song, Jin-Woo, and the two who had supported Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>The flames rose according to the number of people.</p>  
<p>The four flames were drawing a circle around the outer part of the Altar.</p>  
<p>‘Judging by the spacing between the flames, two more are needed to complete the circle.’</p>  
<p>It seemed that something would start only when all the remaining people came up.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo asked Mr. Song.</p>  
<p>“If we wait here, will other Hunters come to rescue us?”</p>  
<p>Mr. Song shook his head.</p>  
<p>“Today is the seventh day since the Gate appeared. Those things will move before help arrives.”</p>  
<p>“They’ve left this D-rank Gate unattended for too long.”</p>  
<p>“That’s just how the Association works.”</p>  
<p>A Gate fully opens after seven days.</p>  
<p>The true purpose of a raid is to defeat the Dungeon’s Boss within that time and close the Gate.</p>  
<p>If they fail, the Magic Beasts trapped inside the Dungeon will be free to roam outside.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo looked back.</p>  
<p>The giant Divine Statue seated on the throne was still looking down with an arrogant gaze.</p>  
<p>‘If something like that gets out...’</p>  
<p>The damage would be unimaginable.</p>  
<p>Of course, before that, all the Hunters in this room would be killed by the moving Divine Statue or the Stone Statues.</p>  
<p>It was certain that they couldn’t just wait idly.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo called out to Joo-Hee and Mr. Kim.</p>  
<p>“You two, come up as well.”</p>  
<p>Joo-Hee was the first to step onto the Altar.</p>  
<p>After hesitating, Mr. Kim soon followed.</p>  
<p>Two more flames rose, completing the circle.</p>  
<p>\*Whoosh!\*</p>  
<p>The Hunters were startled.</p>  
<p>“What?”</p>  
<p>“Why is this happening?”</p>  
<p>As Jin-Woo had predicted, a change occurred.</p>  
<p>‘It’s coming.’</p>  
<p>Small blue flames began to rise one by one from the outermost edge of the Altar, forming a circle.</p>  
<p>The densely connected blue flames numbered at least 30.</p>  
<p>‘34, 35, 36.’</p>  
<p>Quickly counting, Jin-Woo realized there were exactly 36 blue flames after the circle was completed.</p>  
<p>‘Six red flames that rose according to the number of people, and 36 blue flames that appeared outside them. What’s the significance of the number of flames?’</p>  
<p>At that moment.</p>  
<p>\*Clang!\*</p>  
<p>The firmly closed door suddenly opened without any warning.</p>  
<p>The Hunters reflexively flinched.</p>  
<p>“Ugh...!”</p>  
<p>Everyone wanted to rush out through the open door, but after witnessing the young man’s gruesome death, they couldn’t bring themselves to move.</p>  
<p>If they went out first, they didn’t know how they would die.</p>  
<p>As if demanding an answer, everyone’s gaze turned to Jin-Woo.</p>  
<p>But Jin-Woo kept his mouth shut.</p>  
<p>“...”</p>  
<p>He couldn’t draw any conclusions yet.</p>  
<p>He didn’t know if the door opening was a trap or if they had fulfilled the last commandment and could now leave.</p>  
<p>While everyone’s gaze was fixed on Jin-Woo, an unpleasant noise echoed throughout the room.</p>  
<p>\*Screech—\*</p>  
<p>\*Screech—\*</p>  
<p>The six heads turned quickly in all directions.</p>  
<p>“What’s that?”</p>  
<p>“They’re coming!”</p>  
<p>“They all moved just now!”</p>  
<p>The Hunters’ breathing quickened.</p>  
<p>The Stone Statues, which they thought only moved when someone was close, had taken a few steps closer than before.</p>  
<p>In that brief moment, Jin-Woo accurately assessed the situation.</p>  
<p>‘No, it’s not the Stone Statues that moved. It’s the pedestals beneath them.’</p>  
<p>The unpleasant noise that had just assaulted their eardrums was likely the sound of the pedestals rubbing against the floor as they moved the Stone Statues.</p>  
<p>“...They’re not moving now?”</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim wiped the sweat from his forehead.</p>  
<p>While everyone was distracted by the Stone Statues, Jin-Woo lowered his gaze to examine the blue flames.</p>  
<p>The blue flames, which had begun to extinguish one by one, had already disappeared by three.</p>  
<p>\*Screech—\*</p>  
<p>Someone shouted.</p>  
<p>“What, what’s that? Which way is it?”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo raised his head.</p>  
<p>The noise was coming from his direction.</p>  
<p>The Stone Statues positioned directly in front of him had moved a little closer.</p>  
<p>‘Why only my side...?’</p>  
<p>Was it because he had looked away?</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo closed his eyes to confirm.</p>  
<p>Then the noise sounded again.</p>  
<p>\*Screech—\*</p>  
<p>When he opened his eyes, the noise stopped.</p>  
<p>The Stone Statues had definitely moved closer.</p>  
<p>“What the hell is this?!”</p>  
<p>“What, what are we supposed to do about this?”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo shouted.</p>  
<p>“Don’t take your eyes off the Stone Statues!”</p>  
<p>Thinking about it, the Stone Statues had started moving toward the Altar when everyone’s gaze had turned to him earlier.</p>  
<p>‘These things move when you’re not looking.’</p>  
<p>At that moment, another blue flame went out.</p>  
<p>But there was no change in the group or the Stone Statues.</p>  
<p>‘Could it be...?’</p>  
<p>Without taking his eyes off the Stone Statues, Jin-Woo carefully raised his wrist to check his watch.</p>  
<p>‘As I thought.’</p>  
<p>The blue flames were disappearing at a rate of roughly one per minute.</p>  
<p>‘The blue flames are a timer.’</p>  
<p>It seemed that the key to the third commandment was to endure on the Altar until all 36 blue flames disappeared.</p>  
<p>In other words, as long as everyone was watching the Stone Statues, they were safe.</p>  
<p>Perhaps, in the final stage, no one would have to die.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo checked the number of remaining blue flames to calculate how much longer they had to endure.</p>  
<p>‘Only 30 left...’</p>  
<p>They just had to hold out for 30 minutes!</p>  
<p>But that was Jin-Woo’s mistake.</p>  
<p>While he was counting the blue flames, the Stone Statues on his side had moved closer to the Altar.</p>  
<p>\*Screech—\*</p>  
<p>“Ugh... Aaaah!”</p>  
<p>The man standing opposite Jin-Woo screamed and ran toward the door.</p>  
<p>He had been frightened by the eerie noise that kept coming from behind him.</p>  
<p>As he stepped down from the Altar, a red flame immediately went out.</p>  
<p>“No!”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo shouted.</p>  
<p>But contrary to most expectations, the man, who seemed to have lost his mind, safely ran out through the open door.</p>  
<p>“What, what’s going on? Mr. Sung, what happened? That guy survived?”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo couldn’t see the situation because he was facing the opposite direction of the door.</p>  
<p>“Has anything changed?”</p>  
<p>“The door... the door closed a little.”</p>  
<p>“Is the door closing?”</p>  
<p>“No. No. It moved a little after that guy stepped down and then stopped.”</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo remembered that when the man stepped down from the Altar, a red flame had immediately gone out.</p>  
<p>‘Oh no!’</p>  
<p>A sinking feeling washed over him.</p>  
<p>The question that had been troubling him the entire time he had been standing on the Altar was finally answered.</p>  
<p>Why was this the proof of faith?</p>  
<p>The answer to that question came to him.</p>  
<p>It was the worst possible condition for Jin-Woo, who had lost one leg and needed someone else’s support to maintain his balance.</p>  
<p>\*\*\*</p>  
<p>The ‘open door’ was actually a trap.</p>  
<p>A false hope in plain sight!</p>  
<p>If the people standing on the Altar had all stepped down at once upon seeing the open door, all the red flames would have gone out, and the door would have completely closed.</p>  
<p>All that would remain was a spectacle of blood and screams.</p>  
<p>On the other hand, the ‘Altar’ was the promised land.</p>  
<p>A place where everyone’s survival was guaranteed as long as each person fulfilled their role in their designated position for the allotted time.</p>  
<p>False hope in plain sight, or an invisible promise.</p>  
<p>The third commandment, ‘Proof of Faith,’ was a test of whether one could resist the sweet temptation and hold their ground in the face of an approaching threat.</p>  
<p>Here, two variables came into play.</p>  
<p>The first variable was Jin-Woo’s presence.</p>  
<p>The people who should have run out upon seeing the open door had stopped to hear Jin-Woo’s answer, preventing the tragedy of the door closing due to a full evacuation.</p>  
<p>‘We were lucky.’</p>  
<p>That was the only way to describe it.</p>  
<p>It was only possible because Jin-Woo had figured out the first two commandments on his own and gained everyone’s trust.</p>  
<p>But an unexpected second variable occurred.</p>  
<p>Someone had left.</p>  
<p>What would people do when they realized they could grasp the hope right in front of them?</p>  
<p>It was an obvious question.</p>  
<p>The man who had been supporting Jin-Woo also abandoned him and ran out.</p>  
<p>Mr. Song quickly reached out and grabbed Jin-Woo’s back as he staggered.</p>  
<p>\*Whoosh—\*</p>  
<p>As the man stepped down from the Altar, another red flame went out, and the door gap narrowed further.</p>  
<p>\*Creak—\*</p>  
<p>“Uh, uh!”</p>  
<p>Mr. Kim pointed at the second deserter, but like the first, he also safely ran out.</p>  
<p>Jin-Woo checked the number of red flames and shouted.</p>  
<p>“Don’t move! No more can leave!”</p>  
  
\*\*CHAPTER END\*\*