

Just as Agnes wanted by sunset the following day, preparations were complete for our departure from the capital back to the cave. A lot of money and various favors were necessary. Still, thanks to that, a sufficient number of adventurers stood ready to depart the city and navigate the labyrinthine cave's many paths.

I wasn't doing all this just on Agnes' orders. My desire was also to leave the capital as soon as possible for two reasons.

Firstly, clinging to the slender thread of hope that Syvis yet lived, I was resolved to exhaust every avenue to bring her back. I couldn't bear the thought of resigning myself to the notion of losing her forever. I won't give up when I was already so close to making her mine.

Secondly, I wasn't ready to face Mili and had to explain to her that Amelia and Syvis weren't coming back. Though Mili harbored no fondness for Tricia, Amelia held a special place in her heart, being the person she spent most time with. My sister really loved Amelia. And not to mention Syvis. For Mili, Syvis was not only her mentor but also her savior. Syvis not only saved her life but also gave her the hope to continue living, reviving her hope to one day become an adventurer and travel the world.

That being said, I was near the city gates with all the adventurers and carriages ready to leave, but Ilene, who I thought was the most eager to leave, was not here.

"Strange," I mumbled under my breath.

I issued the command to locate Ilene, and soon after, I was informed that she had departed on her own the previous night.

"I see..." I snapped, clenching my fists. This wasn't part of my plan, but I wouldn't let it deter me.

This is the perfect opportunity to get closer to Ilene and make her mine once and for all. Just like I did with Syvis, if I play my cards right, I'll be able to spend a lot of time alone with Ilene in the cave. I'll bring back Syvis, and Ilene will be mine eventually, too. If everything goes well, I will get everything I want.

As we departed from the capital, the group of adventurers and I traveled through lush forests and crossed arid plains. Our conversations were mostly shallow, filled with strategic planning and banter. But my thoughts remained fixated on Ilene and Syvis.

A month later, we finally arrived at the seaside village. My heart raced with anticipation as I scanned the area for Ilene. As if fate had aligned our paths, I spotted her standing near a store buying food.

"Ilene!" I spoke as I approached her.

Ilene turned to see me. Her face was grim, as if no happiness was left in her, "I'm ready to go in." Ilene said, her voice strained and filled with concern, "We need to hurry and enter the cave. We must find my son."

"Of course, that's why we're here," I replied, masking my true intentions behind an expression of concern, "But Ilene, I told you to wait for me back in the city. You didn't have to come here alone. The cave is a labyrinth, and it is still full of monsters."

"I know," Ilene answered, "I entered the cave when I arrived and reached where there was a massive hole in the ground. I entered through one of the paths, but I realized that I wouldn't get far by myself with the number of monsters there. "

"Y-You went that far alone!?" I said, surprised since I didn't expect her to try to enter on her own, "Ilene, that wa-

I was trying to speak, but Ilene began to walk on her own to where the carriages were with all the adventurers who had arrived, "Let's organize everything at once and get in as soon as possible." She said, ignoring what I wanted to say.

As we assembled everyone, Ilene took charge effortlessly, organizing everything herself and only occasionally seeking clarification from me about the cave. Despite there being adventurers of higher rank present, including myself, her natural leadership and competence left no room for doubt, and everyone simply followed her instructions without question.

Given that the majority of the present adventurers were of C and D Ranks, Ilene methodically organized the groups, appointing A-Ranks as party leaders and mixing in B, C, and D adventurers based on their individual skills. This meticulous approach ensured that each party had the best possible composition, compensating for the presence of weaker adventurers by leveraging their strengths effectively. At the end of it all, I was quite surprised by this side of Ilene that I don't get to see very often. It reminded me of the Ilene who trained me and who helped save the many people in the monster attack that destroyed several villages.

Every second with Ilene made me more and more obsessed with her. And of course. I made sure to be in the same group as Ilene. Ilene, for her part, didn't seem to care about anything but Darx. One could see at first glance her concern and desire to enter the cave as soon as possible. At the same time, I couldn't help but feel genuinely concerned for Syvis; I wanted to find Syvis just as much as Ilene wanted to find the incompetent of her son.

After two hours of preparing everything we needed, we headed to the cave.

"Remember, stay focused and watch each other's backs," I instructed once we were in front of the cave, feigning concern for the group as a whole. In truth, all I wanted was to have Ilene by my side.

Our journey into the dark depths of the cave commenced. As we traversed the winding tunnels, I quickly realized a noticeable decrease in the biting cold that had plagued us during our previous venture. The temperature now hovered at a tolerable level, neither too cold nor too hot, making the expedition significantly more comfortable.

I remained close to Ilene throughout the day, engaging in combat with monsters as we meticulously mapped out each path we traversed. Surveying the labyrinthine network of tunnels, considering our numerous groups and the steady pace of our progress, I couldn't help but realize that it would likely take us several months to explore the entire cave thoroughly. Nonetheless, Ilene displayed unwavering determination as she led the way, pressing forward at a commendable pace. I often found myself having to insist that she take breaks.

Several days passed without us finding anything, and Ilene not paying much attention to me, regardless of my attempts to get closer to her. Even so, I am patient and don't give up easily. From the beginning, I knew that Ilene was a grieving mother and wouldn't be easily swayed. However, one particular night, as Ilene and I stood guard by the bonfire, a quiet moment unfolded between us.

"Don't worry, we'll find Darx and Syvis." I started.

Ilene looked up at me, her eyes glistening with unshed tears, "Thank you, Kase," She whispered, her voice barely audible above the crackling fire, "I imagine it was not easy or cheap to organize all this."

Ilene's response took me by surprise, "Of course," I replied softly.

Ilene continued, looking at the fire with sadness, "I don't know how to repay you."

"Your gratitude is enough," I told her, my voice smooth and reassuring. I allowed my gaze to linger on her lips for a moment before meeting her eyes once more, "You don't need to do anything else. Also, one of my guild members is trapped. I'm also doing this for her. If I am going to be a good Guild Master one day, I must start caring about my members."

"I see," She responded. Leaving me wondering if she believed me or not.

"Tomorrow, we will reach the end of the cave and the place where the portal was." I continued, "If you want, get some sleep. Tomorrow will be complicated."

"I'll do that," Ilene responded, going to sleep without saying anything else.

Ilene went to where her sleeping bag was. I discreetly watched as Ilene took off her armor little by little. As I observed Ilene undress, my heart quickened with desire. Her large breasts, covered only by a t-shirt, make my dick get hard. Her beauty, accentuated by the flickering

firelight, stirred a longing I struggled to contain. I could only remember the night we spent together, and I looked forward to repeating the same thing soon.

The next day, as expected, we reached the bottom of the cave. Ilene asked me to explain in detail what happened, so I did. The suffering in Ilene was evident. We searched for a long time, trying to find something, anything that would tell us where Syvis and Darx were, but nothing. Ultimately, we took a different path than the one we had arrived at.

After many days of exploration, we finally emerged from the cave's depths and made our way to the nearby village to replenish our supplies and restock provisions. While there, we awaited the arrival of the other adventuring parties, hoping that someone might have made a significant discovery. Unfortunately, it seemed luck was not on our side, as none of the parties reported finding anything of note. With a collective sigh of disappointment, we prepared to venture back into the cave, each group taking a different path in search of answers.

We did the same thing multiple times. As the days turned into weeks, our search within the cave remained fruitless. However, my efforts to get closer to Ilene began to yield results. I know that Ilene didn't want to be close to me because of the story we had, plus I'm sure her idiot son must have told her about the things I've done to him, but after so much time together Ilene started to let her guard down little by little. Our conversations grew deeper and more personal, and I could see the trust in her eyes when she looked at me. I made sure to project an image of genuine concern for her and Darx while maintaining my discreet advances towards her.

I could sense her growing trust in me. I thought about making more direct advances, but I didn't do it since I realized that Ilene's mind was only Darx. I was sure Ilene would reject me if I tried anything now, so my best long-term option was to gain her complete trust and make her feel grateful to me. And once we finish all this, making Ilene my woman will be more accessible. Even though my heart ached for Syvis, I knew I couldn't let this opportunity slip away.

Months passed, and our search within the cave continued to be disappointingly unproductive. Every month, we would leave the cave to stock up on supplies and rest in the village, only to return and repeat the same process. Our morale was dwindling, and after five months of constant exploration, checking all the paths, and eliminating all the monsters inside without any findings, most of the hired adventurers decided it was time to call it quits and return to the capital. They were convinced that there was nothing more to be done. Added to that, we received a message about the increase in hostility in the north, and all adventurers were required to return to the city.

In the end, only Ilene and I were left. I could see that Ilene's despair was deepening with each passing day. Her once bright eyes now seemed dull and lifeless as she struggled with the weight of her belief that her son Darx might truly be dead. But not only her. I was also accepting that I had lost Syvis forever.

Ilene didn't want to give up and decided that she would enter the cave again, even if she had to do it alone. Ilene and I entered once again—just the two of us. Since there were no monsters, it was easy, and we reached the bottom of the cave in a short time.

"Another day without any trace of Darx," Ilene said one evening, her voice barely a whisper, as we sat by the fire in the cave, "I feel like I'm losing hope, Kase."

"Hey, don't say that," I replied gently, putting a comforting hand on her shoulder.

But even as I spoke those words, I couldn't help feeling the creeping sensation of doubt. Was there any hope left? Were we just wasting our time in this endless labyrinth?

"Stay strong, Ilene," I whispered to her, "I'm here for you, no matter what."

Ilene didn't respond. Her hopeless eyes remained fixed on the fire of the bonfire. We looked for what we could while we were in the cave, but ultimately, we had to return to the exit. This time for the last time. When leaving the cave, Ilene wanted to be alone and locked herself in her room at the Inn. She spent those days outside the cave, isolated from the world, as if trying to shield herself from reality.

After a few days, I brought food to Ilene in her room in the afternoon like I had done all those days. Perhaps a small gesture of kindness might help lift her spirits. But when I arrived at her door, ready to knock, I discovered that Ilene wasn't inside this time. Worried, I asked around the village about Ilene's whereabouts, and one of the villagers mentioned they had seen her heading up the mountain.

Climbing the mountain, my heart pounded in my chest, concerned for Ilene. As I approached the summit, I caught sight of her silhouette against the setting sun. There she was, sitting on the edge of a cliff, watching the last light of day slip below the horizon. The wind gently blew through her long black hair, making her appear even more stunning than I remembered.

"Hey," I called out softly, not wanting to startle her. Ilene didn't respond but didn't seem to mind my presence either. Slowly, I made my way over to her and sat down next to her, our legs dangling off the cliff's edge.

"Beautiful sunset, isn't it?" I tried to make conversation, though my usual sarcastic tone seemed to have vanished.

Ilene remained silent, her eyes never leaving the sun as it disappeared beneath the waves. I knew she was struggling, and I wanted to help her somehow. I wanted to ease her pain.

"Darx and Syvis are still alive," I whispered, not entirely sure if I believed it myself, "We'll find him, I promise."

"You know, today is Darx's birthday," Ilene spoke, her gaze fixed on the sunset and tears beginning to come out of her eyes, running down her cheeks, "I've never been good at cooking, but on days like today, I tried hard to make his favorite food. We used to celebrate just the two of us in our small house. Now, that village and that small house no longer exist. And more important than anything, my son is no longer here."

All these months, Ilene, despite her obvious concern and worries, had remained strong. However, as those words escaped her lips, a torrent of emotion flooded forth, shattering the facade of composure she had maintained for so long. She was crying uncontrollably. A heartbreaking cry full of pain.

I hated seeing Ilene like this, but I knew it was an opportunity for me to strengthen my bond with her further. I ran my hand down her back, reaching her shoulder and hugging her lightly. Ilene didn't pull away. Instead, she leaned in closer to me, seeking warmth and solace in my presence. I knew that it was now or never. I had to make my final move and claim her as my own before it was too late. I was willing to risk it all for the chance to have Ilene by my side.

"In my case, my family never celebrated my birthday, so I can only imagine that those days must have been pleasant for you and him. When I was a kid, I thought there was nothing I could do about it, but now... now maybe it's different," I said, my hand reaching out to touch hers, "Let me help you, Ilene. Let me be there for you."

Still, with tears running down her cheeks, she turned to see me, surprised by my words.

I continued softly, "You don't have to face all this pain and suffering alone. Seeing you suffer really makes me suffer, too. I've changed since we first met, but one thing that hasn't changed is my feelings for you. And I'm not saying that I expect you to accept me right now, but I want you to know that I want to be with you."

I could see the hesitation in her eyes as she looked away from me, "Kase, I appreciate everything you've done for me. Your help in searching for Darx means more than words can express. But... I don't feel the same way about you. I also know what the life of a noble is like. It's something I couldn't deal with without mentioning that I can't have children."

"I-I understand you. I know it was inappropriate to declare my love for you now in these moments of suffering," I replied, masking my frustration with a gentle smile, "But you can still live your life, Ilene. You deserve happiness and love, too. You don't have to deny yourself those things. I won't press any more now, but I want you to know I'm here for you, Ilene. If you'll let me, I'd love to be the one to stand by your side and support you through everything."

Ilene took a deep breath, her shoulders shaking as she tried to regain her composure. She wiped her tears with the back of her hand and looked at me with a mixture of gratitude and sadness, "Kase, I can't thank you enough for everything you've done. You should find someone your age who can love you the way you deserve to be loved."

Her words stung, but I forced a smile to hide my disappointment, "I understand, Ilene," I said, my voice barely above a whisper, "Just know that I'll always be here for you if you ever need anything. And who knows? Maybe someday you'll find it in your heart to love again."

"Maybe," She whispered, staring off into the distance, "Now, Kase, if you don't mind, I would like to be alone for a while."

Hiding my frustration, I stood up and said, "I'll see you at the Inn. Don't stay too long, as the nights are cold here."

Ilene simply smiled at me tenderly.

I began my descent down the mountain, but something didn't feel right. Ilene's attitude and her desire to be alone worried me. Unable to shake off the bad feeling gnawing at me, I decided to turn back and check on her. I activated my skill [Death Silence], making me invisible as I retraced my steps up the mountain.

As I approached the cliff where I had left Ilene, I froze at the sight before me. Ilene was standing at the edge of the cliff, her body swinging close to falling. I realized she was about to jump.

"ILLENE!" I yelled, but thanks to my skill, she didn't hear me. I rushed towards her.

In one motion, Ilene opened her arms and let herself fall. Fortunately, I managed to hug her, and we fell onto the rocky ground, our bodies tangled together. Ilene turned to look at me now that my skill was no longer in use, startled by my sudden appearance. Her eyes widened in surprise, but it wasn't enough to divert her from her tragic intention.

"Kase, please, let me go," She yelled, tears streaming down her pale cheeks.

"No!" I shouted, my arms wrapped around her waist, holding her back with all my strength. Even though my rank is higher than hers, my class gives me a similar strength level to Ilene's, who is a B-Rank tank.

"Without Darx, I have no reason to live!" Ilene sobbed, trying to break free from my grip. Her desperation was palpable as she struggled against me, her eyes full of sadness and pain.

"Listen to me, Ilene," I said firmly, refusing to let her go, "You can't just throw your life away like this. There has to be another way."

Ilene body trembled as she continued to cry, not wanting to hear what I was saying. Ilene seemed determined to want to finish everything.

At that moment, a thought crossed my mind. If Ilene doesn't have a reason to continue living, I can give her one. If I could make Ilene love me more than she ever loved Darx, she would have a reason to live. Yet, I knew the consequences of using this skill if I couldn't maintain its constant use. It could be devastating for Ilene, just like it was for Amelia. But given the circumstances, it is the only option. All I wanted was for Ilene is to be alive and to be mine.

"Let me go!!!" Ilene whispered, her voice barely audible through her tears.

"Ilene," I replied, tightening my grip on her, determined to save Ilene from her despair, "I'm sorry, Ilene. But I can't let you go."

Channeling my skill [Broken Will], I focused on Ilene, causing a sudden change in her demeanor. Her eyes widened as the first effects of the skill began to affect her. First, she will experience uncontrollable sexual arousal and the gradual creation of feelings of love towards me after some time of constant use.

"W-What is?" Ilene stammered, her breaths becoming shallow and rapid. She clung to me, her body trembling with newfound desire.

"Trust me, Ilene. It'll be okay," I whispered into her ear, feeling a surge of guilt for using my skill on her like this, but being with me will be for her own good.

Ilene's mental state seemed to be in complete chaos, too much for Ilene to bear; her eyes rolled back as she succumbed to the overwhelming sensations. With one last shudder, she lost consciousness in my arms.

"Ilene... You and I will help each other heal the pain of the loss of your son and I of Syvis," I muttered, carrying her limp body away from the edge of the cliff.

I carefully descended the mountain, cradling Ilene in my arms. The weight of what I had done weighed heavily on me, but it was the only option I saw to keep her alive. It was a small price to pay for saving her life and making her mine.

As we reached the village, I took her to her room at the Inn. I gently laid Ilene down on the bed.

"Sleep well, Ilene," I whispered softly, watching as her chest rose and fell with every breath, "When you wake, I promise you'll have a reason to live."



