

The Duke 851

Chapter 851 End that monster

Meanwhile...

"That guy..." Kristina's eyes sharpened as soon as they reached the land, gazing at the person standing in the fort motionlessly.

Alphonse.

"What is he doing here?" Charlotte ground her teeth, marching in Alphonse's direction while the rest of the troop were rushing to the land. Riding the boat was hectic. They didn't have time to observe their surrounding as they were all busy trying to reach the land. So now that they were away from the Kraken, did they notice Alphonse's presence.

Some members of the Divine Order Charlotte, Kristina, and Ramin, to be exact didn't have a good memory of Alphonse. They couldn't just disregard everything that had happened before the regression; they wouldn't even buy Stefan's so-called sincerity.

They knew that Stefan could go so low as to deceive them by acting sincere and humble. The only reason they agreed to assist him was that they knew Lilou and Samael would be in this. If ever Stefan colluded with Zero, Charlotte, Ramin, and Kristina would be a valuable addition.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Charlotte grumbled, stomping her way to Alphonse. "I knew Stefan had another plan -"

"Claude told me to relay his message to the divine orders." Without looking in Charlotte's direction, Alphonse spoke. "His exact words are 'to tell the Divine Order to scatter and cleanse the land.'"

Alphonse slowly turned on his heel, facing Charlotte and Kristina, who rushed to stop the former from attacking him. His eyes fell on Kristina's hand, which was holding Charlotte's arm, before raising his eyes back to them.

"Claude rushed in here to tell you that message," he repeated with certainty. "You must've known by now that this land reeks of nothing but blood and death. Even vampires like us couldn't stand the smell. What I am saying is, you will understand these orders from him once you go on your way"

Charlotte scrunched her nose up in dismay, sizing Alphonse up from head to toe. "Why would we listen to you?"

"Where's the Earl?" Unlike Charlotte, who was taking things too personal, Kristina maintained a sharp mind. She followed his hand as he raised it slightly, pointing at the ocean where they came from.

"Underwater," said Alphonse. "He's helping me assist His Majesty to take down the Kraken much faster."

Kristina and Charlotte gazed at the water, ignoring the roars behind them as the soldiers reached the land one after another.

"Why would he have to do that?" Charlotte's voice shook, lifting her bloodshot eyes to Alphonse. "I don't see any reason he had to help the king since the latter is so amazing and strong. We hadn't

forgotten how he held up until the end, causing problems for all of us even after he took his last breath."

"I am not here to convince you of our agenda." Like a wall, Alphonse returned her accusatory gaze with coldness. "However, berating me will not make us any progress. I am simply relaying Claude's message. It is up to you to believe it or not, but if you truly care about your masters, then you better hurry."

"The longer we stay in this land, the more dangerous it will be for us," he added solemnly. "For what reason? I am not sure myself. However, I am certain you subconsciously know that as well, since you were a part of the Divine Order, the bearers of light. This land doesn't have any light at the moment... it was just darkness."

Charlotte opened her mouth, but the words were stuck in her throat. Meanwhile, Kristina pressed her lips into a thin line.

"He's right," said Kristina, rocking her head in agreement. "Berating him won't fix the problem." Kristina faced Alphonse squarely. "Did the earl say anything else?"

"That's all."

"Do you need our help?"

"No" Alphonse shook his head. "Take all the Divine Orders and even the knights with you. Use the back of your weapon; make sure you spill less blood as possible."

"Why is that?" Kristina furrowed her brows, confused. "What do you mean by using the blunt side of our weapons?"

"I'm afraid Quentin, the mad king, had captured a demon. A real one!" Alphonse's remarks made Charlotte and Kristina freeze, looking back at him with wide eyes. "I haven't confirmed anything for sure, but what I am certain is that he simply turned his subjects into undead to stall time. After all, monsters like the undead will not hesitate to attack anyone. And by that, I meant the ones they were attacking, which would be us, would have no choice but to retaliate. In other words, we are doing the work of sacrifice for him."

"That is why I am telling you this. It might just be a theory, but it is not impossible. It's better to prevent more crippling problems later than choosing the convenient way of slaughtering his sacrifices," he added solemnly.

Kristina and Charlotte took time for Alphonse's confession to sink in. It was true that they could feel the dangers in this land. They didn't have time to dwell on this previously, but now that they reached the land, their stomach turned at the pungent scent in the air. Adding what Alphonse said didn't relieve them.

"Then..." When Kristina recovered, she snapped her eyes at Alphonse. "... don't blame us if your king died fighting against that monster"

"Don't worry. Stefan and I might die, but I give you my word Claude will get out of here alive!" Alphonse looked straight into Kristina's eyes, nodding reassuringly. "I hold nothing for you to believe me, but just this once, even if it sounded shameless, put a little faith in me."

There was a moment of silence between the three of them before Kristina turned her back on him.

"The earl is the precious nephew of the Madam and the master. If he doesn't return alive, I'll do my best to return their pain a hundred folds," warned Kristina without looking back. "Let's go, Charlie. Relay the message with the rest of the Divine Order. Each of us will split with one member of the Order leading each unit Ramin come here quick"

Alphonse watched Kristina's and Charlotte's backs and tilted his head down. And just like that, the two of them spread the word and formed groups with each being led by a divine bearer. Seeing how efficient Kristina was, Alphonse couldn't help but wonder what sort of role she had before the regression.

'I bet she became a part of the army for her quick response; he thought, peeling his eyes away from them as that was resolved faster than he thought. 'Now, I have to focus... and end that monster.'

Alphonse closed his eyes ever so slowly, standing motionless in the same spot while everything around him moved as if he wasn't even there.

Chapter 852 Parasites

'The hell?' Claude dove deeper into the depths of the ocean. The deeper he goes, the darker it was. Diving wasn't easy, especially if there was this gigantic monster in it. The Kraken's tentacles would sometimes get in his way. If Claude was not swift enough, he would've been knocked out. Not that the Kraken knew Claude was underwater. It was just that each tentacle had a width that was wider than his size.

'Just how much deeper should I dive in to see what that cursed uncle is saying?' Claude let out a little bit of oxygen. 'If this keeps up, I have no choice but to go back to the surface.'

Claude might be a reliable earl and a powerful vampire. However, he was not a siren. Holding his breath longer than an average person was a skill he learned during his training with his army. Klaus had an intense training method; one of the tasks the soldiers needed to complete was to dip themselves underwater in the middle of the coldest time in winter. Even though Claude was an earl, he still had to do it. If his soldiers could survive such harsh training, Claude should also survive it like a don. In that case, he wouldn't lose his soldier's confidence. Klaus would train with him as well. 'He said strings on top of the Kraken's head...' Claude recalled Alphonse's words about his task. 'Strings, strings... damn it. I can't even see its head...'

Claude's train of thought trailed off, narrowing his eyes as he caught little aquatic plants fluttering underwater. It was dark. Even for a vampire like him who could see clearly in the dark, being underwater made it challenging to see things clearly. Following his instincts, Claude did a stroke, diving deeper and faster to see it closer. When it was within his reach, he halted upon seeing a small red light as if the Kraken's eyes opened. Claude floated, not moving a muscle. The Kraken's eye was big, and it was shining in red. It was looking sideways, so Claude could only see its one eye. Its eye moved around as if looking for something or someone that entered its vicinity. Claude held his breath and relaxed his body. He didn't know why he froze, but he felt like that was just the right thing to do. As he watched that big eye that was almost half of his stature, Claude realized not moving helped. 'It seems he wasn't seeing me when I'm right in front of his eye.' Claude heaved a sigh of relief, watching what the Kraken would do. 'Was it because it had poor eyesight?' Claude

would be lying if he said he didn't feel nervous. No matter how arrogant he was, he knew he was at the disadvantage underwater. A faint growl caressed Claude's clogged ears before bubbles of water ascended before him. The Kraken closed its eye ever so carefully.

'Was it hibernating all this time?' Claude was confused. 'Right now, this Kraken is fighting Uncle — I mean, it is fighting Stefan fiercely. It was also screaming so loud it could shatter a person's ears.'

'Damn it, Claude!' he shook his head, eyes shut. 'This is not the right time for riddles. I need to cut wherever strings my cursed uncle is saying.'

When Claude reopened his eyes, determination shone in them. He got no time to idle, knowing he would soon lose his breath. His eyes searched the Kraken's head. It was huge, but that made it easier to see the aquatic-like plants on top of its head. Claude gazed up, moving his feet to propel himself up. He was careful not to wake up the Kraken. Who knew what it would do if it figured out Claude was there? Claude couldn't risk that. Floating over the Kraken's gigantic head, Claude furrowed his brows. He wasn't wrong when he thought that the ones he saw earlier were akin to an aquatic plant. They, in fact, looked like some sort of plants or algae.

'He said I will know if I see them, but I don't see anything amiss...' he mentally trailed off, narrowing his eyes to see clearly. For some reason, he held his breath even longer, as if that would help him discern the problem. 'Ahh...' His pupils went wide ever so slowly, seeing everything much clearer this time.

There, among the algae stuck on the Kraken's head, were some dark red strings. It was camouflaged in the algae. If one wouldn't look properly, it wouldn't be spotted.

'So that's what he was saying,' thought Claude, observing the dark strings. 'They were like parasites, huh?'

The side of his mouth curled up into a smirk while his eyes shone a sense of pride. Claude didn't idle, flexing his right hand. His fingernails instantly turned sharp and a little long. Before jumping into the water, Claude removed anything that could add more weight to him. Alphonse said he simply needed to cut something. That was easy. 'What a dumb uncle,' he mocked internally, sneering. 'Why cut it when, obviously, you need to remove the root? Though I don't blame him.'

Claude carefully approached it, glancing at the small tentacle nearby. From a different perspective, these odd strings looked like it was connected to something. However, since Claude was on the other side of the Kraken. Thus, he could see the problem clearly. The Kraken was being devoured by these parasites. What were these? He didn't know. However, his gut feeling told him to help Stefan, Claude had to remove these parasites. So carefully, Claude reached for the first string. It was small, like a person's vein. He pinched it and froze, gazing down to see the Kraken's open eyes. The Kraken's eyes were shaking, searching for something. Claude swallowed the nervousness that jumped to his throat, clenching his teeth while he mustered his courage. His brows then rose when he felt an underwater wave approaching, and going along with its force, Claude pulled out the string without a second hesitation. ROARR!!!

Chapter 853 Stay fucking still

ROARR!!!

Stefan was flying toward the Kraken tentacle after waiting for an opening. However, just before the tip of his Lancelot could penetrate the tentacle, a piercingly loud shriek erupted in the air, The

sudden shriek disrupted Stefan's speed, and since he was mid-air, he was defenseless at the appearance of another tentacle. Pain erupted on the side of his stomach, making his lungs constrict while bits of blood came out of his mouth.

ROARRR!

Stefan came flying away, almost losing consciousness at the pain he had. For sure, a rib or two broke with that attack, piercing his lungs as a result. Thanks to his years of experience, Stefan was able to suppress the pain before he could land anywhere.

Gritting his teeth, he tried to regain control of his weight and body. Stefan succeeded, landing on the piece of a boat on the surface, only to jump up to find a more stable surface. The Kraken continued to shriek, making Stefan's ears bleed.

Stefan watched his weight as soon as he regained his footing on a piece of much bigger wood. The wood was still sinking slowly, but he settled on it temporarily. His hand was placed on the side of his stomach, gritting his teeth because of the pain, and then gazed up at the monstrous tentacles wiggling over the ocean.

"What's going on?" he wondered, touching his bleeding ear.

The Kraken was still screaming, but unlike the screams it released at the beginning, it sounded like the Kraken was writhing in pain. Stefan had been fighting this monster for minutes while everyone else fled the scene as ordered.

From Stefan's observation, this Kraken was called a legendary thing for many reasons. A thick layer of slime covered its skin, making it its protective barrier. Even if Stefan pierced through this protective barrier, its skin itself was thick but soft. Meaning, most of his attacks simply bounced off.

Brute force wasn't enough to inflict damage on it. Stefan had to be smart with his every attack. The reason he wasn't tiring himself by fighting blindly, but instead, conserved his energy by repelling the Kraken's attack, all the while waiting for an opening.

However, just when that opening came, and he finally did a move, this happened.

"Something is wrong..." he trailed off, deserting the sinking wood where he was standing as a tentacle swung into it. Stefan found another floating wood around the same place, taking his time to regain balance due to the violent waves the Kraken's action was creating.

"There's definitely..." he breathed out, lifting his head at the monster ahead of him. "... something off."

The Kraken wasn't attacking Stefan anymore. It looked like it was simply throwing a huge fit. Stefan turned his head in the fort. All he could see were tiny people rushing to the land, narrowing his eyes as his gaze scanned the fort.

"Alphonse." Stefan's eyes opened from its squinting, furrowing his brows.

Alphonse was just standing on the corner of the fort, and no one was paying attention to him. All the Divine Orders have already reached the land. It would be impossible for them not to notice Alphonse, especially Charlotte, Kristina, and Ramin.

Those three didn't have a good memory of Alphonse. If they hadn't forgiven Stefan or believed him, they wouldn't have simply ignored Alphonse. Moreover, Stefan didn't mention to everyone that

Alphonse would also be in the land of Spade. Not because he had forgotten about it, but that was Alphonse's wish.

Alphonse's only request after talking to Stefan before this happened was not to tell Samael anything about it. Samael already had an idea, but he didn't pry. Alphonse also didn't explain the reason, and Stefan didn't question the reason for this request.

Even if Alphonse wouldn't explain himself, Stefan already knew why.

Alphonse didn't have the courage to face Samael or Lilou. He was too ashamed to even look at their shadows, let alone stand before them. Stefan could understand his brother because he also felt the same way. It was just that Stefan had to swallow that shame and guilt because if he didn't, things would be different. A lot worse.

"Unless he already talked to them," was Stefan's guess, which he thought was the only logical explanation for a rather peaceful situation back in the fort. "So that means..."

Stefan's eyes veered in Alphonse's direction once again. He sized up his brother, observing him for a minute. Seeing that Alphonse was not moving a muscle as if he was a statue, Stefan figured out what was happening.

"What did he do?" wondered Stefan, looking back at the violent monster before him, standing still despite the waves. "He should've told me beforehand."

A frown dominated Stefan's face, but he knew there was nothing he could do. On a battlefield, anything could happen, and that included a change of plans or an improvise of a plan.

"He must be underwater," he told himself, keeping his attention on the Kraken before him.

"Whatever he is doing... I have to take advantage of it."

His jaw tightened, eyes glinting with determination. Attacking the Kraken now was a lot riskier, especially when it was rampaging. However, that also meant he wasn't in its right mind. He might not know what was going on, but one thing was for sure; Alphonse had done something underwater.

Little did Stefan know, it wasn't Alphonse who was the cause of the Kraken's current state. It was another person, whom Stefan didn't expect to be in this place.

Claude.

The moment Claude pulled out the parasite leeching on top of the Kraken's head, his eardrum nearly shattered. The Kraken's scream underwater was silent, yet its waves nearly broke Claude's ear drums. Despite that, his ears were bleeding and the underwater waves were taking him away, Claude pierced his fingers on top of its head.

The Kraken wiggled and struggled, screaming on and on, but he was determined. Regardless of the disadvantageous setting, Claude gritted his teeth and fought the force coming at him. 'Stay fucking still! he mentally cursed, reaching out his other hand with great difficulty to pluck out another parasite. I'm trying to help you!"

SHRIEK!!

Chapter 854 I knew he had more

Blood mixed in the sea as Claude's ears, nose, and eyes bled from the silent but deadly waves underneath the water. But with gritted teeth, he clung to the Kraken's head. His sharp fingers were plunged deep into the soft and slimy surface of the Kraken while his other hand picked out the parasite one after another.

His vigilant approach from the beginning turned aggressive in a blink of an eye. He had no choice but to adapt to the situation because picking out one parasite brought unimaginable pain to the Kraken.

'Last one!' Claude shut his eyes tightly and reopened them again, telling himself to hold his breath a bit longer.

He had been underwater for who knows how long if he wasn't trained enough, he would have to return to the surface to take a breath. However, Claude knew going back underwater and searching for the Kraken's head would be ten times harder.

'That... onc...!' Claude outstretched his hand, wiggling his fingers trying to reach the last parasite clinging on to the Kraken's head. Just a bit... closer...'

Claude clenched his teeth, narrowing his eyes. Being underwater and holding his breath wasn't the only thing he had to endure. There was also the pressure as he was currently deep in the water, the piercingly quiet sound waves from the Kraken, and clinging on to the monster while it tried to shrug him off.

Claude sank his nails deeper into the Kraken to push himself closer. However, as soon as he plunged his fingers deeper into it, the Kraken wiggled more aggressively. Claude had no choice but to pierce his one hand into the Kraken to not separate from it.

On top of the struggle, Claude was annoyed. He was running out of air, conserving it as much as possible. He knew he couldn't stay underwater longer.

'Fuck it!' his eyes shone in bright red, glinting menacingly as he raised his head. The Kraken was still moving as was fighting another annoying lad on the surface of the water.

Determined to get rid of the parasite once and for all, Claude had to take a risk. He pulled out his hand, producing inks and blood that instantly mixed in the water. He didn't care about it, though. Claude searched for the parasite and when he found it, he didn't look away from it. Holding onto the Kraken while it was wiggling and fighting was impossible. Thus, Claude didn't take his eyes off of the monster as he dragged out his other hand in the Kraken's thick skin. Using the downtime as the Kraken would take pauses every once in a while, Claude pushed himself up. His feet stepped on the hole his hands left on it, swimming over the Kraken's head to the other side.

SHRIEEEEK!!

His pupils went instantly wide, looking back for a moment, only to see a dark and powerful underwater wave coming at him. Claude had a choice; one of them was to cling onto the Kraken and try to withstand another sound wave and force or he would swim up to avoid it and take a breath.

Claude's option was obvious.

Claude set his eyes back to the Kraken's head, swimming forth as if he didn't care about the incoming sound wave that might truly leave permanent damage to his ears. He stretched his hand, clinging on to the parasite tightly. Pulling it out wasn't easy. Claude had to press his feet on the side of the Kraken's head to gain force and pull the last parasite that was leeching on the Kraken.

SHRIEEEEK!

'Ahhhh!!' Claude mentally roared, using every bit of his strength and reserved energy to pull out the parasite on the Kraken. At first, it was as though it was cemented in the Kraken; it clung as if it was already a part of the Kraken's skin. However, when the parasite moved slightly, it continuously moved away until the flesh that got inside the Kraken was right before Claude.

Claude set his eyes on the Kraken to check if it was calming down. It didn't. Before Claude could even think about what had just happened, a tentacle suddenly came to his side and sent him flying.

For a moment, Claude was in shock with his eyes wide. But then, the pain slowly erupted on the side of his stomach, making his lungs constrict. The last air Claude was conserving escaped as his mouth parted from the pain.

'No... hell... Before he would lose consciousness, Claude could only think of cursing the Kraken. After what he had done for it, the Kraken would return his kindness with a punch to the gut.

The tentacles underwater continuously moved, and his body slowly fell deeper and deeper into the water. Claude's vision shook and despite the darkness underwater, he could see a bit of light from somewhere. He knew deep in his heart he couldn't afford to lose consciousness. 'Uncle Klaus...'

However, no amount of tricks could deceive his mind anymore. His body wouldn't listen to him as the effect of enduring the powerful waves and pressure was now creeping into his bones. He was exhausted and beaten.

'I'm... doomed.' Soon, Claude's eyes and body felt heavy, as if a boulder was dropped on top of him. His eyes slowly closed as darkness embraced him tightly, accompanying him to the depths of the dark ocean.

Meanwhile, on the surface of the sea, Stefan had fought the Kraken fiercely. He had taken advantage of the fact that the Kraken lost its composure and simply went wild without any calculated move, unlike in the beginning.

Stefan had chopped off several tentacles, but only a tiny portion of it. After some time, Stefan noticed that the Kraken slowed down after his last aggressive struggle and thus, launched a continuous attack on every weak spot the Kraken had.

After his aggressive and continuous attack, Stefan found a large tentacle floating on the ocean. Watching his weight not sink, he stood there and kept his eyes on the remaining severed tentacle over the surface of the water.

"It stopped moving" came out a whisper, narrowing his eyes as the severed tentacles were akin to a statue. "Is it dead?" if it was, then it was only possible that it already sank into the water.

"What's going..." Stefan trailed off as the Kraken moved again, but this time, it was a slow movement. Waiting for whatever the Kraken would do, Stefan held his breath as another long tentacle came from the bottom of the ocean. I knew it. He had more."

Stefan prepared himself for another fierce battle when he noticed that in one of the tentacles, the Kraken was holding something. He narrowed his eyes, focusing his attention on it, and when he realized what or who it was, his heart stopped beating for a second.

"Claude..."