

The beast's crimson feathers covered a large lithe body, with a line of golden spikes down his back to his tail, which he whipped about like an annoyed cat. His head was almost delicate in structure, with the large liquid eyes and wide nostrils of a high-bred horse. The ridge above his eyes drew a line to the two arched horns between his pointed ears.

A combination of many animals, he'd been artfully assembled for a fearsome appearance. And he still smelled of ashes.

Lisette slid to the ground, thinking of escape. The only thing escaping was her consciousness and she struggled to keep from fainting. She sat motionless. Time seemed to stop as he approached. He was terrifying—and beautiful.

His talons extended, encircling her waist and pressing their needle-sharpness against the corset. Her eyes met his, seeking answers in the silver crescents. His lips curled as he inhaled, causing her to exhale. Their breaths took a steady rhythm, his inhale drawing in her life, hers choking on his smoke and ashes. No words passed between them, but she knew his intentions.

He wanted her dead.

Consigned to her fate, she lifted her chin in defiance. He could kill her, but he would not break her. She would meet her end with one final show of courage.