

Draft 2 DragonKnight

Chapter 1

Love.

Delphyne.

There was absolutely no reason why anyone should not love Delphyne.

Even if she said so herself, she was amazing. She was the kindest, most considerate and cleverest knight there had ever been and even though she wasn't officially knighted, nothing would stop her from acting the part. She had mastered the sword. She had studied all the stories of the great knights—especially those of Alfonse Dragonsbane, the famous dragonslayer—and had come to the only correct conclusion that she was the strongest of all. Stronger than a bear. And she would have proven it too if bears didn't keep running away from her.

Humans were amazing too. Everybody had a sister and a brother, a mother and a father, aunts and uncles, an entire family. They laughed. They danced. They even shed tears together. If Delphyne could choose to live anywhere, she would choose to live alongside humans. Everything she had learned, she had learned from them. Blacksmithing. Sword-fighting. She even adopted their values. She could not claim to be the magnificent person she was today without them.

So there was absolutely no reason why anyone should not love Delphyne.

Shadows reigned inside her mountain, a wellspring of darkness. Somewhere deep within a single candle burned. Delphyne danced around her workbench already imagining herself to be in the presence of princess Iliana with whom she had a date. Everything she needed to make their date go as planned lay prepared on the table. All she needed to do was assemble it.

But first she dunked her head into a pail of water. Cold rivulets trickled down her face. If her plans had any chance of success she needed to look her finest. Grabbing a home-made bar of soap she began washing her hair, careful not to dig her claws into her skull. Having a set of sharp claws was just wonderful. She could cleave and claw and crack into anything. They were almost too perfect. But being the humble person that she was she could admit that they were perhaps a little less perfect for washing hair.

She scrubbed vigorously behind her ears and underneath her horns. Her horns were another absolutely fantastic feature. All the best animals had horns. Like cows. Everybody loved cows. And her horns were particularly stylish, curving outwards and then inwards from the back of her head, for about a handspan. Clearly the Goddess had decided she needed a crown.

After rinsing her hair and wiping off the excess water, she dowsed her candle. The all-devouring darkness swept in. An aroma of smoke mixed with her cleaning oils. She snatched her scissors. Little tufts of hair twirled all around her as one hand chased after the other across her head. Tails were amazing too, especially long snake-like ones like hers. She hardly needed to extol its virtues. Anyone who has ever had an itch between their shoulders could attest to the importance of good reach.

With her brown hair cut to the exact width of one finger and not a single strand left unsheared, Delphyne moved on to the next stage of the plan. This was the important part where everything came together and to demonstrate she needed a little light. She seized the candle and blew. A lick of flame escaped her lips, breathing life into the candle.

The pieces of her new armor shone like treasures in the sand. Her previous armor had more than earned its retirement. Although she could not easily part with something that served her so well, she had to admit that no dashing knight would ever be seen in something so scratched and dented, not to mention the gaping holes left by a warhammer.

Delphyne's deep blue eyes reflected in the diamond shape of her new cuirass. She hoisted it over her shoulders and strapped it to her gambeson. One by one the pieces went on, transforming her into the magnificent knight she knew she always had been. She pushed her chest out, imagining herself invincible. The one thing that made her armor different, thanks to the unique shape of her body, was the lack of gauntlets, vambraces, sabatons or greaves. Wonderful blue scales covered her hands, feet, tail and the lower half of her arms and legs, and while they weren't as strong as steel, they kept her well enough protected. The armored plates slid across each other as smoothly as her scales and she couldn't decide

which of them shone brighter. No woman would be able to resist a dashing knight like her. She could scarcely resist herself.

Abuzz with excitement, Delphyne ran off, her armor clanking like a set of windchimes. Her true love awaited. She rushed through her lair into the wider cavern beyond. Darkness dominated this labyrinth. Delphyne sprinted without concern, leaping over ledges, over crevices deep enough that if you somehow managed to avoid the walls, it would take about five minutes before you splattered on the ground. The stale air clung to her lungs as if she was breathing through a moldy cloud. If she lived here any longer she was certain she would turn into a fungus.

Fresh air wafted in from up ahead along with a faint light. Bursting out of the exit, Delphyne's wings unfurled like massive sails, long fingerlike appendages pulling the leathery membranes between them taut. She flew, leaving the forest and mountain far behind. Out of all the wonderful things she could do, nothing topped flying. Being one with the wind, seeing the world far below, tiny humans going about their day. But right now the visibility was limited for the Goddess had gone to sleep. Thousands of stars dotted the sky. Their light travelled across untold distances. Not even Delphyne could fly that high but one day she would.

Her date was going to go fantastic even if it was still a surprise for the lovely lady in question. First they would talk. There were many things she had always wanted to ask about being a princess. And of course Iliana would be more than interested in the life of a dashing knight such as herself. They would dance. Delphyne imagined them gliding across the ballroom floor hand in hand, twirling until they were sick with laughter. The princess would not be able to resist her natural charms—nobody could—and then under the starlit sky they would kiss. Their parting would be such sweet sorrow. But it needed to be done. Not everyone would understand. These things take time. First there would be anger—outrage even. But in the end even the most ardent believers of the Goddess would have their hearts changed by the strength of their love. All would embrace her.

The banners of the Dawnspire billowed up ahead. The enormous castle rose from the cliffside of a hill on the edge of the city. Towers stacked upon towers in a kind of chaotic harmony, all striving to be the tallest. A staircase to the heavens. Its white walls glowed under the faint light of the stars and the castle's shimmering twin reflected on the lake at its base. Blending art with architecture, only humans could create something so incredible. Only a very important person was allowed to live here.

And there on the balcony of the great ballroom, far beyond Delphyne's sight, all by herself stood Iliana. This was Delphyne's chance. Her golden opportunity.

Blood rushed to Delphyne's cheeks. A force as inexorable as the Sunrise took hold of her. She changed course.

It would be a very great shame not to see more of the castle while she was here. It certainly would be. She touched down on a different balcony: that of Iliana's room.

She swung the balcony door open and was stopped. A string of reflective disks blocked her path, the kind most people hung in their windows and doorways. She knew exactly why they were here and who they were for. She also knew that without the most important element, a burning candle, they had no chance of stopping her, and more than that, even if the Goddess herself had stood smiling in the doorway, not even Her light could prevent Delphyne's entry. Yet here she lingered all the same. It had never halted her before. If it had she would have never been able to go near anyone. Delphyne took a deep breath. A fire flared in her stomach. A gentle warmth spread through her chest. She pushed inside.

A flowery perfume still lingered in the air like a ghost of Iliana. Lilies. She froze; flowers. Every woman liked flowers. She loved flowers—nobody ever brought her flowers but she loved flowers. Still it was probably too late now and perhaps a little too forward. She could always bring her a gift later.

Delphyne's hook-like claws sunk into the soft carpet and caught the very next step. A tear stopped her progress. Curly threads clung to her foot. She groaned. It was such a lovely floral carpet too. Her feet, wonderful though they were, because of her raised heels, had a tendency to grab. Still she committed to being more careful, teetering precariously on the balls of her feet.

Seeing someone's room was like seeing a part of themselves. You could sense a touch of the living if you knew where to look. A four-poster bed made from beams wide enough to be a ship's prow dominated the spacious room. The blankets lay open on the left side and a doll dressed like a princess sat tucked in on the right. A diamond studded hairpin and an armband rested on the nightstand. A basin of water, a sponge, and a comb with a tangle of golden hair littered the table in front of a mirror. A rather cluttered assortment of bottles of perfume and powders covered a dresser. Delphyne clicked her claw against the glasses. She opened a drawer to reveal a glittering hoard of jewelry big enough to satisfy a—

Well... the less said about that the better. Delphyne banished those thoughts and closed the drawer.

She wetted her lips. She had saved the best for last: A wall to wall closet. Delphyne flung the doors open. A composition of colors exploded in her face, dresses in every style, a variety of velvets, silks and satins. But one jumped out in particular with a train about ten meters long. Iliana's wedding dress.

Delphyne bit her tongue. She really shouldn't.

But before she could finish that thought, Delphyne had already snatched it and made her way over to a tall three piece mirror, holding it in front of her chest. Its sparkly bodice was way too small for herself, both in height and width, but it would fit Iliana perfectly. Delphyne could already imagine herself walking down the aisle towards Iliana, the crowd cheering her on, her claws tapping like polished shoes, her tail swishing, her wings waving behind herself like a cape, her...

A weight settled on her stomach.

Delphyne let the bodice fall slack and placed one hand on the mirror. It shrieked in protest. One ill-considered twitch of her fingers and it would shatter into a million pieces. Her scales shimmered as if she was covered in diamonds. In many ways she resembled a human. In many ways she did not. Not even she knew exactly what she was but it seemed that everyone else had already decided. She withdrew her hand and placed her forehead against the glass. It was cold to the touch but touch all the same.

Why was she here? She fancied herself a knight yet here she was stealing into someone's home, touching things without permission, breaking stuff. Some knight she was. A proper knight would be well within their rights to run her through. Delphyne took a deep breath. The fire in her stomach burned bright. None of this had turned out the way she wanted. She could still leave, pretend she had never been here and pray no one would notice. She could still go home to her mold and her darkness.

Delphyne pulled away from the mirror. The slitted eyes of a dragon stared back at her. She knew what people called her.

Monster.

Iliana would understand. Princesses were special that way. Their hearts were open to anyone. Everyone knew that. A princess inspired greatness. Just look at this castle;

hundreds of craftsmen had built it over the centuries so that people far and wide could be reminded of her brilliance. She inspired hope. An end to war as old grudges lose their sting in the face of her forgiveness. Her tears become the cries of a kingdom demanding change, demanding peace, demanding a better world for everyone. She was the fulcrum on which a society turned, born to be beloved and born to love: the young, the old, the sick, the poor, man or woman. A more magnificent existence Delphyne could not imagine. Someone so magnanimous deserved only the best and to have the finest knight by her side: Delphyne.

Who better to protect a princess than someone who was both knight and dragon? Let any challenger step forward. If they could prove their worth she would renounce her claim. But if not, if no one could defeat her, and if the princess would have her, she would gladly take her rightful place by her side.

Delphyne stood tall, ready. She returned Iliana's wedding dress exactly as she had found it, pushed the threads she had pulled out the carpet back in as best she could, and even discovered a ring which must have rolled under the bed. Delphyne first removed Iliana's doll. How many tea parties must it have enjoyed? Probably more than Delphyne. This doll wasn't the kind of thing you would expect to find in the bed of a twenty-one-year old, but Delphyne could hardly fault anyone for seeking companionship. With one hand under the side beam she tilted the bed. The massive monstrosity groaned, the curtains shook, the cushions rolled off, but Delphyne snatched the ring. She left it on the nightstand after settling the bed back into the dent in the carpet. After she remade the bed she restored the rosy-cheeked doll to its place and left the room.

Iliana still waited on the ballroom balcony some floors below. Twenty-three guards—possibly more—patrolled the gloomy hallways though most of them kept to the lower floors. If they caught Delphyne, they would kill her—which was fair.

Delphyne had often visited castles. The benefit of not being wanted anywhere was that you could go everywhere. Despite fearing her, most humans did a terrible job of keeping her out. They painted the walls of their homes white as they knew they should and hung their reflective disks in every window and doorway, and nearly every wall had sconces embedded in them, but rarely did anyone keep the candles burning all through the night. Perhaps they had grown tired of maintaining what could be considered a fire hazard or perhaps they had simply forgotten about her. As a joke she had considered lighting some.

And it was not like she was as bad as everyone made her out to be. Contrary to popular belief she had never eaten anyone, never placed a curse on anyone, and never

covered an entire kingdom in darkness. She had no taste for the former and no idea how to do the latter two. She hadn't even brought a sword with her today because she had no intention of using one.

Humans were not so bad either. Nobody had tried to kill her recently. It used to be that someone would come by to murder her every week. Then it became every other week. Then every month. Every two months. The last visitor she had was six months ago and he turned around before reaching her lair. It simply would not do. She had tracked him down and demanded an explanation: Something about this all being a big mistake and how he should have never come here. But she wasn't going to let him off so easily. She argued that he must have journeyed far. He needed a place to rest, somewhere to put up his feet, perhaps some dinner. She offered all this and more. No, no, he insisted. He had places to be. He was a man of some importance you see and couldn't be missed. She understood completely. She offered to fly him home this instant. No, no, no, he said, and he was ashamed to admit this, but he had a great fear of heights. He barely dared to ride his horse as is. In the end she had to say her goodbyes and was left alone in the darkness. It seemed like society had decided to ignore her to death.

Delphyne had also endeavored to meet humans. Most ran away screaming at the sight of her and the few brave ones who stayed behind never wanted to talk. The result was always the same with everyone getting upset and her having nothing to show for it. In the end she had to settle on watching them from afar, from the shadows. Only then could she be reminded of what loving people they truly were.

Delphyne arrived at a large double door. The entrance to the ballroom. She took a deep breath—*Goddess light the way*—and went in.

The wind slammed the door shut behind her. Iliana stood on the other side on the balcony, her silvery dress and waist-length golden hair blowing in the breeze. She hadn't turned around.

Within a few steps Delphyne's foot slipped on the ballroom's floorboards, claws skittering on what might as well be a sheet of ice. She steadied herself by taking smaller, surer steps, claws clacking, armor creaking as she went. Luckily no one expected an intruder to come from inside.

Starlight filtered in through the arched windows. Between each of them, each on their own side, hung the banners of the soon to be wedded houses. For the Arcelia family, Iliana's, the swan with an olive branch in its bill, resting on a lake before the rising Sun. And

for the Klinge family, Oswald's, Iliana's future husband, the coronated fox, hunting between the trees. Iliana, in all her greatness, had agreed to unite these once warring houses. If her kindness could heal these ancient wounds and unite both families, imagine what a similar union could do for humans and dragons? Or dragon, since Delphyne was the only one.

The Goddess had not just favored Iliana with golden hair but with beauty beyond compare as if the gentleness of her heart had bloomed in her features. She exuded an air of supreme confidence. If royalty were a coat she wore it beautifully. She was the embodiment of everything a princess should be and if anyone could save Delphyne it would be Iliana. Her wedding would be in one week. When Delphyne heard the news she knew she had to act quickly.

The night had whispered its secrets in Delphyne's ear. The darkness always shared everything with her. She was the veil of darkness, the shadow in every corner, the monster under every bed. She watched as the world slept. Always near. Always far. How could she resist venturing a little closer? People had always been like ghosts to her, silhouettes moving in the dark. But that was not what a true person was. She knew better than anyone that people were made of light.

Delphyne's footsteps rang like false notes amongst the silence. She held her breath afraid that even the slightest rush of air might shatter the moment. As was the case with Iliana, delicateness and beauty often went hand in hand, as if its existence defied all expectations. This was the miracle of the Goddess in its truest form. Delphyne bore more than enough scars to know the frailty of human skin. The hair on the back of her neck stood on end. Her fingers twitched despite her best efforts to stay calm.

If Delphyne and Iliana had changed places would she not run as far as possible at the sight of the person behind her?

A princess would understand.

Delphyne came to a halt just outside Iliana's view. She puffed out her chest.

With her chin held high, Iliana focused on the far horizon. Beyond the lake, beyond the mountains, beyond the river that separated their kingdoms, stood Bernthal Castle, Prince Oswald's ancestral home.

Somewhere in the dark of night Delphyne heard a mirror crack.

Just then, side by side, two stars streamed across the sky, their golden tails trailing. Iliana closed her eyes and clasped her hands.

May she smile for me.

"What did you wish for?" Delphyne asked.

"I wished for—," Iliana turned as she spoke.

Her face twisted into a mask of madness. A bone chilling scream tore from her lips, echoed through the ballroom, resounded through the hallways. Delphyne willed it out of existence but the damage was done. All throughout the castle faces turned, swords were drawn.

Delphyne, checking her manners, bowed in the manner of a distinguished gentleman.

But Iliana had other plans and slipped past her.

Or tried to. Delphyne caught her hand at the last second.

Iliana raised the other.

A fist flew at Delphyne's face. She caught it, pulled Iliana towards herself, and pirouetted her under her arm.

After a momentary confusion, Iliana regained her composure and tried to flee once more.

Once more Delphyne grabbed her arm, this time twirling together. She let go only to catch her again as if they were dancing.

Iliana pulled away from her, hesitating. Wherever she turned, Delphyne blocked her path. From the left to the right, from the left to the right, until another fist came down the center.

Delphyne's foot slipped. Her claws shredded the floorboards. Delphyne toppled forwards, capturing Iliana as a fist flew over her shoulder. She managed to stop herself from collapsing on top of Iliana who now dangled beneath her as if Delphyne had dipped her. Iliana's other hand rested on Delphyne's cheek, her delicate fingers as smooth as a summer breeze. Touch was the truest of all senses. Children had to be taught not to touch everything for how can anything be real if you have never touched it? The promise Iliana represented

suddenly seemed more real than ever. Delphyne couldn't help but smile, seeing herself reflected in Iliana's eyes.

By now Iliana was probably sick of dangling. Delphyne hoisted her up, arm secure around her waist. "Sorry, I did not mean to frighten you. See, I mean no harm."

Iliana stood there with a sort of shaky, wide-eyed expression. She made no attempt to escape. Slowly, Delphyne released her. Iliana stayed in place. They just stood there observing each other. An avalanche of everything Delphyne had always wanted to ask piled in her mouth.

The ballroom doors cracked open. Eight armed men stormed inside. More were underway.

Iliana glanced past Delphyne's shoulder, and then, with an odd glint in her eyes, stared back at Delphyne.

"Please tell them we were just talking?" Delphyne had no intention of being stabbed or exposing Iliana to a fight.

But Iliana's gaze remained fixed. Not fleeing. Not crying for help. Only an unwavering stare as if she was challenging Delphyne to stay.

The thunder of feet drew near.

"Please tell them were we just talking?"

Iliana's silence held. The balcony doors stood open. The midnight air awaited where no one else could follow. "Please?"

The Swans, the Valencian royal guard, with their bulbous helmet and feathered capes circled around them, swords aimed at the center.

Iliana bolted. "Kill it already."

"Hey, you are supposed to like me." Delphyne snatched Iliana, wrangled her in and wrapped her wings around her. Any attack would have to go through Delphyne first. Her muscles tensed, feet sliding on the smooth floor. All her strength might well work against her. She switched to a wider stance.

“Good evening gentlemen, we were just having a nice talk,” Delphyne said in a neighborly tone while Iliana hammered away at her arms. A dull thudding was all that came through. Delphyne leaned on Iliana to steady herself.

The men grimaced at the sight of her.

This guilty scene spoke louder than any words she could offer. Still, she needed a chance to reason with Iliana. This was all a mistake. Nothing had gone to plan.

A broad chested man with black plumes adorning his helmet and a black feathered cape covering his shoulders while all the others wore white stepped forward. Their commander. He sheathed his sword while the rest maintained their circle, eying back and forth between him and herself. “I mean you no harm,” he said with his palms open. “Just let the princess go.”

Delphyne’s fingers itched. Her arms coiled around Iliana’s waist a little tighter. This was all a misunderstanding. She had come so close. If only she had more time to talk.

When she did not answer, the circle stepped closer. The man directly behind Delphyne waved his sword about, licking his lips.

Delphyne lifted Iliana off her feet. Iliana’s golden hair tickled Delphyne’s face. Like this she could not only keep Iliana out of harm’s way, but she could also serve as a counterbalance.

“No one wants anyone to get hurt.” The commander took a step forward—

—As did the man behind her, lunging.

Delphyne’s tail slapped his feet out from under him. He crashed to the floor, sword spiraling through the air. Delphyne’s tail twined around the hilt and swung it along the inside of the circle, stopping at the commander.

They all flinched, retreating one step.

“I did not come here to hurt anyone,” Delphyne said. “I just wanted to talk.” To add weight to her words Delphyne flung her sword out the door and off the balcony.

With faltering legs the man on the floor crawled away and was grabbed by one of his fellows and the circle closed once more.

“Just let the princess go and you can leave,” the commander said.

She could trust them about as much as they trusted her. She could not blame them either: they were only doing their duty.

Iliana had begun kicking Delphyne's legs. Delphyne kept her grip firm. Despite Iliana's protestations there was a softness in her that Delphyne could only describe as human. The delicate brush of her fingers, the warmth of her touch, this was her true self, the person that could hear Delphyne's plight. Not the blind anger directed at a misunderstanding.

A princess would understand.

A strangeness took hold of Delphyne then, something she had only felt once before. A soberness. A certainty. She could not part with Iliana any more than she could part with her own heart. The realization stunned her into silence. She shook her head trying to make sense of it all but her mind was made up. This was the way it had to be. An old idea resurfaced.

The commander must have read her mind because he lunged forward, grasping for Iliana just as Delphyne's wings unfurled.

Within a flash they were airborne. Iliana screamed. The circle spilled into its center. A sword struck Delphyne's foot just before they escaped.

Delphyne circled the ballroom, clinging to Iliana who clung to her.

The guards scattered. Some stayed behind to block the balcony doors, new arrivals cut off the way inside the wider castle, and the majority spread out across the ballroom floor to jump her anywhere she might land.

There was only one option left. “Tell the king,” Delphyne shouted, “I promise his daughter will be safe. And tell anyone who wants to hear where to find me.” And with that Delphyne pivoted sharply, wrapping one wing around Iliana and smashing herself shoulder first through the leaded glass window. Shards sprayed everywhere. Limbs of lead scraped Delphyne's wings, but more importantly, Iliana remained safe despite her screaming. Delphyne, wings bleeding, cradled her against her chest and vanished into the night.

Hours of flight brought them back to the mountain. All this time Iliana had clung to her like a child to its mother despite the fact that nothing could compel Delphyne to let her go and despite her constant reassurances. Delphyne touched down amongst the skeletal trees,

steadying herself before gently lowering Iliana into the wetness of the fallen leaves. With her sparkling bodice and flowing skirts, no one had ever seemed more out of place amidst the rotting filth of the forest floor. She truly was a star amongst the darkness, her guiding light. And yet the effect was already spoiled. Her eyes had turned puffy and her golden hair had tangled into knots.

"I know this doesn't mean much coming from me, but I am sorry. I will do anything to make it up to you."

Iliana shivered. She gripped Delphyne's chest plate scarcely seeming aware of the world around her. Delphyne supported her as best she could. If anything she had wanted to fall into her arms.

Despite her disheveled state there was nothing more mesmerizing than a living breathing human. Just reading her body language was more conversation than Delphyne was used to. Iliana's lips trembled. She breathed heavily. Her jaw tightened. She balled her fist. Drew her arm back...

...and struck Delphyne square in the jaw. It stung, but not half as much as knowing she was right to do it. "I deserved that, didn't I? And much more."

Iliana's affirmation came in the form of another fist.

Delphyne caught it. "You are quite brave. No one can deny that. But let's leave a little for someone else to destroy. I am sure your prince will want a piece of me." And many more.

The shadow of the mountain loomed overhead. A cold wind blew.

"Come, you cannot stay outside."

Iliana reacted as if she had been struck, vainly fighting for the strength she had long since lost.

Delphyne scooped her up and carried her towards a void in the mountainside.

"No," Iliana muttered. She slipped off a slipper.

No one but Delphyne would have noticed. "Aren't you clever? But that won't be necessary." Delphyne hooked her tail into the shoe and brought it along. "They know where I live. They should be here soon."

As the shadow of the mountain enveloped them, Iliana huddled closer. Some of her warmth seeped into Delphyne's arms. The hotness of her breath brushed her cheeks. Inside the mountain Iliana would be as good as blind. Delphyne trotted on unimpeded.

At times Iliana's head would nod only for her to shudder awake in a panic that vanished the next second.

"Do not let your heart deceive you," Delphyne whispered. "The light shines forever true. And though the night seems long and lasting, 'tis the dark who fears the dawn." The words of the Goddess had always brought a smile to Delphyne's face and going by the fact Iliana's panicking ceased, perhaps it helped her too. Still it would take nothing short of a miracle to make all of this right.

Despite how much her conscience cried foul, Delphyne was determined to see it through. She didn't know what that made her. Having someone to speak to, someone to hold and to hold you, someone to laugh at your jokes, all of it, even Iliana's mere presence was better than anything she had felt before. She would suffer any consequences to make it last.

Her only regret was that not all the consequences would be her own. On Iliana's side she would do everything to mitigate them. A princess would understand. From everything Delphyne had seen so far, Iliana had quite the spirit. Just the right mindset for someone who could save Delphyne.

A bloody film coated Delphyne's wing. The scratches ached and the splinters of broken glass stung. She would have to tend to it later. Her foot seemed mostly fine. A few broken scales and a bruise that would likely result in a bump but now merely complained.

Their silent procession ended with the arrival at Delphyne's lair. Torchlight waved them in and Delphyne carried Iliana past a lake of glowing gold which covered one side of the chamber. She eased Iliana down against the wall.

Iliana's eyes fluttered open. Her head lolled from side to side but she still resisted Delphyne's attempts to place a shackle on her wrists. A futile effort. And then her spirit just gave out. Iliana collapsed.

Delphyne's heart wrenched. Nothing she could do could make it better. "I promise I will make this up to you," Delphyne whispered, not even sure if Iliana could still hear her.

One of Iliana's arms had stuck propped up against Delphyne's chest. It only fell down when Delphyne backed off.

