

First Chosen by the Dragon

8-10 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 31

[Evelyn's POV]The mark wakes me before the sun does. Heat blooms across my chest like a handprint pressed to a stove, and when my fingers find the skin above my heart, the outline is still there—Draven's palm, his fingers, seared into me during the ceremony just days ago. I trace the edges in the dark, feeling warmth pulse under my fingertips, alive and insistent. Not painful. Worse than painful. Intimate. Like he's still touching me, even now, even with walls and corridors and all the careful distance between us. "You're awake early," Aspis murmurs through the bond, her voice thick with drowsy warmth. "Or did you never actually sleep?" "I slept," I lie. "A little." "Your heartbeat says otherwise. It's been racing since midnight." Aspis counters easily, because apparently nothing gets past her. "My heartbeat is a traitor." I swing my legs off the bed and reach for the dark clothes folded on the chair—routine now, practiced, the way everything about sneaking through service corridors has become practiced since the beach. Since Aspis hatched and the world split open. Since Draven stood beside me in moonlight and looked at me like I was something worth looking at. "How are you feeling? Any better than last night?" "Restless. The walls are too close. My wings keep hitting things." I think I can hear a tinge of whining there, and it twists my heart in turn. I pull my tunic over my head and lace my boots in darkness. The compound sleeps around me. I ease my door open and slip into the service passage like a shadow returning home. The hidden corridors smell of damp stone and old wood. I know every turn now—left at the cracked pillar, down the stairs where the third step groans, right at the broken sconce. This path is muscle memory, worn into me by regular predawn visits, and my feet carry me through the dark while my mind stays fixed on the heat radiating from my chest. Draven's door is unlocked. It always is, this time of morning—an agreement neither of us ever spoke aloud. I slip inside and let my eyes adjust to grey light seeping through curtained windows. "I hear you," Aspis says, excitement spiking through the bond like a struck match. "Come." I cross to the private alcove and pull the heavy curtain aside. Aspis lifts her head from where she's curled on stone, white scales catching dim light like scattered moonstones, amber eyes finding mine with fierce joy. She's the size of a large hunting cat now — sleek and muscular, wings folded tight, tail curving around her haunches. Beautiful. Impossible to hide much longer. "Hey, gorgeous," I whisper, crouching to press my forehead against her snout. She chirps—a deep, resonant sound that vibrates through my sternum—and pushes into my touch. "You've grown again. Your wing nearly

reaches the window frame.”“I can’t help it. Everything feels too small. The ceiling is wrong. I need sky, Evelyn.”“I know. We’ll figure it out.” I stroke the ridge between her eyes, feeling the bond hum steady and warm. But the energy coiled inside her trembles against my palm—restless, building, wings twitching with the need to fly. She shifts, and one wing clips the curtain rod with a metallic scrape that makes me wince. I reach up to adjust the curtain, and that’s when I hear the footsteps. Measured, deliberate, the stride of a man who owns every stone beneath his boots. I smooth the fabric into place and straighten just as the door opens. Draven enters already dressed for the day—dark leather and steel, blade strapped to his thigh. His gaze sweeps the room, tactical and automatic, and then it finds me. Something raw flickers across his face—unguarded, like a wound he forgot to bandage—and vanishes before I can name it. His jaw sets. Controlled. Unreadable.

“She grew again,” I say, because if I don’t speak first, the silence will swallow us both. “Look at her wingspan.” He crosses the room and crouches beside me to pull the curtain back. Aspis trills at him—she always does, the shameless creature—and something softens at the edges of his expression before he masks it. We’re close enough that his shoulder brushes mine, close enough that I catch the scent of salt and steel on his skin, close enough that when he speaks, his voice drops to that low register he only uses when no one else can hear. “She’s gained at least four inches since yesterday,” he says, running a careful hand along her wing joint. His fingers are precise, clinical, assessing bone and muscle. “At this rate, three weeks. Maybe less before concealment becomes physically impossible.” “Three weeks isn’t long. What happens then?” “Then we find a better solution, or we face the consequences of discovery.” He meets my eyes, and the proximity hits me — his jaw, the way grey light catches in his dark gaze. “You need to stop using your light abilities. Completely.” “People are asking questions.” He turns toward me fully. “In the arena, the way you moved — that kind of speed doesn’t go unnoticed. There are whispers. Venna lost to something she can’t explain, and that makes her more dangerous than if she’d simply lost to a better blade.” “I barely use them at all anymore. I’ve been careful, Draven. I’ve been pulling every strike in training, making myself look average. I know what’s at stake.” “Careful isn’t enough anymore. No light. None. Not even when you think you’re alone.” He reaches toward me, and my breath stalls—but his fingers find my cloak collar, adjusting the fabric where it’s folded wrong against my neck. His knuckles graze bare skin, a whisper of contact that sends heat cascading down my spine. The touch is practical, impersonal, the kind of correction a commander makes without thinking. The way my breath catches is not practical at all. “The mark is visible if this sits crooked,” he says, voice dropping lower, rough at the edges. His fingers linger a fraction too long, close enough that I feel calluses on his fingertips, warmth through fabric. “Keep it covered during training.” “I will.” Our eyes meet and hold — three

heartbeats, four, five — and the space between us tightens until it hums with something neither of us will name. The mark on my chest burns hotter. His gaze drops to my mouth for an instant so brief I might have imagined it, and then he steps back. The distance falls between us like a blade. *wW(w).n(O)velwORM.côm* “Get to training,” he says. Not cold. Not warm. Something carefully, deliberately neutral that costs him more than he’ll ever admit. I turn for the service corridor and pull the hidden door open. The passage swallows me in cool stone darkness, and I walk fast — faster than necessary — while my pulse hammers against my ribs. The mark throbs in time with each heartbeat, Draven’s phantom touch still burning along my collarbone. *wW.W.NOV(e)lwôrm.c©mm* Moonlight bends toward my fingertips unbidden, silver threads curling around my hands. I clench my fists, willing it down, but the light has a mind of its own this morning—drawn out by the racing in my blood, by the heat pooling in my chest. Through the bond, Aspis purrs. Low, knowing, insufferably smug. “Don’t,” I warn her silently. “I didn’t say anything.” “You didn’t have to.” Her laughter ripples through me like warm water, and I can’t stop the smile tugging at my mouth as I step into grey dawn, the mark burning quietly beneath my clothes, moonlight trailing from my fingertips like a confession I can’t take back. Cedella is a passionate storyteller known for her bold romantic and spicy novels that keep readers hooked from the very first chapter. With a flair for crafting emotionally intense plots and unforgettable characters, she blends love, desire, and drama into every story she writes. Cedella’s storytelling style is immersive and addictive—perfect for fans of heated romances and heart-pounding twists

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8-10 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 32

[Draven’s POV] The training yard spreads below my balcony like a map of small failures. Newly marked warriors pair off under morning sun, their movements sharp but unrefined—eagerness mistaken for skill, aggression substituting for technique. I catalogue each one by instinct, sorting strengths from liabilities, and my gaze should remain clinical. It does not. Evelyn moves among them like a blade hidden in cloth. She pulls every strike a fraction short, rounds her shoulders to disguise the economy of her footwork, makes herself look merely competent when every line of her body betrays something far more dangerous. Smart. She’s adapting to the threat Venna represents, blending into the ranks like water disappearing into sand. But she overcorrects on the left—her guard drops a half-second too slow on that side, a deliberate stutter that no one below would notice. I notice. I notice because I’ve

watched her fight without restraint, because I know what she looks like when she stops pretending. I also notice the way sweat catches the light along her collarbone. The way she bites her lower lip when concentration narrows her focus. The way her body turns through a parry with a fluidity that has nothing to do with combat training and everything to do with the fact that I have apparently lost the capacity to observe a woman fight without cataloguing the architecture of her throat. I redirect my attention to the eastern pair drilling close-quarters disarms. Their footwork is abysmal. "You watch her like a man starving, and yet you won't eat," Khaira rumbles through the bond, her amusement thick and slow as honey. "Fascinating." "I'm assessing readiness across all the new marks. She happens to be among them." "She happens to be the only one you've tracked for the last twelve minutes without blinking. But please, continue your comprehensive assessment." I don't dignify that with a response. Below, Evelyn resets her stance and engages her sparring partner again—and this time the spin-strike she executes carries a fraction too much speed, too much precision. A bonded rider's reflexes leaking through whatever suppression she's maintaining. The motion is beautiful and terrifying, and I file it under problems I will address later, because addressing it now means acknowledging why I saw it so clearly. Movement in the colonnade catches my attention. Venna stands beneath the stone arches at the yard's western edge, arms crossed, spine rigid as hammered steel. She's positioned exactly where she used to stand when she ran the morning drills—the spot that was hers by right and reputation for nearly a decade. Before the arena. Before she lost to a woman she still can't explain. She doesn't speak to the trainees. Doesn't correct form, doesn't bark commands, doesn't so much as raise her voice. She simply watches, and that silence radiates through the yard like pressure before a storm. The warriors nearest her shift their weight unconsciously, angling away from the intensity of her stillness. Venna loud is Venna predictable—fire and steel and fury you can see coming. Venna quiet is Venna planning. I note it the way I note weather patterns and border movements: something is building, and its direction matters. I look away at the other trainees again, and a minute later I hear boots on balcony stone behind me. The stride is unhurried, deliberate, belonging to someone who has earned the right to walk beside me without announcement. Venna comes to stand at the railing, and she doesn't ask permission because she doesn't need to—she is my senior commander, and this balcony has been her ground as long as it has been mine. For a long moment we both watch Evelyn in the yard below, and the silence between us has the weight of an accusation neither of us has spoken yet. "She visits your chambers," Venna says without turning her head. Her voice is level, stripped of the fire I've come to expect. Something colder lives there now, something that spent the weeks since the arena being sharpened to a finer edge. "Every night. Through the service corridors. Leaves before dawn."

The words land precisely where she intends them. I keep my eyes on the yard, on the dust rising from a dozen sparring pairs, on anything but the woman beside me. “Are you spying on my personal movements, Venna?” “I’m protecting the House. Someone has to.” She turns to face me, and I feel the shift before I see it—the weight of her full attention, her conviction, directed like a weapon. When I meet her eyes, I find something harder to fight than rage or jealousy. Certainty. She believes what she’s about to say with every fibre of her being, and that makes her more dangerous than she’s ever been with a blade. “Whatever she’s doing in your chambers—whatever hold she has on you—it’s making you reckless.” Her tone stays measured, each word placed with surgical care. “You stopped my challenge. You gave her your mark. You watch her—” A pause. Deliberate. Aimed. “—the way you’re watching her right now.” Below, Evelyn executes another combination, and this time the speed is unmistakable—too fast, too clean, the kind of movement that comes from something deeper than muscle memory. A bonded rider’s power bleeding through the mask. [www.novelworm.com](#) She recovers quickly, slowing her next strike to match the rhythm around her, but the damage is done. Anyone watching closely enough would have seen. Venna was watching closely enough. I force my gaze from the yard and meet Venna’s stare directly. “You overstep.” “And you’re blinded.” She holds my eyes for three full seconds—long enough to make the silence count, long enough to prove she won’t be the one to look away first. Then she steps back, inclines her head with impeccable formality that concedes nothing, and turns on her heel. Her boots strike stone in measured rhythm as she crosses the balcony and disappears through the archway. [www.novelworm.com](#) Not defeated. Not retreating. Recalibrating. Adjusting the approach the way a siege commander adjusts after the first assault reveals the wall’s true thickness. She is right about one thing. I am watching Evelyn the way she described. The fact that I recognize it changes nothing. The fact that recognizing it should change everything is a problem I will continue to ignore with characteristic discipline. I turn back to the railing. Below in the training yard, Evelyn pauses between drills and glances upward—not searching, not uncertain, but drawn by the same gravity that keeps pulling my attention downward. Her eyes find mine across the distance, and something passes between us that has no name civilized enough for daylight. Heat and recognition and the quiet understanding that whatever careful boundaries we’ve constructed are eroding faster than either of us can rebuild them. She holds my gaze for a heartbeat, two, and then she looks away first. Back to the drill. Back to the mask. Back to the performance of being ordinary. “The commander sees what you refuse to name,” Khaira says, and her voice carries none of its usual amusement. “How long before others see it too?” [www.novelworm.com](#) I watch Evelyn reset her stance among the newly marked warriors, pulling her strikes short, rounding her shoulders, making herself small. The mark I pressed into her skin burns somewhere beneath her training leathers, invisible and undeniable. I don’t answer Khaira. She already knows the answer, and so do I—it’s already

too late, and I'm simply watching the distance close. Cedella is a passionate storyteller known for her bold romantic and spicy novels that keep readers hooked from the very first chapter. With a flair for crafting emotionally intense plots and unforgettable characters, she blends love, desire, and drama into every story she writes. Cedella's storytelling style is immersive and addictive—perfect for fans of heated romances and heart-pounding twists.

First Chosen by the Dragon

9-11 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 33

[Evelyn's POV]The days blur into a rhythm that bruises. Morning drills at dawn with newly marked warriors, every strike pulled short. Afternoon patrols along the eastern ridge. Evening weapons practice under Sera's command, her voice cracking across the yard like a whip while torchlight turns blades to molten gold. I settle into it, become exactly what I'm supposed to be—competent, unremarkable, invisible. The eastern ridge stretches ahead of me in late afternoon light, wind pulling at my braid, salt air sharp off the cliffs. I'm scanning the treeline below when boots crunch gravel behind me and Riven falls into step at my shoulder, easy as breathing. "You look thrilled," he says. "Truly. The excitement is radiating off you." "I'm patrolling. It's not meant to be thrilling." I counter half-sarcastically with a small smile. "Everything is meant to be thrilling if you do it right." He grins—wide, careless, a grin that costs him nothing—and bumps his shoulder against mine. "I'll show you the overlook past the next bend. Sea-dragon nests in the cliff face—they light up at dusk when the mothers come back." "I'm supposed to be watching the treeline, not sightseeing." "You can do both. I believe in you." He walks backward ahead of me, arms spread, the cliff edge three feet behind his heels, and he doesn't even glance at it. "How are you settling in? Post-marking life treating you well?" "Well enough. Sera runs a tight rotation." His sincere laugh carries across the ridge, warm and unguarded, and something in me wants to lean toward it the way a cold body leans toward fire. But even as I half-smile at him—charming, easy, open in all the ways his brother is not—my mind snags on Draven. The memory of his hand hovering at my hip weeks ago, correcting my footwork—not quite touching, close enough that heat radiated across the gap, and my entire body ignited. The way his voice drops half a register when he gives me orders directly, and I feel it in my spine. I should feel nothing for him but a soldier's wariness toward her commander. Instead, every incidental contact lands like a brand, and the worst part is he doesn't even seem to notice. "Evelyn?" Riven tilts his head. "You disappeared for a second." "Just thinking about the rotation tomorrow." I shrug half-heartedly. "Truly riveting,

mind-boggling stuff, you know?” www.NoVellWorld.com “Liar.” But he says it gently. “I’ve got to cut north—my patrol forks at the ridge marker. Stay sharp past the bluffs, the footing gets loose.” He clasps my shoulder, warm and brief. “See you at evening practice.” He jogs ahead and disappears around the bend, and the ridge goes quiet. Just wind, and salt, and distant waves. “You’re distracted,” Aspis says through the bond, her voice stripped of its usual playfulness. Something tight. Desperate. “And I can’t breathe. The walls are pressing in again. My wings keep hitting stone and I can’t—the ceiling is too low, it’s all too low.” The distress slams through me mid-stride. Claustrophobia—thick, suffocating, not mine. Aspis’s world closing in through the bond, stone on every side. I feel her claws raking across rock, gouging lines into the walls of Draven’s chamber, wings crumpling against surfaces that were spacious a week ago and are now a cage. “I need out. Everything is wrong. I can’t stay here.” www.NoVellWorld.com “I know. I’m working on it. Hold on for me.” I whisper, trying to be more comforting, already calculating the route to Draven. I find Draven in his study after evening practice, still in my training leathers. He looks up from maps and something shifts behind his eyes—there and gone. www.NoVellWorld.com “Aspis can’t stay in your chambers anymore,” I say without preamble. “She’s gouging the walls. The claustrophobia is bleeding through the bond so hard I can barely focus during drills. She needs real space, Draven.” He studies me. “I’m aware. I heard the scratching through the floor last night.” So calm and collected, as if he’s not affected by the situation at all. “Then you know we’re out of time. Another week in that alcove and she’ll break through the stone herself, and then it won’t matter how careful we’ve been.”

He leans back, jaw tight. “The sea caves. Below the eastern cliffs—there’s a network large enough. Natural ventilation, water access, a concealed arch open to the ocean. Hidden passage goes from these quarters.” He taps the wall behind him. “Narrow. Rough. Built for smuggling, not dragons.” “Can she fit?” “Barely. We go tonight, middle of the night, when the compound sleeps. No one sees us. No one knows.” His eyes hold mine. “Strict conditions, Evelyn. If anyone discovers that passage, we lose everything.” I nod eagerly. “Be here at the second bell past midnight. Don’t be late.” And that night, I’m not late. I slip through the service corridors with Aspis’s anticipation thrumming through the bond like a plucked wire, and when I ease into Draven’s chambers, he’s already waiting—dark clothes, shuttered lantern, expression carved from stone. Behind the alcove curtain, Aspis whines, white scales catching the barest sliver of light. “Stay close,” Draven says, and opens a section of wall I never would have found on my own. The passage swallows us. Damp stone presses from both sides, the ceiling low enough that Draven ducks, the lantern throwing stuttered shadows across rough-hewn rock. Aspis follows behind me, breathing harsh and rapid, flanks scraping the walls. I keep one hand on her — scales warm beneath my fingers, muscles bunching and flexing with barely contained tension. “Easy,” I whisper to her. “Almost there. Just a little further.” “The walls

are touching me. I hate this. I hate all of this.”“I know. I’ve got you.” The passage narrows, and Draven’s shoulder brushes mine as we navigate a turn. His breathing is close enough that I feel it against my temple—warm, steady, controlled. The darkness makes everything sharper. The rustle of his clothes. The creak of leather. The heat where his body presses briefly against mine before the passage widens enough to separate us. My hand stays on Aspis but my awareness splits between dragon and man, and I can’t decide which makes my heart beat harder. Then the tunnel opens, and the world expands. The cave is vast—vaulted stone ceiling lost in shadow, black water stretching across a subterranean lake, and there, cutting through the far wall, a natural arch wide enough to frame the sky. Moonlight pours through it in a silver column, turning the water to hammered metal. Aspis shrieks. Raw, triumphant, echoing off stone and water—and then she launches. Wings spread for the first time, six, seven feet of glittering span, and she glides over the dark water with white scales blazing in moonlight like a second moon born from the sea. She banks, dips low enough that wingtips send silver ripples spiraling outward, then climbs toward the arch, bathing in open air. I laugh. The sound startles me—bright, unrestrained, something I barely recognize as my own. It comes from somewhere deep, somewhere I’d forgotten existed, and it fills the cave alongside the whisper of wings on water. I turn, still laughing, still breathless, and find Draven watching not the dragon but me. The moonlight catches his expression before he can hide it—open, unguarded, stripped of every wall he builds between himself and the world. Something close to wonder. Something closer to hunger. His dark eyes hold mine, and the breath leaves my lungs like he’s pulled it from me with his bare hands. “What?” I whisper. “Nothing.” But he doesn’t look away. His gaze stays on my face, on my mouth, on the tears I didn’t realize were tracking down my cheeks, and the word nothing sits between us like the most obvious lie either of us has ever told. We stand together in the dark, shoulders almost touching, watching Aspis fly. Her wings catch moonlight and scatter it across the cave walls in shifting silver, and the silence between us is warm. Not empty—full. Full of everything we won’t say, everything we pretend not to feel. The silence hums with it, alive and tender and terrifying, and it is the warmest thing I’ve felt in years. Aspis shrieks again, joyful and wild, and the sound settles in my chest beside the mark that still burns with Draven’s handprint. I don’t move closer. He doesn’t step away. And the cave holds us both in moonlight and silence while the dragon flies.

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Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 34

[Draven's POV]The council chamber smells of ink and old stone, morning light cutting through narrow windows in pale slabs across the war table. Six chairs occupied, maps weighted at their corners with bronze dragon-head paperweights. Theron delivers the border report: eastern ridge patrols steady, two minor incursions repelled, southern watchtowers requesting supplies before the wet season. Sera follows with training evaluations. Corwin shuffles parchments at the far end of the table with the meticulous care of a man who has organized the affairs of three generations of my house. Routine. Predictable. Then Corwin clears his throat—not the administrative one that precedes budget amendments. The other one. The sound he makes before delivering news that will rearrange the furniture of my life. “A raven arrived before dawn, my lord. Sealed with the Alliance sigil.” He slides the parchment across the table. “The Alliance of Houses has formally requested a diplomatic summit. To be hosted here, at the House of the Black Dragon. Full council mandate—binding under the Accord.”

“All five major houses sending delegations, I assume?” Theron asks, though his tone says he already knows. “Including the ones we’d rather see at the bottom of the sea?”

“All five. Stormreach. Ashenvale. The Duskborne. Thornwall.” A pause, precise as a blade finding the gap between ribs. “And The Blue Dragon.”

The name lands in my chest like an old wound splitting under new pressure. The House of the Blue Dragon. I feel every pair of eyes finding me. I give them nothing—that skill was perfected after Lyanna’s convoy was torn apart on a mountain road carrying a ceasefire proposal written in my own hand. “Under Alliance law,” Corwin continues, wise enough to keep talking when silence would be more dangerous, “a formal summit request from the full council carries binding obligation. The host house must grant hospitality and safe passage to all delegations. Including blood enemies. Including houses with unresolved blood debts.”

“So the people who slaughtered our diplomatic envoy now want us to host theirs,” Sera says, her voice flat as hammered steel. “And Alliance law says we smile while we do it.”

I fold the parchment with deliberate care. My hands are steady. They’ve been steady through worse—through the two years I spent hunting Lyanna’s killers instead of leading my people, because rage had replaced duty so completely I couldn’t tell them apart. “Timeline and delegation size?”

“Three weeks until arrival. Seven-day summit with two days for travel on either end. Delegations capped at twelve per house, though Blue Dragon has historically interpreted ‘twelve’ with creative generosity.”

Theron leans forward. “You can’t host this personally. Not with Mintia walking these halls. Every lord in attendance will be watching

to see if you keep your blade sheathed.”“I’m aware of what they’ll be watching for.” I look at him directly. “Which is why you’ll serve as my formal representative. Full authority to negotiate—trade, borders, breeding agreements. Sera handles intelligence. I want to know what every delegation is really here for before they finish unpacking.” I hold Sera’s gaze. “Especially the Mintians. I don’t care what they say at the table. I care what they whisper when doors close.”“I’ll have eyes on every member of their contingent before they clear the front gate,” she says. “If they breathe in a pattern I don’t like, you’ll know about it.”The meeting concludes. I wait until the chamber empties—all except Corwin, who lingers when he senses a second meeting hiding inside the first. I cross to the window. Somewhere below these stones, in a sea cave carved by tide, a white dragon sleeps.“I need you to research something. Historical precedents—white dragon appearances. How the bonded riders were handled, what political consequences followed, how they survived.” I turn to find him watching me with those sharp, ancient eyes. “Quietly, Corwin. No records. No assistants.”His expression shifts—understanding settling into the deep lines of his face. He asks no questions. “I’ll begin with the restricted archives. There are texts from the Second Accord—sealed accounts I haven’t had cause to open in thirty years.”He leaves with the unhurried dignity of a man who understands that some knowledge is carried best in silence.That evening, I find Evelyn in the sea cave—sitting at the water’s edge with Aspis curled beside her, white scales catching the last amber light through the natural arch.“There’s a diplomatic summit,” I say. “Alliance-wide. All five major houses. They arrive in three weeks and remain for nine days.”

She absorbs this with practiced calm. “Here? At the compound?”“Here. Bound by Alliance law—I can’t refuse.” I watch her face as I list the houses. Stormreach draws nothing. Ashenvale, the same. Duskborne, Thornwall—her expression stays level. “And Blue Dragon.”The word hits her like a physical blow. Not surprise—something deeper that travels through her entire body in a single convulsive flinch before she locks it down.Her hands on Aspis’s flank go white-knuckled for one heartbeat.“How long will the delegation stay? How large is the contingent—military escort or diplomatic staff?” Her voice is almost steady, but the questions tumble out too fast, stacked and urgent.“Nine days. Twelve delegates per house, though I expect Mintia will push that number. Standard diplomatic escort—but standard for them means armed and trained to observe everything they touch.”“Will they have access to the full compound? The training yards, inner corridors?”“Common areas, the great hall, guest quarters, the eastern courtyard. Inner areas restricted. Training yards on shared rotation during designated hours.”The questions are tactical—someone mapping escape routes, not expressing casual concern about houseguests.Too specific for a woman with no connection to the Blue Dragon house. I file it beside every other inconsistency she carries.“You stay invisible until the delegation leaves,” I tell her. “Inner duty rotations only.

Archives, the infirmary. You don't train in the open yards, don't patrol the outer walls. For nine days, you don't exist." "That's not a plan, Draven." Something sharp surfaces in her voice. "That's a prayer. And prayers don't hold up against trained observers looking for exactly the kind of inconsistencies I carry." The corner of my mouth almost lifts. She catches it, and for a moment the fear in her eyes gives way to exasperation. "Prayers have their place. And so does discipline. Follow the rotation I set, and let Theron and Sera handle what walks through our gates." "And if discipline isn't enough? If someone recognizes something they shouldn't?" "Then we deal with it. But not by borrowing problems we haven't earned yet." I hold her gaze. "Stay invisible, Evelyn." She doesn't agree. Doesn't refuse. Just looks at me with those fierce blue eyes carrying secrets I haven't earned yet, and nods once—not submission but calculation. I leave the cave with Khaira's rumble vibrating through the bond. The secondary problem gnaws at me as I climb the passage—the one I didn't voice, because speaking it would mean admitting how closely I've been watching her. Evelyn's fighting style is house-trained. Her reflexes carry the precision of formal education, not desperate survival. A delegation of politicians and warriors will walk my halls for nine days—people bred to spot exactly the inconsistencies she wears beneath the disguise. Whatever she's hiding beyond the dragon, the summit is going to crack it open. And I'm not certain I'm ready for what spills out. Cedella is a passionate storyteller known for her bold romantic and spicy novels that keep readers hooked from the very first chapter. With a flair for crafting emotionally intense plots and unforgettable characters, she blends love, desire, and drama into every story she writes. Cedella's storytelling style is immersive and addictive—perfect for fans of heated romances and heart-pounding twists

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7-9 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 35

[Evelyn's POV] www.novelmorm.com The archives smell like dust and slow death—the kind that settles over centuries, layering itself across leather spines and brittle parchment until the air feels weighted against my lungs. Corwin assigns me to the eastern wing—trade records, census documents, correspondence logs. "You'll sort by era, then by house of origin, then by subject classification," he says, placing leather folios on the table with the utmost care. "I trust you can manage alphabetical ordering without supervision, though I'll verify periodically because experience has taught me that trust and competence rarely cohabitate in the young." "I'll do my best not to shatter your faith in an entire generation," I tell him, and

something that might be amusement crosses his weathered face before he retreats to his desk. The compound hums with summit preparations—boots in the corridor, hammers reinforcing the eastern gate, commands carrying through stone. Everyone is moving, sharpening. Everyone except me, shelving dead correspondence while the world prepares for war dressed as diplomacy. “I hate this,” Aspis says through the bond, frustration bleeding through so precisely it mirrors mine. “The walls are wrong. Stone on every side. No sky anywhere.” “I know. It’s temporary.” “You keep saying that. The word is losing its shape.” She shifts in her sealed chamber beneath Draven’s quarters, wings brushing stone. She’s dog-sized now, dense with muscle and restless energy, growing at a pace that makes my chest tight with equal parts wonder and terror. It’s the third hour when I find it. Not in the census records but in a misfiled folio—a bound manuscript on vellum so old it crackles under my fingertips. The cover bears only a symbol from the compound’s oldest stonework: a dragon coiled around a single star. *www.Novelworm.com* The Last White Dragon of Aeloris. Year of the Broken Star, three hundred and twelve years before the current Accord. The rider was called Seraphine. She came to the House of the Black Dragon bearing a white hatchling. The ruling lord—Aldren Blackthorn—confined her under the pretense of protection. Within three months, she was betrothed to the lord’s second son—an arrangement she had not consented to and could not refuse. The words press against something inside me that already knows where this is going. Seraphine attempted to flee. She was captured at the northern boundary, returned, and executed for the crime of bond-theft. The white dragon, chained beneath the eastern tower, felt its rider die. It broke its chains and destroyed the tower, the courtyard, the barracks, and half the residential wing before bond-severance completed its work. Eleven minutes. Forty-seven dead. The compound burned for three days. I close the manuscript. My hands are trembling, and through the bond, Aspis has gone very still. “That was three hundred years ago,” she says quietly. “And nothing has changed.” I take the manuscript and leave without telling Corwin, moving through torchlit corridors until I reach Draven’s study. I push through the oak door without knocking because the fury in my chest won’t survive the delay. He stands at the window, silhouetted against grey light. Whatever he reads in my face stops the reprimand before it forms. “What happened?” “Seraphine happened.” I set the manuscript on his desk. “Three hundred years ago, a white dragon appeared in this compound. Your ancestors seized the rider, forced her into a marriage she didn’t consent to, and executed her when she tried to leave.”

My fury is cold, contained, but palpable. “The dragon destroyed half the compound before bond-severance killed it—forty-seven people in eleven minutes. And the record calls it bond-theft, as if the crime was a woman trying to keep the dragon that chose her.” *www.Novelworm.com* Draven reads in silence, jaw tightening. When he looks up, his dark eyes carry something I haven’t seen before—not anger, but recognition. “I didn’t know

about this,” he says quietly, and I believe him, which almost makes it worse. “It doesn’t matter whether you knew. This is the precedent written into these stones—this is what happens when they find out. A white dragon appears, and the ruling house’s first instinct is ownership. Containment. And when the rider resists, they kill her and call it law.” “I’m not my ancestors.” Low, edged with something that sounds like a wound. “Whatever was done three centuries ago—I didn’t build this, and I won’t repeat it.” “Then prove it.” The challenge leaves my mouth before wisdom can catch it. “You’ve confined me to archives and sealed Aspis where she can barely turn around. You’ve told me to stay invisible, to trust your orders will keep us alive.” “And I have trusted you—against every instinct telling me that trusting the lord of any house is the first step toward a cage.” I don’t soften the blow. “But trust without evidence is just fear wearing a different face, and I am standing in a room with the evidence of what happened to the last woman who trusted this house with her dragon.” The silence that follows has weight—physical, filling the space between us. Draven doesn’t look away. His dark eyes hold mine across the desk, across three hundred years of precedent that damns everything he represents. Something shifts in the air. A charge, electric—the same awareness I felt in the sea cave when moonlight turned his expression open and unguarded. My heartbeat thuds against the mark on my chest, and the distance between us feels vast and paper-thin at once. Neither of us moves. The almost stretches—a breath too long, a silence neither one breaks. His gaze drops to my mouth, and my body registers it like a physical touch, heat blooming outward, fingers curling against the desk’s edge. His breathing has changed—shallow, controlled, the breathing of a man holding himself still because moving would mean admitting something he isn’t ready to name. Three sharp raps on the door—precise, unhurried. Draven’s jaw tightens. His eyes stay on mine for one more heartbeat, and I watch the moment get buried alive—swallowed beneath the mask that slides back like a door closing on a room still burning. www.NoVLEWorm.Com “Enter,” he says, betraying nothing. Theron steps through with a leather portfolio. “My lord. The finalized summit guest list—all five delegations confirmed. Names, titles, security details, accommodations assignments. Sera has flagged three individuals on the Mintian delegation for enhanced surveillance.” “Thank you, Theron. I’ll review tonight.” Draven’s hand rests on the portfolio, casual and controlled, as if the last five minutes never happened. Theron retreats with silent precision. The door closes with a click that echoes louder than it should. My eyes don’t drop from his face. Cedella is a passionate storyteller known for her bold romantic and spicy novels that keep readers hooked from the very first chapter. With a flair for crafting emotionally intense plots and unforgettable characters, she blends love, desire, and drama into every story she writes. Cedella’s storytelling style is immersive and addictive—perfect for fans of heated romances and heart-pounding twists.

First Chosen by the Dragon

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 36

[Draven's POV]The portfolio sits beneath my hand, and I don't open it. Half a second. Maybe less. But my eyes stay on Evelyn instead of the leather binding, and that delay tells her something I'd rather it hadn't. She watches me watching her, and neither of us pretends the charged silence from before Theron's interruption has dissipated. I break first. Flip the portfolio open—neat columns in Theron's meticulous hand, delegations organized by house. "Stormreach sends Lord Harlen and his wife, Lady Maren. Twelve delegates, mostly trade advisors. Arriving two days before the summit opens." My voice settles into the cadence of preparation. "Ashenvale—Lord Edric. Eight delegates. He's bringing his eldest son, which means he's shopping for marriage alliances. Predictable." Evelyn stands across the desk with her arms loose at her sides, expression carefully neutral—a woman listening to weather reports. "Duskborne. Lady Thessaly and her council of three. Small delegation, big ambitions—she's been pushing for expanded coastal trade routes for two years." I turn the page. "Thornwall sends their steward in Lord Brannon's absence. Six delegates. Nothing remarkable." Her breathing stays even. Her posture stays relaxed. She is, I note with something between admiration and unease, exceptionally good at this. "Mintia." I slow deliberately, because I'm watching, because I need to see what happens when the mask meets the blade. "The House of Blue Dragon. Twelve delegates, as expected. Lady Cassandra leads the delegation—eldest daughter of Lord Aldric, his diplomatic representative and heir apparent." Her jaw tightens. Not much—a fraction of movement, the barest flex of muscle—but I've spent weeks cataloguing the geography of this woman's face, and that twitch might as well be a scream. She doesn't blink. Doesn't shift. The reaction lives and dies in her jaw, contained with a discipline that speaks to years of practice. I continue. "Cassandra's delegation includes two senior warriors, four political advisors, and—" I find the name and let it land clean. "Lord Kael Varenthis. Her betrother, apparently. The son of Lord Aldric's right hand." The door behind her eyes slams shut. Not a flinch this time—something worse. Something total. Whatever light lives in Evelyn's expression when she's unguarded, whatever sharp intelligence and warmth I've grown accustomed to reading, it vanishes. Replaced by nothing. A wall so complete it might have been mortared into place. She recovers in under two seconds. Impressive, if I weren't the kind of man who counts heartbeats for a living. "What are the compound access parameters for the Mintian delegation?" she asks, and her voice is steady—almost too steady, the way a bridge is steady right before the supports give. "Will they have free movement through the eastern corridors, or are those restricted?" "Eastern corridors are locked to guest traffic. Common areas, the great hall, guest quarters, the

western courtyard—that’s their world for nine days. Training yards on shared rotation, two-hour blocks, supervised.” “And the archives?” She asks it too quickly, the question loaded with a weight she’s trying to pass off as procedural curiosity. “If I’m shelving documents daily, I need to know whether someone from that delegation could walk through the door unannounced.” “Restricted. Corwin’s domain stays sealed to anyone without my direct authorization.” I study her, the way her fingers have curled into fists at her sides. “The man catalogues dust particles. You’re safe there.” “Safe is a strong word for a compound about to host sixty foreign diplomats and warriors.” She uncurls her fists—deliberately, I think, because she caught herself doing it.

“What about the evening gatherings? Am I expected to serve? And if the rotations shift—if Sera needs bodies for the hall?” “No. Inner rotation only. Archives, infirmary supply rooms, the lower kitchens—anywhere a servant blends into stone.” I hold her gaze across the desk, across the portfolio full of names that just cracked something open in her expression. “Sera pulls from the general pool, not from you.” I say with conviction that, I hope, will assuage her. “I’ve already given the order. You follow the schedule I set. Nothing else. No improvisation, no initiative, no heroics.” “I wasn’t planning heroics, Draven. I was planning survival.” The word cuts closer to the bone than she probably intends, because survival is exactly what I’ve been doing for two years, and watching her do it with the same discipline feels like staring into a mirror angled wrong. “Good. Keep planning it.” The words come out rougher than intended, edged with something I refuse to examine. “Anything else?” She shakes her head once and turns for the door. Her stride is measured, unhurried, the walk of a woman who knows she’s being watched and refuses to let it show. The door closes behind her with the softest click, and then she’s gone, and the room holds the ghost of pine and something warm beneath it—her scent, clinging to the air like a fingerprint I can’t wipe clean. Two names. Cassandra and Kael. Two names from the Blue Dragon house, and she reacted like someone struck across the face. I carefully observe the reactions and keep it in my mind beside everything else—the house-trained fighting style she thinks she’s hiding, the too-specific questions about the delegation weeks ago, the way her entire body went rigid when I first mentioned Mintia. The picture refuses to resolve. The pieces I’m missing feel less like gaps and more like the shape of something deliberately concealed, and that shape grows more dangerous every time I look at it. I close the portfolio and press my knuckles against the desk until the wood bites back. Two hours later, Venna stands in the same doorway. She carries a sealed document bearing the house administrative seal—formal, witnessed, filed through proper channels. “A petition under section twelve of house law,” she says, extending it. “I’m requesting a formal background investigation into the woman called Evelyn. Origin verification, identity confirmation, and assessment of security risk during the summit.” I take the document. Read it. Every line is immaculate—Venna knows house law the way a surgeon knows anatomy,

with precision that leaves no room for argument. “I’ll review it.” *Www.NoVeloWOrM.com* “You can delay, my lord.” Her dark eyes hold mine without flinching. “House law grants you thirty days’ discretion on administrative petitions. But you cannot deny it indefinitely. The law is clear, and I have standing to file.” *www.NoVeloWOrM.com* “I’m aware of the law, Venna.” I set the petition beside the portfolio, two documents bracketing me like walls. “I don’t need a lecture on my own house code.” “I know you are. I simply want to ensure awareness and inclination remain in conversation with each other.” She inclines her head—respectful, sharp, the bow of a woman who knows she’s holding a blade and wants me to see it. “My lord.” She leaves. The document sits on my desk beside the portfolio, and between them, the walls close in from every direction—the summit, the delegation, Venna’s petition, and the woman whose secrets I’m protecting for reasons I haven’t named. Khaira speaks. Her voice moves through the bond like deep water—ancient, undeceived, carrying the weight of decades spent watching me lie to myself. “You’re falling,” she says. “You fell weeks ago. You’re simply noticing the ground now.” I don’t answer. She already knows, and so do I — the ground has been rising to meet me for longer than I’m willing to admit, and the impact, when it comes, will leave nothing intact. Cedella is a passionate storyteller known for her bold romantic and spicy novels that keep readers hooked from the very first chapter. With a flair for crafting emotionally intense plots and unforgettable characters, she blends love, desire, and drama into every story she writes. Cedella’s storytelling style is immersive and addictive—perfect for fans of heated romances and heart-pounding twists.

First Chosen by the Dragon

8-10 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 37

[Evelyn’s POV] The panic doesn’t leave. It just learns to hold a pen. I bury myself in the eastern wing before dawn, pulling folios from shelves with hands that won’t stop trembling. The repetition becomes medicine—each document slotted into place like a brick in the wall between myself and the names Draven read last night. Cassandra. Kael. Coming here. Walking these halls. “You’re spiraling,” Aspis says through the bond. “The fear is eating your edges.” Sometimes I hate that she feels the same, because then I have no choice but to confront the things that disturb me. “The fear is keeping me realistic. My sister is about to walk into this compound, and the only thing between recognition and death is hair dye and a prayer.” “Then stop praying and start thinking. You’ve survived worse than politicians and a sister who underestimates you.” “Surviving and hiding aren’t the same thing. Right now I need

to be perfect at both.” My tone is sharper than I intended it to be, but Aspis understands. “Then be perfect. You have me. That changes the equation.” She’s right. I pull another folio from the shelf, the binding cracks with age, spilling loose pages—old vellum, ink faded to dried blood. I scan the headers and stop. ‘Year of the Shattered Gate. A white dragon appeared over the Ashenvale border three days before the First Coalition collapsed.’ I keep digging. Another reference in a trade dispute two centuries earlier: ‘A white hatchling reported in the eastern marches. Within six months, the border alliance reformed and the Stormreach Accords were signed.’ Another, older still: ‘The appearance of the white coincided with the fall of the Old Compact and the rise of the current house system.’ The pattern assembles itself. White dragons don’t just appear. They appear before—before wars, before alliances shattering and reforming. Every reference carries the same weight: a white dragon is the match struck before the fire. “We are not omens,” Aspis says, her voice moving through me like light through water. “We are not curses wrapped in white scales. We are answers. The world breaks, and we arrive to rebuild. That is what we are for.” I press my palms flat against the table. The trembling has stopped. Boots in the corridor—too relaxed for Draven. Riven rounds the corner with supply ledgers under one arm, grin faltering when he finds me buried in documents instead of on patrol. *www.novelworm.com* “You’re off rotation,” he says, dropping into the chair across from me. “Checked the board twice. You requested archive duty yourself, on a day when we need every warrior on the walls. Why are you hiding in the dust?” “I’m not hiding. I’m organizing records that haven’t been touched in decades. There’s surveys from the Third Accord that need sorting, if you’d rather help than interrogate.” I slide the pile toward him. He catches the top folio, scans three lines, closes it. “Thrilling. I can see why you’d choose this over a sword.” He picks up the next one anyway, starts sorting with surprising care. We work in silence for several minutes. “The tournament,” he says. Not a question. “I’ve been turning it over since that night. You were good before—better than you let people see. But during the final bout, something changed. You moved differently. Faster. And the light—I saw light around your arms. Pale, almost white, like veins of fire beneath glass.” I keep my eyes on the document. Through the bond, Aspis goes still. “I’ve seen that before,” Riven continues, leaning forward. His brown eyes hold no accusation—just sharp intelligence beneath the easy smiles. “Bonded riders channel their dragon’s strength. Changes their movement, speed, reflexes. I grew up watching it every day beside my brother. I know what I’m looking at.” “You’re looking at a woman who fought hard and got lucky. Adrenaline does things in combat that look supernatural—you know that.” “I do know that. Which is exactly why I know the difference between adrenaline and what I saw in that arena.” He leans back, arms crossed, watching me with the patience of someone who’s already decided to wait as long as it takes. “That wasn’t a surge of desperation, Evelyn.” His eyes narrow. “That was channeled strength. Controlled. Precise. The kind of thing you can’t fake and can’t train into your body without a bond feeding it.” *www.novelworm.com*

“Riven—” “I’m not trying to corner you. I’m not going to report anything. I just need you to know that I saw what I saw, and I’m not stupid enough to pretend otherwise.” He holds my gaze—same iron core as Draven, different surface. “Whatever you’re carrying, I’m choosing not to ask. But don’t pretend there’s nothing to ask about.” Aspis sends warmth through the bond—not instruction, just presence. I’m here. “Thank you. For choosing not to ask, and for not being stupid.” “Family trait, unfortunately. Don’t tell Draven—he thinks he’s the only observant one.” His grin softens. “You’re safe with me. Whatever I think I know stays where it is.” Riven finishes his folio and leaves with an easy and warm smile. But it doesn’t settle me as it’s supposed to, so after my shift in the archives is done, I seek out Draven. His study is dark except for fire and two candles, shadows carving his face into hard angles. He listens without interrupting. When I finish, his jaw works once. “I’ll speak to him,” he says, clipped. “Before he draws conclusions that put us all in danger. If I bring him in now, on my terms, I control what he knows.” “And if you do that, you make it real.” I step closer. “Right now it’s a feeling. A suspicion he’s sitting with because he trusts you. The moment you confront him, you turn a feeling into a fact, and a fact demands action. He can’t unknow what you confirm.” “He’s my brother. If he’s already pieced it together, the damage is done.” www.NoVELworm.com “No. There’s a difference between suspecting and knowing.” I insist. “A man who suspects can look the other way. A man who’s been told directly by his lord carries a burden he can’t set down. You’d be forcing his hand.” Draven stares at me. The fire pops, sparks spiraling upward. “You think like a strategist,” he says quietly. “I think like someone who’s been hiding her whole life.” There’s steel in my voice. “When every truth you speak can be a weapon against you, you learn which truths to hold and which to let land. Riven is holding back because the truth is still soft enough to carry without it breaking him. Don’t harden it before you have to.” “And if he hardens it himself? Decides suspicion is enough to act on?” He insists. “Then we deal with that when it comes.” I cut him off. “But your brother sat across from me today, told me he saw something impossible, and chose to leave it unnamed. That’s not a man looking for a reason to act—that’s a man looking for a reason not to.” The silence stretches, and Draven studies me—not with desire, not with the charged electricity when we stand too close, but something quieter. Respect, maybe. “Then we wait,” he says. “And we watch.” “And we trust that your brother is exactly as smart as he just proved himself to be—smart enough to know when knowing is enough.” His mouth curves—not a smile, but its ghost. He nods, and the conversation folds closed. I leave his study with three secrets against my ribs—the dragon, my name, and the certainty that the walls are closing faster than any of us can shore them up. “He listens to you,” Aspis says through the dark corridor. “That matters more than you realize. Men like him don’t listen easily, and they listen to almost no one twice.” “It matters exactly as much as I think it does. Which is why it terrifies me.” Cedella is a passionate storyteller known for her bold romantic and spicy novels that keep readers hooked from the very first chapter. With a flair for crafting emotionally intense plots and unforgettable

characters, she blends love, desire, and drama into every story she writes. Cedella's storytelling style is immersive and addictive—perfect for fans of heated romances and heart-pounding twists.

First Chosen by the Dragon

8-10 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 38

(W)ww.NoVèlWorm.com

[Draven's POV] Five days before the summit, and I make the decision that will either save us or end everything. The logic is clean. Riven already suspects a bond—told Evelyn as much to her face, laid his observations out with the precision of a man who doesn't like the sum he's reached. I talked myself out of confronting him once, on her counsel, and she was right. But circumstances have shifted. The delegation arrives in five days, and a brother who suspects is a fissure waiting for pressure. An ally who knows—brought inside the wall on my terms—is a foundation stone. Not Evelyn's identity. That secret isn't mine to spend. But the dragon—yes. I find her at dawn in the eastern corridor, arms full of folios, shadows beneath her eyes. "I need you at the sea caves tonight. Riven's coming." *www.NoVèlWorm.com* She stops walking. The folios press against her chest like armor. "You said we'd wait. Watch. You said we'd trust that knowing was enough for him." "I said we'd trust his intelligence. This is trusting his intelligence with better information." I hold her gaze. "He already knows something is wrong." I see understanding in her eyes. "The summit closes every gap we've been hiding in. If he pieces it together while the delegation observers are cataloguing every reaction in this compound, we lose the ability to manage what he does with it." "And if he doesn't react the way you expect?" She challenges me. "If the knowing breaks something in him that suspicion left intact—what then, Draven?" "Then I'll handle that too." The words come out steadier than the thought behind them. "But it's your dragon. Your risk. You deserve to be there when the circle widens. I won't do this behind your back." *www.NoVèlWorm.com* Something crosses her face—not gratitude, something rawer. She nods, and the corridor swallows the sound of her boots as she walks away. I spend the day in tactical meetings I can barely concentrate on, Khaira a low hum of amusement in my skull. "You're nervous," she observes. "You're never nervous. Not before councils, not before combat, and certainly not before conversations with your own brother." "I'm calculating." "You're calculating nervously. There's a difference, and I've known you long enough to identify it with some precision." Instead of answering, I find Riven after

evening drill, pulling him aside in the armory where stone swallows sound. “Walk with me tonight. After the compound settles. There’s something beneath these cliffs you need to see.” He reads my face the way he’s read it since childhood—quickly, accurately. “This about the woman? Because if you’re finally going to tell me what I think you’re going to tell me, I’d appreciate not having to pretend I haven’t been holding my tongue for weeks.” “This is about something I should have told you weeks ago. Meet me at the eastern passage. Midnight.” I pause. “And Riven—whatever you see, remember whose house you serve.” His jaw tightens, but he nods. Midnight finds the three of us descending the cliff path in silence—Evelyn ahead with a lantern that carves her shadow long against wet stone, Riven behind me. The hidden passage opens where the rock face splits, and we move a single file through salt-damp stone. Riven hasn’t spoken since we entered. The passage widens. The cave exhales—vast stone ceiling overhead, black water stretching across the subterranean lake, the natural arch in the far wall framing stars and sea. Aspis lifts her head. She’s the size of a young deer now—dense, muscled, white scales catching the lantern light and throwing it back in fractured brilliance. Eyes pale gold, ancient, fixed on us with predatory stillness. Wings folded, talons curled against stone, she is unmistakably real. Riven stops dead. His hand goes to the cave wall. “A white dragon.” His voice echoes off stone and water. “A white dragon. In our compound.” I can read him as an open book, and what I can see now is terror. The realization morphing into morbid understanding, and then dread, because he knows what it means. We had the same teachers, after all, I was just a more disobedient student. “Riven, listen to me—”

“Do you have any idea—the Seraphine Incident, Draven. Wars started over less. The last white dragon nearly leveled this compound three centuries ago, and you’ve been hiding one in a sea cave like a stolen horse.” His eyes are wide, dark, fixed on Aspis. “How long has this been here?” “Since before the tournament.” I let the answer sit, clean and heavy, because dressing it in justification would only cheapen what I’m asking him to accept. Then Evelyn steps forward. She moves past both of us without hesitation, and Aspis shifts—not a threat response but something entirely different. The dragon rises, crosses the stone in three fluid strides, and presses her snout into Evelyn’s outstretched palm. A low crooning sound fills the cave, vibrating through the rock beneath our feet. Light bends around both of them—subtle, a faint luminescence where dragon and rider meet, as if the air itself reshapes around the connection. Riven watches. I watch him watch, because this is the moment that matters—not the shock, but what comes after. The fear drains from his expression, and what replaces it is quieter, layered with recognition. He’s a rider’s brother. He’s spent his entire life beside Khaira and me, learning the bond’s grammar even if he’ll never speak its language. His hand drops from the wall. “That explains the light around her arms. During the tournament—I told myself it was adrenaline, but I knew. I’ve watched you and Khaira my whole life. I know what a bond

looks like from the outside.” He whispers. “You weren’t wrong about what you saw. And I should have trusted you with it sooner.” Silence stretches, filled with Aspis’s breathing. Riven looks at me—really looks, the way he did when we were boys and I’d done something that frightened him. “What do you need from me, brother? Because you didn’t bring me down here for a viewing. You need something.” “During the summit, access to these caves becomes dangerous. Two of us can manage rotations—feeding, monitoring, ensuring she isn’t discovered. I need you to share that burden.” “You’re asking me to commit treason. You understand that. Harboring an unregistered dragon—a white dragon—that’s not a slap on the wrist. That’s the kind of thing they dissolve houses over.” And still, there’s no fear in his voice. I’m proud of him. “I’m asking you to protect this house. Because if that dragon is found by the wrong people during the summit, everything we’ve built burns. Not in three centuries—in three days.” He processes this. Then he turns to Evelyn—not to me. His gaze is steady, stripped of charm, stripped of the easy warmth he usually wears like a second skin. “I don’t know who you really are,” he says. “I don’t know where you came from, or what you’re running from, or why my brother is protecting you with a dedication that borders on something I’m choosing not to name.” His voice carries no malice—only the weight of a man drawing a line. “But you owe us the truth. All of it. Eventually.” Evelyn meets his eyes. The lantern casts her face in gold and shadow. “Eventually,” she says. The word carries the weight of a vow, and the silence that follows carries more. The promise settles between the three of us like a stone dropped into still water. Aspis croons softly behind Evelyn, white scales catching starlight through the arch, and the cave holds us in salt air and silence while the weight of what we’ve done rearranges into something we’ll carry together. Two people who can access the caves now. Still not enough—but better than one.

www.novellworm.com Cedella is a passionate storyteller known for her bold romantic and spicy novels that keep readers hooked from the very first chapter. With a flair for crafting emotionally intense plots and unforgettable characters, she blends love, desire, and drama into every story she writes. Cedella’s storytelling style is immersive and addictive—perfect for fans of heated romances and heart-pounding twists

First Chosen by the Dragon

8-10 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 39

[Evelyn’s POV] Sleep won’t come. I’ve tried counting breaths, counting waves against the cliffs, counting the hours until dawn when the road from the eastern forests will carry Mintia

straight through these gates. Every number brings tomorrow closer, and tomorrow brings people who knew my face before I learned to hide it. I stare at the ceiling and catalogue every way they might recognize me. My jawline—Father’s, unmistakable in certain light. The way I shift weight to my right leg, a habit Cassandra trained into me with a sparring injury when we were twelve. I’ve dyed my hair dark, cut it shorter, built muscle that reshapes my silhouette. But disguises are surfaces, and the people arriving tomorrow were raised to see beneath them. “You’re spiraling,” Aspis says through the bond. “I can feel every loop. Round and round, tighter each time.” “I’m being realistic. Cassandra’s coming, Aspis. Cassandra, who memorized the way I breathe just so she could tell Father when I was lying. And Kael, who—” I stop. Press my palms against my eyes until colors burst behind my lids. “They’ll walk through the great hall. They’ll eat where I eat, and one wrong turn in a corridor, one moment where I forget to keep my head down—” “Then come to me. Stop lying in that bed, pretending the walls will protect you. Come.” I’m already pulling on my boots. The service corridors are second nature—left at the cracked pillar, down through Draven’s empty study, into the hidden passage that smells of salt and deep stone. The tunnels narrow, then widen, and the air shifts from stale to alive, charged with brine. The sea cave opens around me, dark water stretching beneath the vaulted ceiling, starlight threading through the natural arch at the far wall. Aspis is already awake, watching the passage with amber eyes that catch what little light exists and multiply it. She’s heavy now—dense with growing muscle and thickening bone, packed tight with mass that promises something enormous. When she uncurls from the rocks, the stone groans beneath her shifting weight. Not a hatchling anymore. Something is building inside her that mirrors what’s building inside me—pressure, readiness, the knowledge that hiding has an expiration date. I sink against the cave wall, pull my knees to my chest, and wrap my arms around them. Aspis crosses the floor in three strides and curls her body around mine—a wall of warm scales and dense muscle, her tail sweeping a wide arc to close the circle. Her neck curves until her head rests beside my hip, and her breath washes over me in slow waves that smell of salt and something older. Fire, maybe. The promise of it. “You are not the girl who fled Mintia,” she says, and there’s nothing gentle in it. A fact delivered with the certainty of something that has watched me rebuild myself bone by bone. “What if they see through me?” The terror spills out of me, unbridled. “What if Cassandra takes one look and knows—not suspects, knows—and everything we’ve built here collapses because I wasn’t clever enough to stay invisible?” “Then I burn anyone who touches you.” It should frighten me. The casualness, the absolute absence of hesitation—she means it the way gravity means down. Fire and screaming, diplomatic catastrophe, war. Instead something in my chest uncoils and goes still, like a wound meeting pressure after hours of throbbing. It steadies me. I press my face into her scales, feeling heat pulse beneath them. “If something goes wrong tomorrow,” I whisper, “promise me you’ll fly. Don’t stay for me. Get out through the arch, follow the

coastline, find somewhere they'll never look. You're what matters. Not me. They can't have you." www.Velvetor.com She doesn't answer immediately. The silence stretches long enough that I lift my head to find her watching me, amber eyes enormous in the dark, pupils contracted to narrow slits reflecting starlight like blades.

"I will not fly." Her voice moves through the bond like something ancient settling into stone. "I will not hide. If they come for you, they will understand what I am. Every single one of them, Evelyn. They will understand, and they will remember, and they will carry that understanding for whatever remains of their lives." Calm, certain, terrifying in its completeness—not a threat performed for effect, but a promise delivered with the patience of something that has already decided how the world will bend. www.NovelorM.com I open my mouth to argue—and nothing comes out. Because she means it. Entirely. I close my eyes and lean into her warmth. For a while the only sound is her breathing and the water and the vast stone silence holding us both. Then footsteps echo in the passage. Draven emerges from the tunnel's mouth, and his eyes find me—curled against the dragon in the dark. He takes in the scene without expression. Aspis raises her head, considers him, and settles back down with a low exhale that ruffles my hair. He doesn't say anything. Doesn't ask why I'm here, doesn't offer strategy, doesn't command me back to my quarters. He crosses the cave, lowers himself to stone beside me, and sits close enough that his shoulder presses against mine—solid, warm, a fixed point in all the dark and doubt. The silence stretches, and for once it asks nothing. Aspis's breathing fills the cave in slow rhythms, and the water catches starlight through the arch and scatters it across the ceiling. I don't decide to lean into him. My head tilts against his shoulder the way a river finds the sea—not a choice, just gravity, the natural pull of exhaustion toward the only solid thing left. He doesn't move away. Doesn't stiffen, doesn't shift to create distance. His body accepts the weight of mine with the same quiet certainty that Aspis promised fire. We sit like that while the stars wheel past the cave's arch. Aspis's breathing deepens into sleep, her body radiating warmth into cold stone. The dark hours pass. The water shifts from black to charcoal to pewter, and the first grey light reaches through the arch to touch the surface with uncertain silver. Tomorrow will bring danger. Tonight, this is enough. I rise when the grey light strengthens, and he rises with me, and we walk the passage back in silence—not awkward, not charged, just quiet. The kind of silence two people earn by sitting through a long dark together. When I get back, my room greets me with pale dawn through the narrow window. I cross to it, and there it is—the distant road threading through the forests, disappearing eastward into morning haze. By evening, that road will carry my past straight to my door. Cassandra's golden head, Kael's familiar shoulders, every ghost I've spent months outrunning delivered to my threshold with a diplomatic escort. I press my palm flat against my chest where the mark burns—Draven's mark, seared into skin that once belonged to a different girl. The heat flares beneath my touch, answering with a ferocity that steals my

breath. His handprint pulses with every thundering beat of my heart. I hold it there, fingers splayed wide, feeling the fire spread through muscle and bone. The fear coils tight in my chest like a serpent ready to strike. I refuse to let it consume me. I compress it, force it down, reshape it into something dense and manageable—not gone, but beaten into a form I can carry without breaking. I steel myself. Tomorrow is already here. Cedella is a passionate storyteller known for her bold romantic and spicy novels that keep readers hooked from the very first chapter. With a flair for crafting emotionally intense plots and unforgettable characters, she blends love, desire, and drama into every story she writes. Cedella’s storytelling style is immersive and addictive—perfect for fans of heated romances and heart-pounding twists

First Chosen by the Dragon

8-10 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 40

[Cassandra’s POV] The Black Dragon compound rises from the coastal cliffs like something carved from the bones of the earth—dark stone, sharp angles, watchtowers cutting the grey sky with the precision of blades driven into meat. I catalog it through the carriage window as we ascend the switchback road: three primary fortifications stacked along the cliff face, roost platforms jutting from the eastern wall where two adult dragons sun themselves on heated stone, a training yard visible through the open gates where warriors drill in formation. “The outer wall is thicker than the intelligence reports suggested,” Kael murmurs beside me. “And those roost platforms have been reinforced since last season. New iron supports.” “I see them.” I smooth my traveling cloak and check my reflection in the carriage’s polished window frame—golden hair coiled with silver pins, face composed into the mask of gracious diplomacy I’ve worn since I was old enough to understand that smiles are weapons. “How many warriors in the yard?” “Forty, maybe fifty. More out of sight. Draven doesn’t show his full hand to visitors.” The carriage rolls to a halt inside the outer gates. Our delegation assembles behind me—six in total. Myself, Kael, two warriors selected for their observational skills, two political advisors who know how to extract information from small talk the way surgeons extract splinters. I don’t need numbers. I need eyes. “Lady Cassandra.” A tall man with silver-streaked hair descends the main steps—not Draven. A steward. “I’m Theron, Lord Draven’s chief advisor. Welcome to the House of Black Dragon. Your quarters have been prepared in the western wing.” “How generous.” I extend my hand with practiced warmth. “Father sends his warmest regards to Lord Draven.” “Lord Draven regrets he

cannot greet you personally this evening. Affairs of the house demand his attention.” A deliberate power move—making the daughter of his greatest rival wait like a merchant seeking an audience. I file it under useful, and my smile doesn’t waver. “Of course. A lord’s responsibilities must come first.”

Www.novelworld.com follow Theron through the main courtyard, and every step is another entry in my mental ledger. Guard rotations at the inner gate—four men, staggered shifts. Servants moving in organized patterns, heads down, efficient. The man who commands all of this killed a dozen of Father’s warriors two years ago, avenging a dead partner whose name I never bothered to learn. Lord Draven Blackthorn—the predator of the Aelorian coast. The moment our chamber doors close behind us, the mask loosens. “He’s not coming to dinner,” I tell Kael, crossing to the window. “Draven is making us sit with his advisor while he watches from somewhere we can’t see. Testing our patience.” “Or testing our purpose.” Kael leans against the doorframe. “Which do we show him?” “We wait. Graciously. And we watch everything.” I turn from the window. “This is the last house on the list, Kael. Every minor house in Aeloris. Informants in the neutral territories. Scouts combing coastal settlements for months. Nothing.” “Which means she’s dead, or somewhere we haven’t looked.” “She’s not dead.” The certainty sits in my chest like a stone. “We’ve checked every reasonable hiding place. Which means she’s somewhere unreasonable.” Kael’s eyes narrow. “You think she’s here. In the compound of her family’s mortal enemy.” “I think it’s the one place no one would look. And Evelyn has always had a survivor’s instinct for finding exactly that.” I straighten my collar. “Father’s patience is eroding. Mine isn’t. I am thorough, and tonight I intend to observe every corner of that great hall.” I check the time, and gesture to Kael. “It’s time,” I say, and he nods eagerly, following me to the dinner hall.

The dinner is elegant in its restraint—roasted game, dark wine, bread still warm from the ovens. Theron fills the empty chair at the head of the table with conversation smooth enough that a lesser diplomat might not notice the absence. I notice. I notice everything.

Www.novelworld.com “The compound is remarkable, Theron. The architecture must span three centuries. Has Lord Draven made significant additions to the fortifications, or is this all ancestral construction?” We discuss trade routes and the politics of dragon breeding programs, and I smile and nod while my eyes sweep the hall in slow, systematic passes. The servants are well-trained—uniform dark clothing, heads lowered, moving with choreographed efficiency. I count twelve on the dinner service, note their routes, their timing. A servant crosses the far end of the hall carrying linens toward the side door. Dark hair in a braid, head down, moving fast—faster than the others, as if speed itself is camouflage. I almost dismiss her as another anonymous body in dark clothing. But the walk. The particular way she shifts weight to favor her right leg—a subtle compensation, barely perceptible unless you knew what to look for. A habit trained into muscle and bone by an injury that never fully

healed. An injury I gave her when we were twelve. My foot sweeping her knee at the wrong angle in the training hall. She'd limped for weeks. The healers said it would heal clean. It didn't. The body remembers what the mind tries to forget, and that slight rightward shift is a signature I wrote into her flesh with my own hands. My hand stills on the wine glass. My heart slams once—a single, violent percussion against my ribs—then steadies into something cold and controlled. I don't react. Don't stare. Don't let my eyes follow the figure disappearing through the side door. I take another sip, unhurried, and turn to Theron with polite interest. "You were saying about the coastal shipping lanes? Fascinating. Father has been considering similar adjustments to our mountain trade routes." Inside me, the prophecy screams. She's here. She's alive. My weak, pitiful sister is hiding in the house of our mortal enemy. Disguised in dark hair and servant's clothing, walking these halls with her head down like the pathetic creature she's always been. The most unreasonable hiding place in Aeloris, and she found it. Burrowed into it like a parasite. I smile at something Theron says about tidal patterns. The glass is steady in my hand. My breathing hasn't changed. My expression radiates nothing but warm interest. Beneath the table, my free hand curls into a fist so tight my nails bite crescents into my palm. I've been hunting her for months. Father demanding results. Mother circling my failures with pointed silence. And here she is—not cowering in some minor lord's cellar, but embedded in the household of the most dangerous man on the Aelorian coast. Protected. Hidden. Right under everyone's noses, including mine. Theron asks about Mintia's winter preparations. I answer with detailed warmth, weaving in questions about staffing and household management that sound like polite curiosity but map the compound's internal structure. How many servants does the house employ? Are they locally recruited, or does Lord Draven draw from a wider region? The answers flow, and I store each one like a blade sheathed for later use. The dinner stretches another hour. I laugh at the right moments, compliment the food, and offer nothing of value while collecting everything of worth. When the evening concludes and Theron escorts us toward the western wing, I walk beside Kael with the unhurried grace of a woman pleasantly tired from good conversation. In our chambers, with the door bolted, I stand at the window overlooking the darkened compound where my sister sleeps, and I begin to plan. Cedella is a passionate storyteller known for her bold romantic and spicy novels that keep readers hooked from the very first chapter. With a flair for crafting emotionally intense plots and unforgettable characters, she blends love, desire, and drama into every story she writes. Cedella's storytelling style is immersive and addictive—perfect for fans of heated romances and heart-pounding twists