

First Chosen by the Dragon

8-10 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 51

[Evelyn's POV] I'm halfway through the eastern service passage when a shadow detaches from the wall three paces ahead and becomes my sister. She steps into the faint glow from the kitchen grates as if stepping onto a stage—chin lifted, golden hair in a single braid, blue travelling coat buttoned to the throat. Calm. Beautiful. Utterly in control. “Did you really think dyed hair would fool me, Evelyn?” Not a question. A brand—I see you, I’ve always seen you, you cannot hide from me. Every muscle in my body locks rigid. The bond floods with Aspis’s alarm—white-hot, nearly buckling my knees—and I shove it down hard, building walls the way Draven taught me. Not now. Not here. She cannot feel you. “Cassandra.” My voice comes out steadier than I deserve. “How long have you known?” “Long enough to be insulted by the effort.” She folds her arms, shoulder leaning against stone. “The dinner was careless—you favored your right leg crossing the hall and tilted your head to listen the way you’ve done since childhood. I noticed the first night. I’ve spent every night since confirming.” She recites details—calm, precise. “You visit the private wing every night after midnight through this corridor. Restricted chambers near the lord’s quarters have been sealed with reinforced iron—new locks, expanded twice. Whatever’s behind those doors is growing, and you’re the one tending it.” Her lips curve. “The tournament convinced me. A houseless nobody defeats an elite warrior with bonded-level speed, and the lord awards his personal mark? That’s not talent, sister. That’s power no unbonded rider possesses.” Aspis presses against the walls I’ve built, fury bleeding through the cracks, and I hold her back with everything I have. “The egg hatched, didn’t it?” Cassandra’s voice drops, almost gentle, and that’s when I know she’s most dangerous. “You’re bonded. My pathetic sister, bonded to a dragon.” She laughs—the sound of genuine disbelief tangled with fury so deep it’s almost grief. Her composure cracks for a fraction of a second before the mask slides back. “You smuggled a stolen egg across Alliance territory into an enemy house. That’s a death sentence, Evelyn. For you, and for whoever’s been protecting you.” She tilts her head, studying me the way she used to study insects before pulling off their wings. “Lord Draven, I assume.” She spreads her hands. “The man who spent two years hunting everyone responsible for his partner’s murder, and you crawled into his bed carrying the blood of the house that killed her.” The crack spreads. Her eyes flash—blue and bright and furious—and for one heartbeat I see her clearly. Not the composed diplomat. Not the golden heir. Just a woman who wanted something desperately

and watched it choose someone else. “Everything was mine.” Her voice is quiet, stripped of performance. “The title, the egg, the future Father built. You were supposed to be nothing, Evelyn. You were supposed to disappear and be grateful we let you live. Instead, you stole the one thing that mattered and ran to the one place you thought I couldn’t reach.” “I didn’t steal anything. I survived. There’s a difference.” “There’s no difference. Not to the Alliance, and certainly not to Father.” She straightens, and the mask returns—seamless, impenetrable. “Here is what happens now. You show me the dragon. Its nature, its abilities, its current state.” “No.” “Then I inform the Alliance that the House of Black Dragon is harboring a fugitive who smuggled a dragon egg across sovereign territory—an act of war under the Third Reformation accords.” She agrees easily. “I frame it precisely: Lord Draven knowingly concealed a stolen asset within his stronghold during a diplomatic summit.” She lets each word settle like a blade laid flat against skin. “The Alliance won’t debate it. They’ll act. Whatever protections your lord has built around you will collapse under the weight of every house demanding his head.” My throat closes, because I know her—she’s not bluffing, not pulling my leg; Cassandra means it. This is Cassandra doing what she does best: finding the load-bearing wall and placing her charges with surgical precision.

“Think about it,” she says, already turning. “But don’t think too long. The summit ends in two days. After that, my discretion becomes significantly less generous.” She walks away—measured, unhurried. The shadows swallow her the same way they delivered her, and then the passage is empty and I am alone with the wreckage. My legs give out. I slide down the wall until I’m sitting on the corridor floor, knees to my chest, cold flagstones seeping through my clothes. The walls I built around the bond shatter, and Aspis pours through—fury and terror and a protective rage so vast it fills every corner of my mind. *w(w)w.m0V(e)/(w(o)rm.cóM* “I will kill her.” Not a threat. A statement of intent, delivered with the certainty of a predator who has already chosen the killing strike. “She threatened you. She threatened us. I will find her and I will—” “No.” I press my palms flat against stone. “That’s exactly what she wants. A reason. Proof.” *wWŴ.n0veLwo(®)(m).com* “She already has proof. She knows everything.” I should tell Draven. The thought rises with blinding clarity—go to him, tell him Cassandra found you, let him respond the way a lord responds to threats against his house. He would act. He would protect. But the words won’t form, because telling Draven means telling him everything. My family killed your partner. My blood is the blood you’ve spent two years avenging against. My sister shares my name, my house, the lineage that took Lyanna from you. Everything between us was built on a lie, and if I speak now, he’ll see me the way he sees them. Enemy. The knife that was always meant for his back. I can’t stand before him and watch warmth drain from his dark eyes, replaced by cold recognition that every touch, every almost-kiss, every moment of trust was given to the daughter of the people who destroyed his life. “You’re choosing fear over truth,” Aspis says, gentle now, rage

banked to embers. “He deserves to know.” “He deserves better than knowing.” I sit on the cold floor until my legs stop shaking. Then I stand, brush dust from my clothes, and turn away from the private wing—away from Draven’s unlocked door and the conversation that would end everything. The sea caves are dark and salt-sharp, waves filling the chamber with their slow breathing. Aspis waits—white scales luminous against black rock, golden eyes finding me the instant I step through the passage. She’s grown again, wingspan nearly touching both walls, and when she sees my face she makes a sound I’ve never heard—low and keening, a dragon’s grief for something that hasn’t died yet but is already mourning. I cross the stone floor and press myself against her chest. Her wing folds over me, and then she’s trembling. A dragon—trembling. The terror pours through the bond like ice water, drowning everything else. *W.W. n(O) v e l w O R M . (c) © M* “I cannot lose you.” Her voice cracks, ancient composure fracturing. “I felt your fear in that corridor. I felt you considering surrender. If she takes you from me, if they—” She chokes on the words, and I realize with stunning clarity that this creature who could level mountains is more afraid than I am. Not of Cassandra. Not of the Alliance. Of a world where I no longer exist in it. “Promise me,” she whispers against my hair. “Promise me you won’t let her make you disappear.” I open my mouth to answer. But the words won’t come. 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 — 52

[Draven’s POV] Sera’s report lands on my desk like a lit fuse. “Lady Cassandra was seen in the back corridors well past midnight.” She stands with her arms folded, weight on her heels—the posture she adopts when delivering information she knows will detonate. “Having what my source described as a private, intense conversation with a dark-haired servant. Not casual. A confrontation—dominant posture, controlled volume, the kind of exchange you have with someone you’re dismantling.” I set down my pen. The answer is already forming, and I am already refusing it. “Why would a Mintian diplomat corner a houseless nobody in a back corridor?” Sera’s voice is flat, careful. “She has a full delegation at her disposal. If she needed information from a servant, she’d send someone. She wouldn’t do it herself, in the dark,

alone.”She doesn’t have an answer. She’s waiting for mine. “Continue monitoring. I want to know if there’s further contact.”Sera nods and leaves. The door closes, and I let the thing I’ve been refusing to look at finally turn its face toward me. I pull every thread I’ve been filing away. The reaction when I said Blue Dragon during the summit briefing—not confusion, a flinch. The names Cassandra and Kael shutting her down like a blade across a nerve. The house-trained fighting style. And now Cassandra is hunting her—not as a diplomat investigating a suspicious servant, but as someone who knows her. I think of Cassandra’s face across the negotiation table—the familiarity I dismissed. The jaw. The eyes. I see it now: the same jaw, the same eyes. Different coloring, different bearing, but the bones beneath are sisters’ bones. I don’t want it to be true. I want the lie—the rogue from neutral territories, the woman who arrived carrying nothing, owing nothing, who I let closer than anyone since Lyanna. But the truth has been screaming since she heard Blue Dragon and went white. I find her in the archives. Dark hair falling across her face, bent over a ledger, and for one fractured second I see both women—the one I trusted and the one I’m about to unmask. I close the door as she looks up. “Tell me your real name.” She freezes. I watch the lie form on her lips and cut it dead. “I know Cassandra cornered you last night. I know she knows who you are. I know you’re from Mintia. I need to hear the rest from you, right now, or I can’t protect you and I can’t protect this house.”The silence stretches until I’m sure she won’t talk. And if she doesn’t, I know I’ll throw her out of here, I’ll order to keep her locked until the Summit is done, and then I’ll come back and ask again, because something tugs at my heart painfully at the thought of letting her go—or worse. **W.NOVelworm.C@m** But she does talk. She looks me dead and the eyes, and says the words I’ve been dreading to hear. “I am the eldest daughter of Lord Aldric,” she says, voice unwavering. But there’s no pride in it. “I’m from the House of Blue Dragon. Cassandra is my younger sister, Kael was my betrothed. That is who I am.”She holds my gaze, but not as someone preparing to fight for what they stand for. As someone prepared to beg. The house that murdered Lyanna—her house. Her blood. Her name. I listen, and something behind my ribs turns to stone. Not because of what she is—because of what she didn’t say. Every night in my chambers with the dragon. Every conversation where I stripped myself of defenses I’d spent years building. She sat across from me carrying the name of the people who destroyed my life and said nothing. “You let me—” I stop. Start again, voice barely controlled. “I told you about Lyanna. I told you what they did to her. And you sat there. Knowing.”

“I was afraid—” Her voice breaks, and I can hear the truth in it. It doesn’t matter. Fear is not an excuse for letting a man bleed in front of you while you hold the knife’s name behind your back. “Of what? That I’d do what any sane man would do? That I’d see you for what you are?” **W.NOVelworm.C@m** “I am not my family, Draven.” She’s standing now, gripping the archive table, knuckles white. “I ran from them. I chose to leave everything—my name,

my position, my life— because I couldn't be what they wanted. You've seen who I am here, what I've built, what I've fought for—"w@w.ñ(o)VEIW(o)rmm.com" "You are exactly your family until you prove otherwise, and you just spent months proving you'd rather lie to my face than give me the chance to decide for myself!" The volume tears from me—raw, ragged. "Every night I came to the caves. Every conversation where I told you things I haven't spoken aloud in years." My voice breaks, but I continue. "You had a hundred chances to tell me the truth, and you chose the lie. Every single time." "Because the truth would have meant losing you!" She's crying now, tears cutting tracks through dust on her face. "The moment I said Aldric, the moment I said Blue Dragon, you would have looked at me the way you're looking at me right now, and everything we built would have been ash." "I know what my family did to Lyanna. I carry that every single day, and I couldn't—" Her voice fractures. "I couldn't bear to watch you hate me for a name I never chose." "You don't get to decide that for me." My hands are shaking. I press them flat against the table. "You took my choice away. You sat in my chambers and watched me grieve the woman your house murdered, and you held your silence, and you let me—you let me feel—" I can't finish. Won't. "What was I supposed to say?" She steps toward me, and I step back—retreat from someone whose proximity I craved yesterday and can't tolerate now. "The night you told me about Lyanna, the way your voice broke—should I have stopped you there?" "Said, 'actually, my lord, my father gave that order, my house sent those riders, and every word of comfort I'm about to offer comes from the bloodline that destroyed your life?' Would you have listened past the first sentence, or would you have had me in chains before I finished speaking?" She's right, and that doesn't make it better. "You'll never know, because you didn't give me a chance." My voice has gone quiet—the worse kind, where anger has burned past heat into something cold. "You decided I was someone who couldn't handle the truth, and you made that decision every day for months, and you dressed it up as protection when it was cowardice." "It was survival!" She's shaking as hard as I am, the archive walls contracting around us. "Everything I have—Aspis, my place here, the first safety I've known since childhood—all of it depended on you not knowing. And I was selfish. I was a coward." "But I was also right, Draven, because look at your face right now and tell me I was wrong about what would happen." She practically whispers, and I hate to know that I'm another person who broke her. But she broke me too. Through the bond, Khaira is keening—a sound that cuts through stone, rattling the shelves, shivering books on their spines. Her voice rises through it, ancient and absolute, cutting us both to silence. "The child is not the sin of the father. The dragon chose her. The bond is genuine." I stare at Evelyn—this woman who is simultaneously the person I trust most and the eldest daughter of the house I hate most. Tear-streaked, trembling, and behind those eyes the name Aldric, written in the same blood that stained a mountain road four years ago. I don't forgive. Don't soften. "You have until the delegation leaves to give me a reason not to hand you to your sister myself." I walk out. My hands are shaking and I can't make them

stop.www.novelsworm.comCedella 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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7-8 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 53

[Evelyn's POV]www.novelsworm.comThe days after the truth are the worst of my life. Not because of Cassandra, circling like a hawk that's spotted its kill and chooses to wait. Because of the ice. Draven is flawless. Professional and precise as a blade drawn along a measured line. He coordinates the response to Cassandra's threat with tactical efficiency—briefings scheduled, contingencies mapped, every variable accounted for—and he does it all without looking at me. His voice passes over me like wind across a stone, acknowledging my presence only when logistics demand it, and the words arrive stripped of everything human. Orders, directives—all the clipped language of a man who has walled off every part of himself that ever reached for me. Cold and distant, and so-so cruel. But I suppose I earned his coldness. "He is afraid," Aspis says through the bond, low and certain. "Fear in men like him becomes armor. He is not cold—he is burning, and the cold is what keeps him standing." "That's very poetic. It doesn't make it hurt less." "No. But it means the hurt has somewhere to go that isn't despair." Riven takes it in stages. Draven tells him privately—I'm not there, but the bond carries Aspis's awareness of vibrations through stone, raised voices leaking through walls. When Riven finds me in the archive corridor the next morning, his face cycles through shock that blanches his tan, anger that tightens the easy jaw I've come to trust, and finally a quiet acceptance that settles over him like dust after a collapse. He leans against the doorframe, arms folded, studying me. www.novelsworm.com "Aldric's daughter. The whole time, you've been Aldric's eldest, sitting in our archives, eating at our table, and I was—what, cracking jokes with the enemy's firstborn about sea-dragon nests?" His voice is hoarse, not cruel, but the wound in it is real. "My brother's people killed yours. Your people killed his. And you just—lived here. With all of that inside you." He looks at me intently, looking for an explanation, for something. "I didn't have anywhere else to go, Riven. That's not an excuse. It's just the truth, and I know it's not enough." I grip the edge of the table because my hands want to shake and I refuse to let them. www.novelsworm.com "I understand if you

can't forgive it. I'm not asking you to." My voice quiets to a whisper. "I'm asking you to help me protect what we built here—Aspis, the house, everything your brother is risking by not handing me over." www.novE1World.com He's quiet for what feels like years. Then he pushes off the doorframe and sits across from me, pulling a stack of ledgers between us like a barricade he's choosing to dismantle. "You're still the woman who fought Venna to a standstill and made my brother act like a human being for the first time in four years. I'm furious, and I'll probably be furious for a while, but I'm not stupid enough to throw that away because your father is a monster." He meets my eyes. "Don't make me regret it." Venna is told nothing. She patrols, trains, moves through the compound with rigid discipline, nursing grievances she's too proud to voice, and she has no idea the houseless nobody she despises is the daughter of Mintia's ruling lord. Cassandra, meanwhile, hasn't acted. She carries her knowledge like a jeweled blade—visible, ornamental, designed to remind you it can cut. She finds ways to cross my path—the corridor outside the kitchens, the courtyard edge where patrol routes overlap.

"You look tired, little bird." She falls into step beside me near the eastern storeroom, voice pitched for my ears alone, smile bright enough for anyone watching to mistake for courtesy. "All those late nights in the archives—you'd think someone hiding a secret would sleep more carefully. Dark circles are so telling, don't you think? They make a person look..." She looks for a word. "Hunted." Every word lands. Every barb finds soft tissue between my ribs. But Aspis surges through the bond—hot, golden, furious—and wraps herself around the places Cassandra's voice tries to reach. "She speaks to wound because she cannot act. The moment she acts, her leverage dies. She knows this. You must know it too." I say nothing. I keep walking. Cassandra watches me go with patient, predatory satisfaction, and I feel her gaze between my shoulder blades like a knife balanced on its point. The discovery comes on the third night, buried in a folio so old the binding crumbles when I open it. Corwin has been searching for Alliance precedent. I've been searching older—foundational texts, dragon laws predating territorial division, written when bonds were sacred and riders chosen by fire rather than ceremony. The passage is in Old Tongue, and my hands shake as I translate by candlelight. 'A bond formed in truth supersedes ceremonial assignment. Where the dragon's will precedes the rider's claim, no house may contest the bond's authority, for the dragon's choice is sovereign and absolute.' I read it three times. Four. The implications cascade like stones down a mountain. If I can prove Aspis chose me before the egg was formally given to Cassandra—that the bond began in the moment the egg responded to my touch, before any ceremony, before any assignment—then the smuggling charge collapses. I didn't steal an unhatched egg. I carried a dragon already bonded to me. The egg was never Cassandra's to lose, because Aspis was never hers to claim. "I chose you," Aspis says, and the bond floods with certainty so absolute it makes my vision blur. "Before the shell. Before the light. Before

your hands found me in the dark. I was always yours.”“I know.” My voice cracks, and I press my forehead against the ancient page. “I know you did.”But the proof. The proof means standing before a tribunal and demonstrating a bond—which means revealing Aspis. Revealing a white dragon. Every house, every rival, every power sleeping in the belief that white dragons are extinct will wake and turn their eyes toward this compound, toward me, toward a creature whose existence rewrites the balance of the realm. Every consequence we’ve been avoiding. Every fear we’ve been outrunning. All of it, concentrated into a single, irreversible act. I sit in the archive with ancient law beneath my fingers and my dragon’s certainty burning through the bond, and I understand with perfect, terrible clarity: the only way to save us is to end every lie we’ve been living. And I have no idea if we’ll survive it. 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 — 54

[Cassandra’s POV] I am recalibrating. The corridor confrontation gave me everything I needed—confirmation that Evelyn is terrified, that the egg hatched, that Draven is shielding both her and whatever bonded creature hides beneath his compound. She cracked along the exact fault lines I expected: the flinch when I said her name, the bond-light flickering behind her eyes like a lantern she couldn’t smother. I catalogued every fracture, filed every tell. www.NoVELLwOrM.com But something went wrong with the breaking. I replay the confrontation in my chambers, morning light cutting hard angles across the writing desk, and the thing that gnaws isn’t what Evelyn said. It’s what she didn’t do. She didn’t beg. Didn’t crumble the way she always used to. When I told her the egg’s theft was a death sentence, her chin came up—not defiance, something worse. Certainty. The quiet certainty of a woman who has weighed the cost of her choices and accepted them. That’s unexpected and infuriating. www.NoVELLwOrM.com The direct approach cracked her walls but didn’t collapse them. The dragon bond feeds her strength she never possessed, shoring up the soft places I’ve always known how to reach. I need a different angle—something that slips beneath the bond’s defenses, something the dragon can’t burn away. Something rooted in the years

before Evelyn had anything but me and the shapes I carved into her. I find Kael in the guest wing after breakfast. He straightens when I enter, and I note the eagerness beneath his composure—the alertness of a dog who’s caught a scent and wants praise. He still thinks his corridor encounter was his own discovery, still believes he identified Evelyn through instinct rather than orchestration. I’d positioned him on that route with a fabricated errand, knowing proximity would trigger the muscle memory he carries from years of watching her. I let him keep the belief. A man who feels clever is a man who follows instructions without questioning them. “I have a task for you.” I settle across from him, posture open. “Evelyn won’t break under direct pressure. The bond feeds her something the dragon can protect. But it doesn’t reach backward—it doesn’t heal old wounds, only armors the new ones.” “What are you asking me to do?” “Talk to her. As Kael. The man she loved, the one who left. You were her first heartbreak—that kind of wound scars, and scar tissue splits under the right pressure.” I lean forward, holding his gaze. “Approach her with vulnerability. The remorseful ex, devastated by his choices.” I continue. “Tell her your father threatened your family, that you were manipulated, that you never stopped caring. She’ll want to believe it—some part of her will always want to believe the boy she loved wasn’t a coward who sold her for political advantage.” “You want me to pretend I’m sorry.” His voice flattens, but something uncomfortably genuine flickers beneath it. “You don’t have to mean it. You just have to make her feel it.” I stand, smoothing my coat. “Find her before midday. Be alone and be sincere. And Kael—don’t improvise. Say what I’ve told you to say, and nothing more.” He nods. I leave him with his bruised conscience and return to my chambers to wait. Father taught me patience through repetition and consequence, and the waiting is the part I’ve always been best at. I sit at the window, watching warriors cross the training yard, servants haul supplies—the ordinary machinery of a house that doesn’t realize it’s being dismantled from the inside. Kael will deliver the script with enough genuine pain to convince, because the weapon’s genius is that it doesn’t require acting. Kael actually loved Evelyn, in his limited, cowardly way. All I’ve done is aim that love cuts hard like a blade. The sun climbs past the inner wall before he returns. His footsteps in the corridor are too fast, uneven—the stride of a man rattled off his axis. He enters without knocking, which tells me more than his face, though his face tells plenty.

“I found her in the inner courtyard, alone on the stone bench beneath the officers’ terrace. I approached exactly as rehearsed—hesitant, contrite. Told her I was manipulated, that her father threatened my family, that I never stopped caring.” He paces, three steps to the window, three back, hands locked behind his spine. “She let me finish. Every rehearsed confession—she sat and let me empty the script onto the stones between us. Didn’t interrupt. Didn’t flinch. Didn’t cry.” There’s disappointment in his voice. “Just watched me like she was listening to rain on a window. Something happening outside her that couldn’t touch her

anymore.” “And then?” “She said, ‘I don’t care why.’” He stops pacing. Something raw surfaces beneath the report—something I didn’t authorize. “That girl is dead. You helped kill her.” The words hang between us. Not anger—anger I could use. Not grief—grief is a lever. What Evelyn gave him was indifference. The flat dismissal of a woman who has moved so far past the wound that the knife itself has become irrelevant. “Did you deliver the rest?” “The script was dead, Cassandra. Everything you gave me bounced off her like stones off a fortress wall. So I told her something real.” He meets my eyes, and what I see is dangerously close to honesty. “I told her you’re going to destroy her. Whatever she’s hiding—you’ll burn it all down to get what you want. She knows it already. But someone should warn her, even if the warning comes from someone she’ll never trust again.” “How noble. And completely useless. You’ve shown her our approach has shifted from confrontation to sentiment, which means she’ll armor the emotional channels next.” I don’t try to hide my resentment. “She already knew the strategy the moment she saw me in that corridor weeks ago.” He moves toward the door, and his stride has changed—something heavier, something that resists the leash I’ve kept tight since Mintia. “She’s not the girl you broke, Cassandra. Whatever you’re planning—plan it knowing that.” The door clicks shut like a period at the end of a sentence I didn’t write. I sit for a long time, watching the light shift across the stone, and I recalibrate again. Kael’s failure is useful data—it confirms the bond has restructured Evelyn’s emotional architecture so thoroughly that old wounds no longer function as access points. The girl who wept when I raised my voice, who crumbled when Father withdrew approval, who let Kael’s betrayal hollow her out—that girl is genuinely gone. Whatever replaced her was forged in dragon-fire and enemy territory and the alchemy of being chosen by something that doesn’t care about blood or birthright. She already knows I’ll burn it all down. She knows, and she hasn’t run. The Evelyn I grew up with ran from everything—conflict, Father’s rages, the prophecy neither of us was supposed to know about. www.noVelworm.com This version stands still and watches the fire come with blue eyes that belong to someone who survived the burning and found she preferred the heat. I’ll need a new weapon. Not sentiment, not fear, not the old architecture of sisterly dominance. Something structural—something that targets the foundation Draven has built around her. Remove the structure, and even the strongest woman falls. Not because she’s weak. Because gravity doesn’t care about strength. The light dies in the window. I let it go without reaching for a candle, because the dark has always been where I think most clearly, and clarity is the only weapon that never dulls. 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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Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 55

[Draven's POV]The war room smells of cold stone and lamp oil, no windows to soften the dark—just four walls sunk below the main keep where sound goes to die. Voices don't carry past the iron-banded door, which is precisely why I chose this room. Riven arrives first, boots still carrying salt from his evening patrol, and drops into the chair nearest the door with the loose-limbed ease of a man who doesn't yet know what he's about to hear. Corwin follows with folios that smell of dust older than our grandfather, arranging his materials with the reverent precision of a surgeon laying out instruments. Sera comes last, checks the corridor through the narrowing gap, and slides the bolt home with a sound like a bone setting. "You're afraid," Khaira observes through the bond. "Not of Cassandra. Of how much to tell them without telling them everything." I don't answer her. She's right, and acknowledging it would cost me the composure I need. "Cassandra wouldn't leave empty-handed," I begin, standing at the head of the table with my hands braced against stone. *www.nOVêlwD(r)M.čom* Three faces lit by lamplight—my brother, my archivist, my intelligence chief. "She knows Evelyn is here. She knows we're protecting her. And she's building a case to bring before the Alliance that will force us to hand Evelyn over—or face consequences that could destroy this house." Sera's eyes narrow—she's been piecing this together since the delegation departed, and the restraint it costs her tightens her jaw. Riven leans forward, elbows on the table, watching me with sharp attention he usually hides beneath easy smiles. "She knows we're protecting her, and she's using every hour to gather evidence, coordinate with her father, and prepare her move," I continue. "The summit extension bought us time, but not much." "What kind of evidence?" Riven asks, and the lightness is gone from his voice entirely. "Travel records. Border crossings. Witness accounts from settlements between here and Mintia." Sera ticks them off with the precision of someone who's already run the same calculation. "Everything that proves Evelyn came from their territory into ours. Everything Cassandra needs to build her case." Corwin opens his largest folio—Alliance territorial law, annotated in three generations of handwriting—and turns to a section marked with black leather. "The charge matters. Theft requires proving ownership. If Evelyn can demonstrate legitimate claim—that whatever she carried was rightfully hers—then it becomes a succession dispute rather than criminal prosecution." "Different tribunal, different jurisdiction, different rules," I say. "But it still ends with Evelyn before judges who answer to houses that have been our rivals for generations." Riven paces to the far wall where lamplight barely reaches. "Even if we win legally, we lose politically." "Which is exactly what Cassandra wants," Sera says, arms crossed. "She doesn't need to win in a tribunal. She needs to force us into a position where

we either surrender Evelyn or declare ourselves openly opposed to Mintia. Either way, we're exposed."The silence carries weight, heavy as stone. Corwin's pen hovers above blank parchment. Riven's pacing has the rhythm of a man working through an unsolvable problem."If Cassandra brings formal charges, Alliance protocol requires investigation," Corwin says carefully. "Inspectors, searches, questioning—" "They'll tear this compound apart," Sera finishes, her gaze locking onto mine. "Everything we've worked to keep private becomes subject to scrutiny. We can't allow that kind of access." "No," I agree. "We can't." Riven turns from the wall, face sharp in flickering light. "So we need leverage. Something that makes her think twice." "Intelligence," Sera says immediately. "Three of her entourage weren't on the official manifest. She met privately with representatives from two other houses during the summit. We build our own case—document every suspicious contact, every breach of protocol." "We won't," I say. "We'll make it look like we did." "Create the appearance that we have something on her," Corwin adds. "Even circumstantial evidence might give her pause. Make them question whether pursuing Evelyn is worth the risk."

"It's a bluff," Riven observes. "Everything about this is dangerous," I say. "But a credible bluff buys time to shore up defenses and alliances. If this goes to tribunal, we need to walk in from strength, not desperation." "We won't," I say. "We'll make it look like we did." Sera straightens. "I'll need authorization to expand surveillance on anyone who had contact with the Mintian delegation." "You have it," I tell her. "But keep it quiet." "What about our allies?" Corwin asks. "We should prepare them for a possible tribunal before Cassandra frames our position for them." "Carefully," I caution. "Reach out through unofficial channels, feel out loyalties. If we move too aggressively, it looks like an admission of guilt." Riven returns to the table. "And Evelyn needs to know what we're planning." "I'll tell her," I say, and something in my voice makes all three of them look at me with understanding. Riven's expression is knowing. Sera's is calculating. Corwin just looks tired. "One more thing," Sera says, her tone making me go still. "Venna's been asking questions. About Evelyn, about why the summit extended, about what Cassandra really wanted. She's smart enough to piece together that something's happening beyond what we've told the household." "We won't," I say. "We'll make it look like we did." "Venna's loyal," Riven says, but there's a question in it. "Venna was loyal," Sera corrects, voice flat. "She had her own agenda, which failed spectacularly. That kind of failure makes people dangerous. Especially when they think their lord is making the same mistake twice—trusting someone who might get people killed." The comparison lands like a blade between my ribs, sharp and precise. Khaira stirs through the bond, protective and fierce, but I push her back. This isn't a fight that can be won with teeth and fire. "Keep an eye on her," I tell Sera. "Not because I don't trust her, but because we can't afford any more variables right now. If she has concerns, I want to know about them before they become problems." Sera nods once, sharp and final. The lamplight flickers. Somewhere above us, the compound settles into

evening—warriors checking schedules, servants preparing meals, life continuing in comfortable ignorance. “We’re not solving this tonight,” I say, straightening from the table. “But we’re preparing. We build the case, shore up alliances. When Cassandra makes her move, we’re ready to counter.” “And if she moves before we’re ready?” Riven asks quietly. “Then we make sure she regrets it,” I say, the words carrying every choice I’ve made since Evelyn walked through my gates. “This house has survived worse. We’ll survive this too.” They stand—Sera gathering reports, Corwin already planning which archives to search, Riven with the readiness of a fighter who knows the real battle is coming. The door unseals, and they file into the corridor where normal life waits. I remain in the war room after they’re gone, alone except for Khaira’s presence and the weight of everything I didn’t say. The truth I’m keeping—the full scope of what we’re protecting, the real reason Cassandra won’t stop—sits heavy in the silence. “You can’t protect them from this forever,” Khaira observes. “Eventually they’ll need to know everything.” “I know,” I tell her. “But not yet.” The lamp burns low, and I stand in the gathering dark, planning for wars I can see and preparing for the one I can’t.

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First Chosen by the Dragon

7-9 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 56

[Evelyn’s POV] Past midnight, the sea caves breathe. Water laps against black rock, and the underground lake stretches into darkness where the cave ceiling drops to meet its surface. Aspis glides beneath the water like a living moon—white scales throwing pale light across the stone walls, wings folded tight as she rolls through the deep. Every few seconds she surfaces to exhale, sending ripples that scatter her glow into constellations against the ceiling. I sit on the ledge with my boots off and my feet hanging over the water, watching her swim. The bond hums between us—content, liquid. Down here, where the walls open wide enough for her wingspan, she’s herself. Just a dragon, doing what dragons do. Footsteps echo from the passage behind me. I know the sound before I turn—measured, deliberate, authority carried in bone. Draven steps into the cavern at the edge of the light Aspis casts, face half-illuminated, half-shadow. He’s shed his armor—dark tunic, sleeves pushed to his

elbows, blade strapped to his thigh. We haven't been alone since the night I told him my real name. Days of professionalism and war rooms, his gaze sliding past me like I'm furniture. The distance has been a physical ache—a bruise pressed every time he stands close enough to touch and doesn't. "Corwin wanted me to review the coastal charts," he says, not looking at me. "Tide patterns for the seaward opening. In case we need to move her again." "At midnight?" "Corwin keeps irregular hours." He crosses to the far ledge and sits, leaving ten feet of dark water between us. Aspis surfaces near his side, golden eyes blinking, and chirps—a welcoming sound that vibrates off the walls. His hand extends to touch her snout, and the gesture is so unguarded that something cracks inside my chest.

W. n. o. v. é. L. w. o. (r) M. c. o. m. "You didn't come here for tide charts, Draven." Aspis dips below the water, her glow dimming as she descends, leaving us in near-darkness. His breathing is audible across the distance—steady, controlled.

w. w. w. m. o. v. (e) l. w. o. (r) m. c. o. m. "No," he says finally. "I didn't." "Then why?" "Because I haven't slept in four days, and every time I close my eyes, I'm back in that archive listening to you say your father's name." His voice is low, rough-edged, stripped of the command he wears like armor. "I was trying to be angry. Trying to hold onto it. Because anger makes sense—it's clean, gives me something solid to stand on." He takes a deep breath, unguarded, sounding like surrender. "But the truth is I wasn't angry when you told me. Not really."

w. n. o. v. é. L. w. o. (r) m. c. o. m. I pull my knees to my chest. "What were you?" "Terrified." The word drops into the cave like a stone into still water. "My first thought wasn't about Lyanna. Wasn't about your house, or the war, or the blood between our names. My first thought was — they'll take her from me now." "The council, the Alliance, your sister. Every consequence of your name meant someone would pull you out of my reach." He stops. Starts again. "I stood there and the only thing I could think was that I was about to lose you, and it was going to be worse than anything your house ever did to me." My throat closes. Aspis surfaces between us, eyes moving from him to me like she's watching something she's waited months to see. "You built those walls for a reason," I say quietly. "After Lyanna. Every barrier, every silence—you built them to survive. I understand, because I built the same ones. Different stones, same architecture." "You demolished mine." His laugh is short, almost broken. "Every single one. The walls I spent four years constructing—you walked through them like they were smoke. Not because you tried. Because you never tried. You just stood in front of me being exactly what you are, and I couldn't keep the doors closed."

I uncurl from the ledge and stand. The stone is cold beneath my bare feet as I walk the edge of the lake toward him—each step deliberate, each step a choice. "When I ran from Mintia, I swore I'd never need anyone again. Need was the weapon my family used—every time I loved something, they took it to remind me I owned nothing." I stop three feet from him. "Then I came here. And you were awful and brilliant and impossible, and you looked at me like I was dangerous and worth keeping in the same breath." He rises to his feet—broad shoulders,

dark eyes holding mine with an intensity that hammers my pulse against my ribs. “Maybe the dragon brought us together,” I say, stepping closer until I feel warmth off his skin. “Two people who forgot what it’s like to let someone in. Two people so terrified of losing again they’d rather suffocate behind walls than risk the door opening.” “Evelyn.” My name in his mouth sounds like a prayer and a surrender at once. “I’m done hiding from this.” I press my palm flat against his chest, right where his heart beats hard enough that I feel it through fabric and muscle. “I’ve hidden from everything else. I won’t hide from you.” His hand covers mine—rough, calloused, trembling in a way that Draven never trembles. His fingers close around my wrist, holding me against the beat of him, and his other hand finds my jaw, tilting my face up. I watch the last wall fall behind his eyes—the exact moment he stops fighting gravity. The kiss is desperate. Aching. Not gentle, not careful—the collision of two people who’ve been orbiting each other for months and finally stopped pretending. His mouth meets mine and the sound I make is involuntary, because the taste of him is salt and smoke and everything I’ve been starving for. His hand slides into my hair, gripping tight, angling my head back as he deepens the kiss with hunger that shakes through us both. www.novelworm.com My fingers twist in his tunic, pulling him closer—chest to chest, heartbeat to heartbeat, my back arching into him as his arm wraps around my waist and holds me like I’m the only solid thing in a world coming apart. We break for air and his forehead presses against mine, both of us breathing hard, his thumb tracing my cheekbone with tenderness that contradicts every bruising second of that kiss. “Four days,” he rasps. “Four days of pretending I could survive that distance, and it nearly killed me.” “Then stop pretending.” I pull him back down. This kiss is slower—deep, thorough, his lips parting mine with deliberate care. My hands slide to his neck, fingers threading into his hair, and the sound he makes against my mouth is low and undone and mine. Aspis surfaces behind us. Water cascades off white scales as she lifts her head, golden eyes luminous, watching with an expression that is ancient and knowing and insufferably smug. “Finally,” she purrs through the bond, the word vibrating with satisfaction so complete it hums through every nerve I possess. I laugh against Draven’s mouth—breathless, unsteady, full. His arms tighten around me, and his laughter rumbles through his chest, quiet and real and rare. We stand tangled together in a sea cave past midnight, bathed in the pale glow of a white dragon’s light, and for the first time since I told him the truth, the ache is gone. Something better has taken its place. 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 — 57

[Draven's POV]The passage back to my chambers takes eleven minutes. I count every step while her hand stays in mine—warm, certain, refusing to let go—and the counting is the only thread keeping me tethered to a world that still requires navigation. Torches gutter as we climb, shadows folding around us. Hip against hip. Shoulder finding arm. I open the door. Close it. The bolt slides home—not a lock but a declaration, two people stepping past a threshold that cannot be uncrossed. She turns to face me in the dark. Moonlight through the window is enough—pale grey catching the dark dye of her hair, the line of her jaw. I cross the distance slowly, because this will not be desperate. Whatever broke open in that cave demands something more deliberate—every touch earned, every inch of skin claimed only with permission. My hands find her collar. I undo the clasps, fingers grazing the ridge of her collarbone, the hollow of her throat where her pulse hammers. She watches my hands with blue eyes gone dark, and when the fabric slides from her shoulders, the mark on her chest catches moonlight—my handprint, glowing faintly. I press my palm to it, and her breath hitches, her head tipping back in a gesture of trust so complete it nearly breaks me. “If you need me to stop, just tell me,” I murmur against her jaw, because I need her to know the door is still open. “Don’t you dare.” Her fingers curl into the fabric at my chest and pull, and the tunic drops between us. Her hands map me—ribs, abdomen, the scarred planes of my chest—with a thoroughness that feels less like desire and more like memorization. I lift her, her legs wrap around my waist, and we cross the remaining distance to the bed without separating our mouths. It’s slow. Deliberate. I peel fabric from her body with the patience of a man dismantling something sacred—leggings drawn down while my mouth traces her inner thigh, the soft plane of her stomach where muscles tighten beneath my lips. She arches into the contact, fingers threading into my hair, and the sound she makes when my mouth finds the wet heat between her thighs is low and shattered and mine. I take my time. Tongue tracing slow circles against the swollen bud of her arousal while her hips roll against my mouth and her thighs tremble around my jaw. I catalog every shudder, every gasped syllable of my name, the way her spine bows when I press two fingers inside her and curl them upward against the spot that makes her voice break. *WwW.novElwOR(m).com* “Draven—” Half plea, half command, nails scoring my shoulders. “I need you. All of you.” I rise over her. Her legs open wider, one heel hooking behind my thigh, pulling me forward until I press against her entrance. I hold there—forehead to forehead, breathing the same air—giving her one final second. Her hips cant upward, and I sink into her in one slow thrust that draws a groan from somewhere deep behind my ribs. Tight. Impossibly warm. Muscles clenching around me as her body adjusts. I

still, watching her face—the flutter of her lashes, the way her lips part, the flush spreading from chest to throat. When her eyes open and find mine, something in them says move, and I obey. Deep, rolling strokes that press us together hip to chest, that drag sounds from her throat she couldn't produce on purpose. Her nails rake down my back, the sting threading into pleasure until both are indistinguishable. I brace one arm beside her head, the other gripping her hip, angling her upward until each thrust hits the depth that makes her eyes lose focus. "Look at me." Rough. Barely mine. She does—blue finding black in the half-dark—and the intimacy of it is more devastating than the act itself, because she sees me. Not the lord. Not the mask. The man beneath, laid open and terrified of how much this matters. She comes with my name in her mouth and her body clenching around me, and I follow three strokes later—buried deep, face pressed to her neck, the sound I make muffled against her skin because it carries more truth than any word I've spoken in four years.

Afterward, the dark holds us. Her head rests on my chest, dark hair fanning across my skin, and neither of us speaks because the silence is doing something words would interrupt. Her fingertips find the scar—the long raised line along my left ribs, a blade's memory from the night I arrived too late to save Lyanna and just early enough to watch them finish. She traces its length with the same care I used to undress her, and I let her. My body tenses, then releases, because the instinct to pull away meets something stronger—if I flinch now, I lose something I cannot afford to lose. She doesn't ask what it is. She already knows. Her thumb follows the ridge of scar tissue, and I let a woman touch the wound I've never allowed anyone to see. It doesn't kill me. That's the revelation—not the sex but the silence after, where I don't reach for armor. Morning arrives grey and uninvited. Light through the window finds dark-dyed hair on my pillow, Evelyn's face softened by sleep into someone younger, someone who hasn't been hunted by her own blood. I watch her for exactly three seconds—the curve of her shoulder, the mark glowing faint on her chest, one strand of hair stirring with each breath. "Satisfied?" Khaira rumbles through the bond, smug as a cathedral gargoyle watching sinners confess. "Four years of brooding, and all it took was a woman brave enough to stand still while you circled." The world crashes back. Cassandra's patience is thinning. The accusation forming. I ease out of bed without waking her, dress in grey half-light, and take the corridor to the war room. Riven is already there. He reads my face and says nothing—just slides the intelligence reports across the table with the careful neutrality of a man who knows when silence is the only appropriate comment. "Cassandra will move within days," I say. "The smuggling accusation. We prepare as if it's already here." "Corwin's been in the archives since last night. Found something." Riven straightens, arms crossing. "The Luminary Protocol. Ancient law—older than the Alliance itself. White and black dragons belong to their bonded rider and to the realm. Not to any house. Not to any territory. If we

invoke it, Aspis can't be seized or claimed." "And the cost?" "Staggering. Every house learns we've sheltered a white dragon. Delegations. Marriage demands. Assassination attempts." He holds my gaze. "But the alternative is letting Cassandra drag Evelyn before a tribunal, and we both know how that ends." I lay the strategy across the table: accelerate the summit to close within forty-eight hours, prepare a formal legal rebuttal grounded in bond law, and hold the Protocol in reserve if circumstances force our hand. Riven studies the reports, then nods. "The political cost will be enormous." "The alternative is worse." Somewhere beneath us, a white dragon sleeps beside the tide. In my chambers, a woman with dark-dyed hair sleeps in sheets that smell of us both, and I will burn every alliance I've built before I let anyone take her from me. That is the most dangerous thought I've ever allowed myself to keep.

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First Chosen by the Dragon

8-10 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 58

[Cassandra's POV] I send the request through proper channels—a sealed note on a Mintian letterhead, hand-delivered to Lord Draven's steward at dawn. A private audience to discuss a matter of Alliance security before the summit concludes. No specifics and no threats. Just the polished courtesy of a woman giving the man across the table a chance to handle this quietly. His reply arrives within the hour. The south study, midmorning. He names the room the way a commander names a battlefield—choosing terrain before the enemy can. I dress for war the way women in my position always do—carefully. Midnight blue, high collar, Mintian crest pinned at my throat in silver. Hair pulled back so nothing softens the angles—every detail a signal that I am here as the heir of a sovereign house, not as a guest asking favors. The south study is narrow and deep, stone walls hung with navigation charts. A single window throws hard morning light across a desk of salvaged ship timber, and behind it stands Lord Draven—arms folded, back to the window so the light falls on my face and not his. Classic interrogator's stance.

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"Lady Cassandra." His voice is flat, professional. A door, not a greeting. "Lord Draven." I take the chair across from his desk without being offered one, crossing my legs and settling into the leather with practiced ease.

“Thank you for seeing me privately. What I have to say is better heard without an audience, for both our sakes.” “Then say it.” No pretense of hospitality. His dark eyes watch me with the absolute stillness of something that hunts by waiting. “You’re harboring a fugitive from Mintia.” I let the words land cleanly. “A woman named Evelyn who crossed Alliance territory carrying a stolen dragon egg—an unhatched egg transported without formal dispensation, across sovereign borders, into a rival house’s territory.” I offer him an explanation, in case he’s not following. “Under Article Forty-Seven of the Dragon Accords, that’s not a diplomatic incident. That’s a capital offense.” Silence. The window light cuts across the desk like a blade dividing territory. Draven doesn’t move, doesn’t blink. The stillness isn’t surprise—it’s a man who watched this conversation arrive from a great distance and prepared the ground before it landed. “I’m requesting her return to Mintia for a formal tribunal,” I continue. “This isn’t personal. It’s a matter of Alliance stability. Unauthorized egg transport undermines every territorial agreement we’ve built. If houses begin smuggling eggs across borders without consequence, the Accords collapse. You understand the precedent.” “I understand the accusation.” His voice settles deeper—bedrock beneath the surface. “And I’ll offer you the legal response, since you’ve come prepared for a negotiation rather than a conversation.” He recites it with the measured precision of a man who has rehearsed not for performance but for accuracy. *W(w)w.n0v@LwO(r)m.čom* “Bond law predates the Dragon Accords by two centuries. Under the Foundational Statutes of Rider Sovereignty, if a dragon chooses its rider before any ceremonial assignment—if the bond forms prior to any territorial claim—the bond supersedes all jurisdictional authority.” He makes a dramatic pause that I don’t need. “A rider carrying a bonded dragon is not smuggling. She is exercising a sovereign right that no house, no treaty, and no tribunal can override.” The words settle like stones dropped into still water. I watch his face for cracks—the hesitation of a man building his defense in real time. There’s nothing. Every syllable was loaded before I walked through the door. “You’ve been preparing,” I say, and I don’t bother hiding the observation. “That argument didn’t come from this morning’s research. You knew exactly what accusation I’d bring and built the rebuttal before I sat down.” “I prepare for every contingency. It’s how I’ve kept this house standing.” He holds my gaze without effort, without anything I can leverage. *wWw.moVellWorm.com* Which means Evelyn told him everything—the egg, the flight, the theft. Or he assembled the picture himself from fragments and intelligence. Either way, he chose her.

Consciously, deliberately, with full knowledge of what she carried and where she came from. He weighed the cost and decided that sheltering a Mintian fugitive was worth every risk it brought to his door. He’s not a man reacting. He’s a man who already made his choice. I shift tactics. The legal approach is a closed road. I lean forward, letting the formality thin until something sharper shows beneath. “Let me be candid, Lord Draven, since we’re both too intelligent for pretense.” I offer him a poison-sweet smile. “You know who she is. You know

which house she was born to. The house that ordered the ambush on your bondmate's patrol—the house whose soldiers killed Lyanna while you rode too late to reach her.”

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The name lands like a blade hitting stone. “You’re protecting a woman from the house that murdered your partner.” I keep my voice even, almost gentle. “How does that feel?” The silence that follows is unlike any silence I have ever occupied. It stretches across the desk, heavy and absolute. Draven doesn’t look away—doesn’t clench his jaw, doesn’t betray a single involuntary response. The morning light illuminates a man who absorbed the blow and didn’t move—because he had already broken under that same weight and rebuilt himself into something the original impact can no longer reach. He has already had that fight with himself. Fought it alone, without witnesses, with a brutality no enemy could match—because no one destroys you more thoroughly than your own conscience. And he won. Whatever battle raged between Lyanna’s memory and Evelyn’s living face, he walked through it and came out the other side with his decision forged in fire. That terrifies me more than anything he could have said. “This meeting is concluded.” His voice carries the quiet, absolute authority of a dismissal that does not invite negotiation. “If The House of Blue Dragon wishes to pursue formal charges, your house is welcome to petition the Alliance through established channels. You will find the process educational.” He doesn’t stand. Doesn’t escort me to the door. He simply returns his attention to the coastal survey on his desk—a man resuming his work after an interruption that didn’t warrant the time it consumed. I rise, smooth the front of my coat, and leave without rushing. The corridor swallows me in grey stone and torchlight, and behind the mask my mind disassembles the encounter. He is stronger than I estimated. More prepared, more committed, more dangerously certain. The legal rebuttal was constructed, not improvised—he has counsel researching precedents. His emotional defenses held under a strike I’ve watched shatter men twice his age. He didn’t flinch when I named Lyanna. But certainty is its own blindness. A man who has resolved his internal war stops watching for the enemy inside his walls. Emotion makes people predictable—not in how they break, but in what they protect. Draven just showed me exactly what he will fight to defend. I return to my chambers and send for Kael. There is one card left before departure—not a legal argument, not a diplomatic maneuver, but something older and more corrosive. Trust fractures from the inside, and the finest cracks start where tenderness has made the structure soft. I don’t need to break Draven’s walls. I need to make him doubt what lives behind them. Kael and Evelyn, the right place, the right time, the right audience—the kind of scene that plants a seed no amount of loyalty can uproot. By the time it blooms, I’ll be gone, and the damage will do my work for 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

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First Chosen by the Dragon

8-10 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 59

[Evelyn's POV] I find Draven in the war room after midday, alone—Riven caught my expression when I entered and left without being asked. The door closes, and Draven turns to face me, sleeves rolled to his forearms, ink staining his right hand. *www.novelworld.com* “Your sister requested a private meeting this morning,” he says before I can speak. “She named you. Named the egg. Demanded your return for tribunal.” “What did you tell her?” “That bond law predates her accusations by two centuries, and that she’s welcome to petition the Alliance formally if she’d like to waste her time more publicly.” Something cold and satisfied ghosts across his mouth. “She didn’t enjoy the experience.” I know what Cassandra will do next because I grew up watching her do it. The pattern is etched into my bones the way old scars are etched into skin—familiar, unavoidable. She tried the legal strike and Draven didn’t flinch. She invoked Lyanna’s name and he dismissed her like a petitioner who’d wasted his morning. My sister is brilliant and adaptable, but predictable in her cruelty. When the blade doesn’t cut, she reaches for poison. And the poison she’ll reach for now has a name. *www.novelworld.com* “She wouldn’t.” I press my palms flat against the desk’s edge because my hands want to shake and I won’t allow them to. “Draven, listen. She’s not done. I know her—the way she thinks. She tried law and you shut her down. She tried Lyanna and you held. She’s going to go sideways now, somewhere you’re not braced for.” His dark eyes narrow. “Go on.” “She’s going to use Kael.” I say his name the way you say the name of a disease you survived—flat, clinical. “She’ll engineer something. A scene, an encounter, something that looks intimate between him and me.” *www.novelworld.com* I watch his face carefully, to notice his doubts, if he has any. “Something designed to land where you can see it. She doesn’t need it to be real. She just needs it to plant a question you can’t stop asking.” Draven goes very still—not performative stillness but the deep, involuntary kind. His jaw shifts, a movement I’ve learned to read in the dark between breaths. “You know her tactics well,” he says quietly. “I survived eighteen years of them. I know the playbook because I was on the practice field.” I hold his gaze without flinching. “She used Kael against me in Mintia—dangled him, withdrew him, turned him into proof I wasn’t worthy. She’ll use him against you the same way. Different target, same blade.” “And Kael.” His voice drops lower, the syllables

tightening around the name like a fist closing. “What does he want from this?” “What he always wants—to follow whatever script puts him on the winning side. He’s not the threat, Draven. He’s the instrument. Cassandra is the hand.” He studies me across the war table, and I watch the question build before he asks it. Watch his jaw tighten another fraction, the tendons in his forearms shifting beneath rolled sleeves. *W(w).nOv@/W(O)rM.CoM* When it comes, the words are quiet and controlled in a way that tells me exactly how much they cost. “Do you still have feelings for him?” The room contracts. Maps and patrol routes fall away until it’s just his dark gaze and my answer and the fragile, ferocious thing we’ve built between cave walls and tangled sheets. “I have feelings about him,” I say, steady, because this I know with absolute certainty. “None of them are affection.” He holds my gaze for four heartbeats. His jaw releases by a fraction—easing from stone to iron. He nods once, reaches across the desk, catches my hand, and pulls me around to stand in front of him.

His fingers lace through mine, thumb tracing my knuckle with a possessiveness that borders on bruising. He kisses me—hard, brief, a man branding something he’s afraid of losing—and when he pulls back, his forehead rests against mine. “I’ll handle Cassandra,” he says, rough against my mouth. “We’ll handle her,” I correct. But I see the seed land. It’s there in the way his eyes don’t quite warm all the way back, in the tension still coiled through his shoulders. Cassandra’s poison doesn’t need to be believed. It just needs to exist—settling between trust and scar like water into a crack that winter will freeze and widen. The sea caves are darker than usual when I descend that evening, the air charged and metallic like sky before lightning. Through the bond, Aspis pulses with a restless energy that presses against the inside of my skull. I round the final bend and stop, because Aspis fills the cavern. She’s the size of a warhorse—shoulders level with my head, neck arched beneath stalactites that her horns nearly scrape. Wings half-furled, their tips brush the cave walls on either side, dragging pale lines through dark stone. White scales ripple across doubled muscle and bone, and her amber eyes burn with an intelligence deeper than anything I can track. She shifts her weight and a stalactite snaps against her wing membrane with a crack that echoes like thunder. “You’re enormous,” I breathe, pressing my palm to her snout. The scales are hot, thrumming with a pulse that doesn’t match my own. “I am what I was always going to become.” Her voice through the bond carries gravity I’ve never heard—something older than either of us. “And this cave cannot hold what I am becoming.” “I know. The summit is ending, and once Cassandra leaves—” “No.” The word reverberates through me like a struck bell. Aspis lowers her head until her eye—enormous, amber, ringed with fire—is level with mine. “You speak in plans and timelines. But I am not a political problem to be managed, Evelyn. I was not born only for you.” The words hit somewhere deep and unprotected, and I stand with my hand on her scales while she continues through the bond. Her certainty is absolute—not arrogance but the calm, terrible conviction of something that knows its purpose the way rivers know the sea.

“Something is approaching that has nothing to do with your sister’s cruelty or your father’s politics. Something that will require every wing in the sky and every rider who can hold a bond.” A chill slides through me, settling at the base of my spine. “What’s coming? Aspis, what do you feel?” “I feel it the way I feel you—constant, approaching, inevitable.” Her wing shifts, another stalactite cracks, stone fragments raining into dark water. “I cannot fulfill that purpose from inside a cave. No dragon born for fire was meant to hide underground while the world decides whether it’s ready for her.” I press my forehead against her snout, and the heat sears through my skin into bone. Through the bond, I feel the edges of what she’s describing—not a vision but a pressure building at the horizon like a storm that hasn’t crested. Vast, darkening and patient. I don’t fully understand it, don’t know what shape it will take when it arrives. But Aspis’s certainty is a living thing inside my chest, and it doesn’t feel like fear. It feels like a warning. I hold my dragon in the dark, feeling her breathe against my palms, and for the first time since I fled Mintia, the danger ahead feels larger than the danger behind. Something beyond house rivalries, beyond Cassandra’s poison—something that makes all of it look small. The cave groans as Aspis shifts again, wings scraping stone, body outgrowing its shelter the way truth outgrows every lie built to contain it. Whatever is approaching doesn’t care whether we’re ready.

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

8-9 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 60

[Kael’s POV] Cassandra’s instructions are precise, as always. Gardens. Golden hour. Find Evelyn alone, be vulnerable, be genuine. Make it look intimate. She doesn’t tell me why the timing matters, but I’m not stupid. I’ve been her instrument long enough to recognize when I’m being aimed at someone—and someone is meant to see this. The gardens are drenched in amber light, pooling on flagstone paths, turning ivy along the western wall into molten threads. I walk with Cassandra’s script running through my head like a prayer I don’t believe in. Regret, longing, the version of myself she assembled from spare parts and old wounds. I find Evelyn near the stone wall where everything turns the color of honey. She’s alone, her profile sharp against the glow, dark hair catching gold at the edges. She senses me before I

www.nov(e)lw(o)r(m).co(m) Her shoulders draw tight, spine straightening with the precision of a woman who's trained herself to brace before the blow lands. "Evelyn." I keep my voice low, wounded. The opening Cassandra wrote—soft, carrying years of quiet devastation. "I know you don't want to see me. But I need you to hear this." She turns. Those blue eyes find me with controlled disgust. Not hatred—hatred would mean I still matter enough to hate. "Don't," she says, flat and final. But I keep talking, because somewhere in this garden Cassandra is watching and stopping means consequences. I reach for her arm—gentle, deliberate—and my fingers close around her wrist. I deliver the lines. Every rehearsed syllable. The regret that tastes like ash, the longing Cassandra polished into something presentable. Evelyn pulls back, but I hold on—not hard, just enough to keep the image intact for whoever is watching. "I made mistakes," I say, and Cassandra's script blurs against truth bleeding through the performance like ink through wet paper. Because it isn't all rehearsed. That's the part Cassandra doesn't know. Evelyn sent me away cold in that corridor weeks ago, her voice a door slamming shut with coffin-lid finality, and she was right to. Every word she threw landed exactly where it was aimed. But I can't stop looking at her. This isn't the girl I left behind in Mintia—fragile, eager to please, a creature made of apologies and downcast eyes. That girl flinched when Cassandra entered a room, made herself smaller every day until there was barely enough left to cast a shadow. This woman fights elite warriors and wins. She stands in enemy territory like she owns the ground beneath her boots. She's harder, fiercer, more alive than anything I remember, and somehow that's worse than if she'd stayed broken. Broken I could pity. This version of Evelyn just reminds me of what I threw away because Cassandra told me it was worthless and I believed her. "I was wrong about everything," I say, and the words aren't Cassandra's anymore. "About you. About what mattered—" www.m(o)velw(o)r(m).co(m) "I said don't." She jerks free, and the look in her eyes isn't fear. It's the unbothered dismissal of a woman who buried whatever I was to her and walked away from the grave without looking back. Then Draven rounds the hedge. My chest locks tight. This is the moment Cassandra orchestrated—the former betrothed with his hand on her arm, faces close, golden light. The kind of image that poisons everything it touches. I brace for rage, the fracture between commander and soldier. Instead, Draven slows. Those black eyes—flat and depthless—sweep the scene with surgical precision. He reads the positioning, the light, the careful intimacy. And walks toward us. Not away. Evelyn sees him and pulls her arm free as if the air itself released her. Something passes across her face that I recognize because I used to be the one who caused it—relief. Not rescue. The relief of the right person arriving. The way your whole body exhales when the one you chose walks into the room.

Draven reaches us. He doesn't look at Evelyn—not yet. He looks at me, and what I see isn't anger. It's a dismissal so quiet and absolute it barely qualifies as acknowledgment, the way

you'd glance at furniture you need to step around. "You're finished here." Three words. No threat. Just the calm, immovable certainty of a man who doesn't consider me worth the energy of rage. I leave without protest because there's nothing to protest. Cassandra's trap didn't spring because the man she built it for walked through it like it wasn't there. I pass close enough to see them afterward—Draven's hand at the small of her back, Evelyn leaning into him with a shift so slight it's almost imperceptible. But I've spent my life reading the language of bodies pressed close, and what I see hits like a blade between the ribs. *www.N©VéIwøRm.coM* She's not hiding behind him. She chose him. The way her body softens—shoulders releasing, spine curving toward his warmth—I've seen bonded riders stand with their dragons like that. Like the other person is gravity. I was never that for her. I was the thing she settled for before she knew what choosing looked like. Cassandra finds me outside the delegation quarters. She reads failure in my face before I've spoken. "What happened?" "Draven didn't break." I give her the facts, bare and clinical. "Evelyn pulled away before I could establish the scene. He walked in, assessed, and dismissed. The trap didn't spring." I don't give her the rest. Don't say that watching Evelyn lean into Draven cracked something in me her scripts can't reach. Don't say that every time she pushes me toward Evelyn, I see more clearly what I destroyed and why I don't deserve it back. Those truths are mine. She moves on without missing a beat—already three moves ahead on a board I can barely see. "Stay here," she says, and disappears toward the training yard. *www.n0(v)e/W0rm.c0ml* follow. Not because she told me to—because I need to see what comes next. Cassandra finds Venna at the edge of the training yard, running through blade forms alone in fading light. Her movements carry the coiled resentment of a woman who lost her standing to an outsider. Cassandra approaches the way she approaches everything—as if the ground rearranges itself to accommodate her. "The woman your lord is protecting?" Cassandra's voice carries just far enough for me to catch from the corridor archway. Conversational. The tone of someone sharing a confidence, not planting a bomb. "She's not who she says she is. And when the truth comes out, your house will need someone who saw it coming." She doesn't ask for anything. Doesn't offer. She plants the flag, turns on her heel, and walks away with the unhurried grace of a woman who knows which seeds need darkness to germinate. Venna says nothing. Her blade pauses mid-form, suspended in amber light, and her eyes track Cassandra's departure with an expression I can't read from this distance. But she doesn't walk away either. She stands there, holding the weight of those words, letting them settle into whatever cracks Cassandra had already opened. I watch from the corridor shadows, and understanding settles over me like cold water. I'm not blind. I see what's coming—Venna's resentment, Evelyn's secret, Draven's trust stretched thin. Cassandra doesn't need an army. She just needs the right fractures in the right walls. The question isn't whether I see it. The question is whether I keep helping it arrive. 120

Contents

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