

First Chosen by the Dragon

7-9 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 61

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[Evelyn's POV] The sea caves breathe with us tonight—slow, rhythmic, the tide pulling at dark water like a pulse beneath stone. Above the waterline, Aspis sleeps on a shelf of rock with her wings folded tight and her breath coming in long exhales that vibrate through the cavern floor. Moonlight pours through the natural arch, silvering her scales into something carved from pearl and stillness. Draven and I sit at the water's edge. Not touching. Close enough that the space between us hums with quiet electricity—the charge that lives in the gap between almost and not yet. My boots are off, toes skimming the surface where the tide laps at black stone. The water is cold. The cave is cold. But the air between his shoulder and mine holds warmth that has nothing to do with temperature. He's been quiet since we arrived, and I've learned to read his silences the way I once read Cassandra's smiles—by what they're hiding. This one is deliberate. Heavy with something he's carrying toward me like a man crossing a river with a stone he refuses to set down. "The garden today," he says finally, voice low enough that the cave barely catches it. "Cassandra staged it. Kael's hand on your arm, your faces close. She wanted me to see it and break." My stomach drops. A trapdoor opening beneath my ribs, cold rushing in. I know the whole architecture—Cassandra positioning Kael in golden light, engineering the angle, the proximity, the implication. My sister doesn't build weapons. She builds pictures. And she aimed this one at the man sitting beside me. "And you didn't," I say. Not a question. He's here. That's the answer. *www.movelworm.com* "No." The word is clean, unadorned, the way Draven delivers everything that matters. *www.movelworm.com* But then he pauses, and the silence stretches across the dark water. "But I almost did. For about three steps, I almost turned around and walked away. And I need you to know that, because if I pretend I'm past the point where your family can hurt us, I'm lying. And we've had enough lies." The honesty of it cracks something open in my chest—not a wound, not a fight, but the opposite. Something breaking the way ice breaks in spring. Painful in the way relief is painful when you've been bracing so long that relaxing feels like falling. "Three steps," I repeat quietly. "Three steps. Then I stopped. Because walking away from something Cassandra arranged would mean she understands me better than I understand myself, and I refuse to give her that." His jaw tightens. "But the image worked. For those three steps, it worked

exactly the way she designed it to.” I stare at the water, watching moonlight fracture across the surface. He could have buried that beneath pride, fed me a version where he never wavered. The fact that he didn’t, tells me more than any reassurance ever could. “Kael and I,” I begin, and my voice catches on the name like fabric snagging on a thorn. I’ve told Draven about the betrayal before—the broad strokes, the clean summary. But tonight the cave is dark and Aspis is sleeping and this man just handed me his three steps of almost-leaving, and I owe him more than a summary. “It wasn’t just that he left. It was how he stayed.” Draven doesn’t move. Doesn’t prompt. He listens the way he does everything—still, focused, dangerous in his quiet. “He would hold my hand in public. Walk me through the courtyard, fingers laced, and everyone would see it—the heir’s betrothed, claimed and cherished, the picture Cassandra painted for Father’s allies.” The words taste like rust, something corroded and old kept in a sealed jar. “Then behind closed doors, he’d tell me my hips were too wide. That my arms were too thick for the gown Cassandra chose.” It almost doesn’t hurt anymore. Almost. “That I laughed like a servant. Small things, delivered so casually that questioning them felt like I was the one being unreasonable.” The water laps at stone. Aspis’s breathing fills the cave in slow tides. Draven is motionless beside me, a shadow carved from granite. “Cassandra coached him. I didn’t understand that then, but I do now—the language was hers. The specific targets, the way it always circled back to my body, my voice, the space I took up. She taught him exactly where to cut so the wounds wouldn’t show.” My throat tightens.

“And I learned. I learned to make myself smaller. Quieter. Less of me meant less to find fault with.” I don’t look at him, can’t. Just continue. “I ate less so my hips would narrow. Spoke less so my laugh wouldn’t carry. Took up less space in every room until I could walk through a doorway without feeling like I owed someone an apology for existing.” The silence that follows is vast. Not empty—dense with everything I’ve just laid on the stone between us. I watch the moonlight shift across the water and feel stripped raw, the kind of vulnerable that makes you want to pull your ribs closed like shutters. “I want to kill him.” Draven’s voice comes low, flat, carrying the terrifying calm of a man stating a fact rather than making a threat. “You should know that about me.” “I know.” “And your sister.” “I know that too.” The cave fills with silence again, water gently ripples on the stones around us. Aspis breathing on her shelf of stone, sides rising and falling in silver rhythm. No performance, no deflection, no strategy. Just the raw, unpolished shape of who we are and what was done to us and what we’re willing to name out loud. I’ve been afraid to ask the next question for weeks. It sits in my chest like a stone I’ve been carrying since the first night he looked at me and I saw something flinch behind the assessment—something wounded that recoiled at my blue eyes before it recognized the person behind them. *Ww.ñovèl(w)orM.coM* “When you look at me,” I say, and my voice is steady only because I’ve practiced steadiness the way other women practice

smiles, “do you see them? My father. Lyanna’s killers. The house.”He takes a long time to answer. Long enough that the tide shifts, water creeping higher on the rocks, edging closer to where our hands rest on cold stone. I watch the silver line advance and retreat, and I wait because this man has never given me a careless answer and I won’t rush him into one. “Sometimes.” The word drops into the cave like a stone into deep water. “Less every day. But sometimes.” I nod. That honesty is worth more than any reassurance he could have offered—more than never, more than of course not, more than all the comfortable lies people hand each other when the truth would cost too much. He sees my family in my face. He stays anyway. He’s learning to separate me from the bloodline that made me, and he’s honest enough to admit the separation isn’t complete. His hand moves beneath the water—slow, deliberate, fingers finding mine where they rest on submerged stone. His grip is warm, rough with calluses, and he doesn’t lace our fingers or squeeze. He just holds. An offering, not a claim. I let him take it. I close my fingers around his beneath the cold salt water and feel his palm steady against mine, and the cave holds us in moonlight and silence while Aspis breathes above and the dark water rises around our joined hands. We stay until the tide turns. 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 — 62

[Draven’s POV] I don’t sleep. The eastern battlements are mine at this hour—empty stone and guttering torchlight, the compound breathing in slow rhythm. I walk because standing still means remembering the weight of her hand beneath cold water, the way her fingers closed around mine like someone accepting a lifeline she’d stopped believing existed. Khaira finds me at the overlook above the sea caves. Not physically—she’s roosting on the high cliffs—but through the bond, her presence presses against mine with the patience of a creature who has watched me pace through enough sleepless nights to recognize the pattern. “You’re circling the same thoughts again,” she says. “The way you circle the battlements, predictable and also unproductive.” “I’m strategizing.” I parry. “You’re afraid. There’s a difference, though I understand why you’d prefer the other word.” Her tone carries the rumble of a dragon who

has outlived most of the lies her rider tells himself. “She told you everything that night.” She reminds me with a patience I don’t deserve. “The smallness they taught her to wear. And now you’re walking in the dark because you don’t know how to hold what she gave you without breaking it.” I stop at the parapet. Below, the sea churns against black rock, the cave mouth breathing mist into moonlight. “She fled her family at the cost of everything.” Khaira’s tone shifts—no longer teasing, no longer the wry companion needling me toward truths I’d rather avoid. Grave. Absolute. “That is not the act of an enemy.” www.novelworm.com “I know what she is.” “Do you? Because you’re still walking like a man who hasn’t decided. And indecision is a luxury that woman can no longer afford.” A pause, heavy with wingspan and centuries. “Decide, Draven. Not with your fear but with your spine.” I stand with salt wind cutting my face and Khaira’s certainty burning through the bond, and I decide. Not because the fear leaves—it simply rearranges itself into something I can carry while I move—but because the woman sleeping below these stones deserves a man who acts instead of paces. I send the summons before dawn. Sealed note, formal stationery, language precise enough that Cassandra will read the subtext before the words: a request to discuss the summit’s conclusion. Not continuation. She’ll know the distinction. She arrives exactly on time, dressed in midnight blue with the Mintian crest at her throat. I’m standing behind the desk with the window at my back—same position as our first meeting, same hard light falling across the table. The room is narrow, stone-walled, a single chair opposite. She takes it without being invited, crossing one leg over the other with the ease of a woman who treats every room as if it was built for her. Just as the last time. And the result of this meeting, once again, won’t please her. Good. “Lord Draven.” Her voice carries exactly the warmth she wants and not a degree more. “An early summon. I trust the urgency reflects something substantive.” “The summit concludes today.” I remind her coolly. “All remaining provisions deferred to correspondence. Your delegation departs at dawn tomorrow. Formal escort to the border has been arranged.” www.novelworm.com She doesn’t blink—and that’s how I know the words land. The absence of reaction is itself a reaction. “That’s rather abrupt. We have unresolved items on the agenda. Stormreach will object to a compressed timeline.” “Stormreach has already agreed. Thessaly signed provisional terms this morning in exchange for expanded coastal access. Ashenvale follows. Without their coalition, your procedural objections lack the votes to delay.” I lay the signed documents on the desk, fanned like cards. “This is not a negotiation, Lady Cassandra. It is a courtesy notification.” My voice is steel that she recognizes as the blade it is. Something shifts behind her mask—the cold recalibration of a predator whose quarry moved faster than expected. “And the other matter? The security concern I raised regarding your household’s harbouring of Mintian property?”

“If the House of Blue Dragon wishes to pursue formal accusations, you are welcome to petition the Alliance through established channels.” I spread my hands in a welcoming gesture

that's anything but. "The process is thorough, transparent, and governed by precedents that favour the accused rather more than the accuser." I hold her gaze. "I suggest your legal counsel review bond law before filing. It would save everyone considerable embarrassment." "Bond law." She repeats it softly, tasting the implications. "You've built your defence around a framework that requires proving a bond exists. Which means proving a dragon exists. Are you prepared for what that revelation costs you?" "I'm prepared for a great many things." "Then perhaps I'll make my accusations here." She uncrosses her legs and leans forward, elbows on knees, and the pleasantries fall away like silk sliding off steel. "Right now. In the great hall, before every delegation present. Let them see what the High House of the Black Dragon is sheltering." She makes a deliberate, pregnant pause. "Let them draw their own conclusions about an unregistered dragon, a fugitive rider, and a lord who chose to conceal both." I don't falter. I don't move. Don't lean forward, don't adjust my posture, don't give her the mirror she's looking for. "Then I'll respond here and now. And you will not like the response." The morning light cuts between us, and the room contracts until it holds nothing but two predators across the smallest possible distance. Her eyes are Evelyn's blue—same shade, same bloodline. But where Evelyn's gaze carries fire tempered by survival, Cassandra's holds the flat, patient hunger of something that learned to devour the world one calculated bite at a time. "I have documentation prepared," I continue, unhurried. "Testimony from three independent sources regarding Mintia's treatment of unbonded family members. Alliance statutes on displaced riders' rights." It's partially a bluff, but the one I'm prepared to make real. "A detailed account—corroborated and sealed—of the circumstances under which your sister fled your household. If you open that door in the great hall, I will walk through it behind you carrying everything I have." She absorbs this without expression—a masterwork of control I'd admire if it weren't aimed at destroying the woman I've chosen to protect. "And when the delegations have heard both sides, they will not be looking at me." Then she tries the last strike. I feel it coming the way I feel storms through Khaira's bond—pressure dropping, air thinning. "Girls like Evelyn break eventually." Her voice drops, intimate and precise as a knife between ribs. "You can build walls around her, invoke every ancient law, surround her with loyalty and good intentions. But girls who were raised to shatter will shatter. It's only a matter of time and pressure, and I have an abundance of both." The words are designed to lodge—to burrow past strategy into the soft tissue of doubt. Girls like Evelyn. As if she's a category, a predictable outcome, rather than a woman who tore herself free from the machinery that built her and walked into the unknown carrying nothing but an egg and the kind of courage that should terrify her sister. www.NoV@lW@rM.cOm "She didn't betray your family." I say it without heat, without theatrics, without raising my voice. The way you state geography—a fact so fundamental it doesn't require emphasis. "Your family betrayed her. The difference matters." Cassandra holds my gaze for five heartbeats. Then she rises, unhurried, and straightens the crest at her collar with fingers that don't tremble. "Dawn,

then.” “Dawn.” The word is an ending, a border drawn in sound. She leaves without looking back, and the south study holds her absence the way stone holds the impression of water—temporarily, and then not at all. *W(w).n@VellwoŘm.čoml* stand behind the desk and breathe, morning light pouring across documents that end a summit and begin everything that comes after. Through the bond, Khaira rumbles—low, satisfied, ancient. “There you are,” she says quietly. “I was wondering when you’d wake up.” 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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[Evelyn’s POV] The compound settles into its last night with the Mintian delegation the way a body settles after a fever—slowly, unevenly, still radiating heat from places that haven’t learned the crisis is over. I sit on the low wall above the eastern courtyard, legs dangling over the drop, watching servants load travel crates onto wagons below. Torchlight catches the blue dragon crest on each trunk, and every sealed lid feels like a door closing on something I survived. Through the bond, Aspis hums—low, content, sleeping in the sea caves with her peace seeping through me in golden waves. “You’re thinking too loudly,” she murmurs, half-asleep. “Your thoughts taste like smoke and old letters.” “Go back to sleep, gorgeous. I’m fine.” And I mean it—not the way I used to, which was not at all, but the way a woman means it when she’s survived the storm and found herself still breathing. The footsteps come from behind, and I know them. Not the way I know Draven’s stride—certain, grounded, claiming stone—but in the older way, the muscle-memory way. Kael walks slightly uneven, favouring his right leg from that training injury the winter we were sixteen. I don’t turn. “If Cassandra sent you, save yourself the walk. She’s out of time, and so is whatever script she wrote for tonight.” “She didn’t send me.” His voice is rough, scraped raw—not the polished contrition from the courtyard, not the rehearsed longing from the garden. Something unperformed. “She doesn’t know I’m here. She’d gut me if she did, actually, because what I’m about to say is the opposite of useful to her.” I turn then. He’s standing six feet back, hands at his sides instead of clasped behind his spine the way Cassandra trained him. No formal posture. He looks exhausted—the deep kind that lives under the skin—jaw shadowed by days without

sleep. "Then say it. But if you reach for my arm again, I'll break your wrist. That's not a figure of speech." Something that might be a smile ghosts across his mouth. "I know. I heard about how you fought in the tournament, Evelyn. You're not the girl who flinched when someone raised a hand near her face." He takes a breath—just the unsteady inhale of a man gathering his nerve. "I loved you. I need you to know that, because every other time I've said it, Cassandra had her hand on the strings, and you deserved to hear it from me. Not from whatever puppet she'd made out of me." "Kael—" "Let me finish. Please. I won't get to say this again." He moves to the wall, not sitting beside me but leaning against it, close enough that I see tendons standing taut in his neck. "I loved you, and I chose wrong. Every single time—your father's approval or your safety, Cassandra's orders or your dignity, my comfort or your survival—I chose the easy thing." The confession isn't easy, but he seems prepared for it. "The thing that didn't cost me anything. And you paid for every one of those choices with pieces of yourself that I watched disappear and told myself weren't my fault." www.novelworld.com The words land somewhere deep, somewhere I thought I'd sealed shut. Not where anger lives—that room emptied months ago, drained by the bond and Draven's hands in the dark. In the place where the girl I used to be kept her hope locked in a box labelled Kael and checked it every morning. www.novelworld.com "I know," I say, quieter than I intend, gentler than I expected. "I know you loved me, Kael. In whatever way you were capable of. That was never the part I doubted."

"Then what—" "It was everything else. The love was real, and it wasn't enough to make you brave. You'd hold my hand in public and critique my body in private because Cassandra told you my hips were too wide. You knew what she was doing to me, and you stayed silent anyway." I'm not as angry as I thought I would be. That's the strangest part—the words come from a place so calm it frightens me. A deep, still lake where a river used to rage. "You were my first heartbreak. But you were also my first lesson in what love isn't supposed to look like." He closes his eyes. Torchlight flickers across his lids. "I'm sorry. Not because Cassandra told me to say it. Not because it's strategic or part of some plan. I'm sorry because I was a coward, and you deserved better, and I will carry that for the rest of my life." www.novelworld.com The apology settles between us like ash after a fire—soft, weightless. I look at him, really look, and what I see isn't the villain I needed him to be when the wounds were fresh. It's a man who was small in the ways that mattered most and knows it, standing in the wreckage with nothing left except the truth. "I believe you," I tell him. "And I can't. Not because I hate you—I don't, Kael, not anymore. But that girl is dead. The one who loved you, who waited for you, who shrank herself so there'd be less of her for you and Cassandra to find fault with. She's gone. And what grew in her place doesn't need you." He nods, slow and heavy. "Draven," he says, and the name carries no bitterness—just recognition, plain and tired. "He's better for you. I watched you with him in the garden that

day. The way you stood with him—I’ve never seen you stand like that with anyone. Like you weren’t trying to be smaller.”“He doesn’t need me to be smaller.” The truth rings through my chest, warm and resonant, and Aspis stirs in her sleep, purring. “He needs me to be exactly what I am. And what I am now is someone you wouldn’t recognize. Someone I wouldn’t trade for anything.”“I know.” He pushes off the wall and straightens, and there it is—the last flicker of the boy I loved, standing in torchlight, saying goodbye to a woman who was never really his.“For what it’s worth—I’m glad you survived us.” He offers me a small smile that seems sincere enough. “All of us. You were the best thing that family ever touched, and we ruined you anyway, and you built yourself back into something we couldn’t ruin again.”“It’s not nothing,” I say, and mean it. He turns and walks toward the guest wing. I watch him go without grief, without longing—just the quiet observation of an ending that arrived months ago and only now found its words. His footsteps fade into the stone corridor, uneven, favouring the right leg, carrying him back to a sister who will never understand what he just gave away. I sit on the wall for a long time after. The courtyard empties. The torches burn low, then lower, until only moonlight remains—silvering the loaded wagons and the cobblestones and the space where Kael stood. Through the bond, Aspis breathes deep and slow, dreaming of sky, and her peace wraps around me like a second skin. The last chain to my old life lies broken at my feet, snapped so cleanly it didn’t make a sound. I leave it where it fell—in the courtyard, in the dark, in the past where it belongs—and I breathe, and the air tastes like salt and freedom and the first morning of something entirely mine.

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[Cassandra’s POV] Dawn breaks cold over the Black Dragon compound, staining the eastern sky the color of a bruise healing badly. I stand in the courtyard beside my horse while the delegation assembles—Kael checking saddle straps with mechanical precision, the warriors loading baggage onto the pack mounts, Maren and Torys already mounted. Six people arrived. Six leave. On paper, we accomplished nothing. Paper is for fools. I adjust my gloves,

watching the compound stir. Servants haul water from the well. A patrol changes on the northern wall, riders descending while others ascend, their dragons sleepy in the grey light. The machinery of a house that believes it survived my visit unscathed. I let them believe it. The most dangerous wounds are the ones the body doesn't register until the blood loss becomes irreversible. Draven doesn't come to see us off. He sends Theron—smooth, courteous, extending farewells with the warmth of a man performing a duty his lord couldn't stomach. "They always do. Please convey my gratitude to Lord Draven for his hospitality. The Black Dragon compound is everything the reputation promised and more." I offer him a polite smile. The compliment is genuine. It's also a message—I saw everything. Theron smiles coolly and doesn't hear the second meaning—the wrong kind of smart, the kind that sees threats only after they've breached the perimeter. We ride through the main gate as the sun clears the eastern hills. Behind us, the compound shrinks—dark stone against grey sky, dragon roosts jutting from the cliffs like broken teeth. I look back once. Once is enough to fix every angle in memory. The exchange with Venna happened two hours before dawn, in the narrow passage between the barracks and the outer wall where the patrol rotation leaves a four-minute gap. I'd mapped the timing my second day and held it like a card I hadn't needed to play. She was there when I arrived—not because I'd asked, but because a woman running blade drills alone at that hour isn't sleeping, and a woman who isn't sleeping has decided to meet whatever comes in the dark. I handed her a folded square of parchment—a name, a location, a method. Brennan, the grain trader at the eastern port. Coded correspondence through his shipping manifests, messages buried in trade notation that every merchant house uses and nobody reads carefully. Simple and untraceable. She read it by the faint light bleeding from the barracks windows. Her face gave nothing away. Her hand, though—the hand that closed around the folded square—tightened with the grip of someone accepting a weapon they've been waiting for without knowing its name. "I'm not asking for anything today," I told her. "But the day will come when your lord makes a choice that endangers this house, and you'll want someone outside these walls who understands. Someone who listens." Venna said nothing. She didn't need to. I've read silence since Father taught me that the loudest agreements are the ones people refuse to speak aloud. A woman that angry, that sidelined, that convinced her lord has been compromised by an outsider—she won't need persuading when the time comes. She'll need only a direction, and I've given her one. The parchment disappeared into her belt. She turned and walked toward the barracks without a word, stride carrying the tension of someone who has crossed a line and knows it. www.nov@LWorM.com Venna doesn't know what she'll provide. Neither do I, yet. But the channel exists—a thread running from the heart of Draven's compound to my hand, invisible, patient, ready to pull. The road widens past the coastal ridge. Kael rides behind me, and the silence between us has the brittle quality of something that shattered during the night. He warned

Evelyn. Went off-script so thoroughly that his usefulness as an instrument has been permanently degraded. I'll deal with that later.

The official dispatch—the one Maren will deliver to the Alliance—says what it should. Productive summit. Trade agreements reinforced. No irregularities. The real report is the one I compose as miles unspool beneath my horse's hooves, and it will say what the official document cannot. The egg hatched. Evelyn is bonded. The dragon is hidden inside the compound—I couldn't pinpoint its location, but the evidence is conclusive. I watched my sister move through those walls with the grounded certainty of a woman anchored to something immense. She's stronger than she should be, faster. The tournament victory wasn't luck—it was bonded power channeled through a body absorbing it for months. The dragon is growing. And Draven will fight before he gives her up. Father will read that and want war. Full mobilization, formal demands backed by force. He'll invoke the Dragon Accords, rally allies. He's a hammer, Father. Every problem looks like something that needs striking harder. I want something more precise. The prophecy doesn't require an army. It doesn't require politics or tribunals or warships. It requires one thing: the stronger sister must kill the weaker one. Not soldiers. Not proxies. The sister herself, with her own hands. Armies are irrelevant to its fulfillment. I just need the right moment. I'll convince Father to pursue political channels. Let him rattle his saber, assemble forces. The noise will serve as cover—every eye fixed on troop movements while I position myself for the only action that matters. A blade, a moment, a sister watching the army at her gates instead of the shadow at her back. The compound disappears behind the coastal ridge. Salt air gives way to scrubland warmth. My delegation rides in formation, six horses casting long shadows, and from the outside we look like a diplomatic party returning from an unremarkable summit. But my hands are tight on the reins, and the tightness isn't strategy. It's fear. I catalogue the emotion with clinical detachment because Father taught me that unexamined feelings become vulnerabilities and vulnerabilities become graves. I'm the trained one, the chosen one, the daughter who received every weapon while Evelyn received silence. I am the stronger sister. The prophecy says so. Father says so. Except Evelyn was supposed to be the weaker sister. That was the foundation beneath every plan, every cruelty designed to keep her small and afraid. The Evelyn I grew up with would have crumbled under my corridor ambush. Would have wept at Kael's rehearsed tenderness. Would have broken under the weight of hiding in enemy territory with a stolen dragon and a price on her head. Nothing about what I witnessed suggests weakness. Not the woman who shut Kael down with the flat indifference of someone who's moved past the wound until the knife itself became irrelevant. Not the warrior who defeated Venna and earned a commander's mark. Not the sister who stood in the same compound as me for days and never flinched, never ran, never became the frightened girl I needed her to be. She was supposed to break. She didn't. She

was supposed to be small. She isn't. And if the prophecy requires the stronger sister to kill the weaker one, then the question I've avoided since recognizing her walk across that dining hall is the one tightening my hands on leather reins and sitting like iron in my throat—what if I'm the weaker one?

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The road stretches east toward Mintia. I ride into the rising sun and compose my father's report, and the fear rides with me—quiet, patient, growing—like a dragon in a cave that nobody knows about yet.

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[Evelyn's POV]The delegation is gone. I stand on the high wall with Draven, watching the last Mintian horses disappear around the eastern ridge. The compound exhales around us—warriors returning to patrols, servants dismantling guest quarters—but nothing about this feels like relief. "She'll be back," I say. "Whatever she tells Father will bring a response."

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Draven's jaw works once. "We have weeks. Maybe a month before Mintia makes its move." "Then we stop letting her control the narrative." I turn to face him. "We reveal Aspis ourselves. On our terms. To the Alliance, under the Luminary Protocol." Draven goes very still. When he speaks, his voice drops low. "That's not just a revelation, Evelyn. That changes the balance of power across the realm." "The balance was already changing," I hold his gaze without flinching. "We're just deciding whether to lead it or be crushed by it." Silence stretches between us. Draven studies me with an intensity that feels like being seen through skin to bone. "You're not the same woman who arrived at my gates all those months ago."

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"No," I agree, and the truth settles into my bones. "That woman was running. This one's done running." His hand moves slowly until his fingers find mine on the stone. The contact sends heat racing up my arm. Neither of us pulls away. His thumb traces my knuckle, and the simple touch undoes something in me that's been holding tight for weeks. "Alright," Draven says, and the word carries the weight of a vow. "We do it together." "Together," I echo, lacing my fingers through his. His grip tightens, and when I look up, his eyes have gone dark with something that has nothing to do with strategy. "Come with

me,” he says roughly, and pulls me toward the tower stairs. The walk to his chambers is silent, urgent. His hand stays locked around mine through corridors I know by heart. The door closes behind us with finality. Draven turns, and the space between us disappears. His mouth finds mine with hunger that tastes like relief and desperation—two people who’ve been standing on opposite sides of a chasm and just decided to jump. I kiss him back with everything I’ve been suppressing, my hands fisting in his tunic until I can feel his heartbeat hammering. His hands frame my face, thumbs tracing my cheekbones with gentleness that contradicts the fierce pressure of his mouth. When we break apart, we’re both breathing hard. His forehead rests against mine, eyes molten black. “The world’s about to come down on us,” he says roughly. “And I need you to know—” [www.No\(v\)eIwOrM.com](http://www.No(v)eIwOrM.com) I silence him with another kiss, deeper, my tongue sliding against his. His hands move to my waist, pulling me against him with possessiveness that sends heat pooling low. He walks me backward until my spine hits the wall beside his bed, stone cold through my tunic, sharp contrast to his heat. His mouth trails from my lips to my jaw, down my throat, teeth grazing the pulse hammering wildly. I arch into him, head falling back, and his hands slide under my tunic, mapping the curve of my waist, burning through fabric. My fingers find his tunic laces, and he helps me strip the fabric over his head. Candlelight catches on scarred muscle. I trace the raised line along his ribs—Lyanna’s last battle—and his breath catches. His hands return, pulling my tunic up and over, and the mark on my chest glows faintly—his handprint, pulsing with warmth. He presses his palm to it, and the contact makes my knees weak. Heat blooms where his skin meets mine, spreading through my chest like liquid fire. His eyes lock on mine, dark and fierce. “Mine,” he says, rough and certain.

“Yours,” I agree, and pull him toward the bed. We tumble onto the mattress in a tangle of limbs, his weight settling over me solid and grounding. I wrap my legs around his waist, and every point of contact blazes—chest to chest, hip to hip, the hard length of him pressing against me through fabric that’s suddenly frustrating. His mouth finds my breast, tongue circling the peaked nipple before his teeth graze sensitive flesh. I gasp, fingers threading into his hair as pleasure spikes through me. His hand slides down, unlacing my leggings, and then his fingers are there—sliding through wet heat, finding the swollen bundle of nerves that makes my back bow. “So ready for me,” he murmurs, circling slowly, deliberately. “Tell me what you need.” “You,” I gasp, nails digging into his shoulders. “All of you.” He kisses me again as he lines himself up, then pushes inside—slow, careful, giving me time to adjust to the stretch, the fullness. When he’s fully seated, we both go still, his forehead pressed to mine, both of us breathing hard, trembling. The connection between us is so intense it borders on pain, pleasure and pressure threaded through with something deeper. “Move,” I plead, and he does. The first thrust makes stars burst behind my eyelids. The second draws a moan from somewhere deep. By the third, we’ve found rhythm—deep, rolling, devastating. Every

stroke hits something that makes my toes curl, makes my body clench around him in waves that drag groans from his throat. His hand finds mine, lacing our fingers together and pinning my wrist above my head. The position angles him deeper, and I cry out. “Look at me,” he commands, rough and breathless. I force my eyes open, finding his gaze in the candlelight. What I see there makes my chest tight—possession and tenderness braided together, need and certainty. The tension builds, coiling tighter with each thrust until I’m balanced on a knife’s edge. “Draven,” I gasp. “I’m—” “Let go,” he growls, thumb finding my center and pressing. “I’ve got you.” I shatter. Pleasure crashes through me in waves that make my body convulse, make sounds tear from my throat. He follows seconds later, burying himself deep with a groan that sounds like my name and a prayer combined. We collapse together, breathing hard, sweat-slicked and trembling. His weight presses me into the mattress while aftershocks ripple through my body. Neither of us moves to separate, and his hand finds mine again in the sheets, fingers lacing through mine with the same certainty he used when he said we’d face this together. Outside, the compound settles into the evening. Tomorrow, we’ll begin preparing for what comes next—the Protocol invocation, the Alliance response, the confrontation with Mintia. But tonight, we claim this—each other, the certainty that whatever storm approaches, we’ll meet it standing together. Through the bond, Aspis rumbles approval, her presence wrapping around mine like a second heartbeat. Draven’s thumb traces patterns on my knuckles, and neither of us lets go. Outside the window, stars emerge over the eastern cliffs where Cassandra disappeared hours ago. She’s already riding toward Mintia, already composing her report—confirmation of a hidden dragon, evidence of Draven’s emotional vulnerability, ammunition for whatever move she’s planning. But for the first time since she walked through these gates, I’m not afraid. Because I’m not facing it alone. “We do it together,” I whisper again, and feel his fingers tighten around mine. “Together,” he confirms, voice rough with exhaustion and certainty. “Always.”

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First Chosen by the Dragon

8-10 minutes

[Draven's POV] I assemble my inner circle at first light. The council chamber feels smaller than it has in weeks—six chairs, maps pushed aside for the conversation I've been avoiding since Cassandra's departure. Sera arrives first, sharp-eyed and silent. Corwin follows with his unhurried dignity. Theron enters with military precision. Riven closes the door, arms crossed. He already knows half of what I'm about to say. The dragon, at least. Not all of it. I should have told them sooner. Should have brought them in the moment Evelyn's egg hatched. But keeping secrets felt like control, and control has always been easier than trust. Even now, standing with people who've bled for this house, the instinct to deflect claws at my throat. "There's a white dragon in the compound," I say. "She bonded to Evelyn before the tournament. The egg hatched in three months ago. Aspis is her name, and she's grown to the size of a war horse." Sera's face goes through three expressions in the span of a heartbeat—shock, comprehension, fury—before settling on the last one with surgical precision. "A white dragon. For three months. And you didn't think your intelligence chief should know?" Her voice is quiet, which makes it worse. Sera loud means manageable anger. Sera quiet means the kind of rage that burns cold and surgical. "I'm supposed to protect this house from threats we can't see coming. How am I supposed to do that when my own lord keeps me blind?" "You're right." The admission costs me nothing because it's true, and that's the problem—I can acknowledge failure without changing what caused it. "I should have told you sooner. I didn't, and that's on me." "Don't patronize me with easy apologies, Draven." She stands, palms flat on the table. "Do you have any idea what could have happened if the delegates had found the dragon before we were ready? We were operating blind while you—" She cuts herself off, jaw working. "What else haven't you told me?" "Evelyn's real name is Evelyn Ashcroft. Daughter of Lord Aldric, the Blue Dragon. Cassandra's older sister." The words come out measured, professional, as if I'm delivering a border report instead of detonating everything. "Cassandra came here hunting her." I continue to chase away the silence. "That's why we're invoking the Luminary Protocol—to protect both Evelyn and the dragon under Alliance law before her father can mobilize a claim." The silence stretches. Corwin recovers first, eyes bright with intellectual excitement. "The Luminary Protocol. If we invoke it correctly, if the bond is demonstrable, no house can seize or claim the dragon or rider. They become sovereign entities. Protected." He's already reaching for his satchel. "There are complexities, of course. Verification requirements, political ramifications that will reshape—" "Military contingencies." Theron cuts through Corwin's enthusiasm. "If we invoke the Protocol and Mintia disputes it, we're looking at potential conflict. Are we prepared for that?" "We're prepared." The lie tastes like ash, but I deliver it with confidence. "The Protocol invocation happens in five days. Once it's official, Mintia moves against us at their own peril." Riven straightens from the door. "And if they decide the risk is worth it?" "Then we remind them why the House of the Black Dragon hasn't fallen in three centuries." I hold his gaze. "They can try. They won't succeed." The

meeting concludes with assignments. They file out with practiced efficiency. All except one. I find Venna in the western training yard an hour later, running through sword forms with mechanical precision. She knows I'm here. She always knows. "We need to talk," I say. She stops mid-form, lowers her blade. "Privately. My study." She follows without a word, and that's the first wrong note. Venna questions. Venna challenges. This silent compliance feels like watching a blade slide into a sheath—not surrender, preparation. My study door closes behind us. She stands by the window, spine rigid, and I realize I'm stalling. This should be simple. I've told four people already. One more shouldn't matter. Except it's Venna, and with Venna, everything matters in ways I've spent years trying not to examine.

"There's a white dragon in the compound," I say to her back. "Bonded to Evelyn. She's been here since before the tournament." She's silent, so I continue. "Her name is Aspis, and in five days, we're invoking the Luminary Protocol to protect both rider and dragon under Alliance law. Evelyn is—she's Evelyn Ashcroft. Daughter of Lord Aldric. Cassandra's older sister." Silence. Not the explosive kind I expected. Not the sharp intake of breath or the immediate volley of questions. Just silence, and it settles over her like frost forming on glass—thin, crystalline, absolute. Her shoulders don't move. Her breathing doesn't change. She goes so still she could be carved from stone. Then she turns, and her face is wrong. Not shocked. Not angry. Not wearing any of the dozen expressions I prepared defenses against. Instead, she's deliberately, carefully blank—every line of emotion scrubbed away until nothing remains but smooth, polished neutrality. From a woman who's never hidden anything in her life, the absence is deafening. "How long has the dragon been here?" Her voice is level. Professional. The tone she'd use to confirm patrol schedules. "Three months. Since a few months after Evelyn arrived." "Who else knows?" "Riven. Corwin. Sera. Theron. As of this morning, the full inner circle." "When did you learn her real identity?" Three questions. Precise, surgical, stripped of everything except the need for information. She doesn't ask about the Protocol. Doesn't ask about strategy, about the political ramifications, about what this means for the house. Doesn't challenge or argue or demand explanations for being kept in the dark. From Venna, who challenges everything, the absence is like a blade held at the wrong angle—not threatening yet, just positioned somewhere that makes my instincts scream. "After Cassandra left. Evelyn told me herself." She nods once. "I want to see the dragon." The sea caves are colder at midday. Venna follows me through the narrow tunnel in silence, breathing controlled despite the tight quarters. The cave opens, and Aspis lifts her head from the rocks. War horse sized now, muscle and scale and ancient intelligence. White scales catch the filtered light, turning her incandescent. Golden eyes—too knowing for a dragon this young—track Venna's approach with patient certainty. Venna stops at the water's edge. Doesn't approach. Just stands there, looking at the dragon, and the stillness that came over her in my study deepens into something that makes my chest tight. Her hand lifts—

reaches toward Aspis slowly—then drops before making contact. She pulls it back like she’s been burned. “Since before the tournament,” I say, because the silence is worse than words. “She bonded to Evelyn the night the egg hatched. Everything you saw in the arena—the light, the speed, the way she moved—that was the bond.” Venna nods once. Short, sharp, final. Then she turns and walks back toward the tunnel without another word. Doesn’t ask to touch the dragon. Doesn’t demand explanations. Doesn’t react beyond that single nod and the rigid set of her shoulders as she disappears into the dark. I watch her go, and something cold settles in my gut. I’ve seen Venna angry—the hot kind that clears the air like a storm. I’ve seen her bitter, insubordinate, defeated after the arena. But this careful, deliberate absence of reaction from a woman who’s never hidden her feelings about anything? I’ve never seen Venna afraid. And what crossed her face in the half-second before she locked it down looked exactly like fear.

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First Chosen by the Dragon

7-9 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 67

[Evelyn’s POV] The sea cave smells of salt and stone and the ozone-sharp scent that clings to Aspis’s scales. She surfaces from the underground lake, water streaming off white wings that now exceed twenty feet from tip to tip. In the lamplight, she looks carved from moonlight—beautiful and impossible. “Tomorrow, you fly,” I say, my voice echoing off the cave walls. “In front of everyone.” Aspis climbs onto the rocky shelf beside me, folding wings that barely fit the space. Her golden eyes catch mine, ancient wisdom in a body still growing into power. “Tomorrow I become what I was born to be.” She tilts her head. “And so do you.” The weight of that truth settles into my bones. Tomorrow the world learns about the white dragon. Tomorrow I stop being Evelyn-who-hides and become something the realm hasn’t seen in three centuries. Tomorrow everything changes, and there’s no going back. “Are you scared?” I ask. “Of flying? No. Of what comes after?” Her voice resonates through the bond, warm and certain. “Yes. But fear is just honesty about stakes that matter.” Footsteps echo from the tunnel entrance. I know his walk before I see him—measured, deliberate. Draven emerges from the shadows, lamplight catching the hard lines of his face. He looks at Aspis first, taking

in her size, the reality of what we're announcing tomorrow. Then his eyes find mine. "I needed to see her," he says. "Before." "Before we change everything." I stand, brushing salt from my hands. "Before the delegations arrive, she stops being ours." He crosses to where I stand, close enough that I can see tension coiled in his shoulders. "Are you scared?" "Terrified," I admit, and honesty feels like freedom. "Tomorrow we put everything—your house, my life, Aspis's existence—into Alliance hands and trust that the Protocol holds. That feels like stepping off a cliff and hoping the ground appears." "I know." He exhales slowly, and for once the iron control cracks enough to show what's underneath. "I've led this house through wars, political upheaval, assassination attempts. I've stared down threats that would have destroyed lesser houses." "But tomorrow?" His hand finds mine. "Tomorrow I'm gambling with something I can't afford to lose." *www.NoVellworm.com* The vulnerability in those words hits harder than any declaration. This is Draven without armor, just a man standing on the edge with me. "What if they don't accept the Protocol?" I ask. "What if the other houses decide the law is too old, too convenient, and they want their own claims on a white dragon?" Draven's expression hardens, and I see the lord who's held this territory through force and will. "Then they'll learn what happens when you make demands of the House of the Black Dragon." His thumb traces circles on my palm. "Let them try. They'll discover why this house hasn't fallen in three centuries." The promise in his voice—fierce, absolute and uncompromising—sends heat through my chest. This isn't political posturing. This is a man declaring war on anyone who threatens what's his. *www.NoVellworm.com* "Tomorrow the world claims us," I say quietly. "Tonight..." "Tonight you're mine," he finishes, and the words are both question and statement. "Before the delegations and the politics and the scrutiny. Tonight we claim each other." The urgency hits us simultaneously. His mouth crashes against mine—desperate and claiming. I kiss him back with equal hunger, hands fisting in his shirt, pulling him closer. Tomorrow we become public figures, political calculations.

Tonight we're just this—two people who've fought gravity too long and finally stopped resisting. His hands find my waist, lifting me onto the rocky shelf. I wrap my legs around him, and the kiss deepens, becomes something that burns through hesitation and every reason we should be careful. His tongue slides against mine, and I taste desperation and need and frantic certainty. "Tell me you want this," he breathes against my lips, hands already working the laces of my tunic. *www.NoVellworm.com* "I want this." The words come out ragged. "I want you. Now." He strips my tunic over my head, and cool cave air hits bare skin for a heartbeat before his hands replace it—warm, calloused, sliding up my ribs to cup my breasts. I arch into the touch, head falling back as his thumbs brush over nipples already tight with want. He takes one into his mouth, tongue circling, teeth grazing just enough to make me gasp. Heat pools low in my belly, between my legs, everywhere his hands aren't touching yet. I reach for his shirt, fumbling with the fastenings until he helps me, shrugging it off. My

palms find the hard planes of his chest, tracing old scars, mapping the body I've imagined touching. He's all muscle and tension and controlled power, and feeling him under my hands—solid, real, wanting me—makes something inside me crack open. His mouth finds mine again as his hand slides between my legs, cupping me through the fabric. I rock against his palm, chasing friction, and he makes a sound low in his throat—satisfaction and hunger. “You’re already wet,” he murmurs, and the rough approval in his voice makes me clench. “Don’t tease,” I manage, working at his belt. “Not tonight.” He helps me, and we strip each other with hands that shake despite our urgency—trousers, boots, everything that separates skin from skin. When he lifts me again, there’s nothing between us except want and the need to feel each other completely. He enters me in one slow, deliberate thrust, and I cry out—not from pain but from the overwhelming rightness of being filled by him. He stills, forehead pressed against mine, breathing hard. “Alright?” His voice is strained, holding back when I can feel how badly he wants to move. “Yes.” I roll my hips, taking him deeper, and his control fractures. He begins to move—slow at first, then harder as I urge him on with hands gripping his shoulders and legs locked around his waist. Each thrust drives deeper, hits something inside me that makes pleasure spark up my spine. I move with him, meeting each stroke, and the friction builds into something that obliterates thought. His hand slides between us, finding the sensitive bundle of nerves at my apex. He circles with his thumb, pressure perfect and relentless, and pleasure coils tighter in my core. “Come for me,” he demands against my ear. “Let me feel it.” The combination of his cock filling me and his fingers working that sweet spot breaks me apart. My orgasm crashes through me in waves, clenching around him, and I cry out his name as pleasure whites out everything else. He follows moments later, thrusting deep and holding there as he comes inside me, face buried against my neck. We stay locked together, breathing hard, trembling. His arms wrap around me, holding me close as the world slowly reassembles. Through the bond, I feel Aspis’s satisfaction—knowing, smug. www.NoVELLwôrM.com He kisses me again—softer this time, less desperate, but no less certain. A promise sealed in touch and trust and the kind of intimacy that has nothing to do with sex and everything to do with choosing someone when the cost is everything. 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

8-11 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 68

[Draven's POV]The compound assembles on the great terrace overlooking the sea. Every warrior, every rider, every household member stands shoulder to shoulder on stone. Morning sun burns copper across water, throwing light against faces I've commanded for years—Sera with arms crossed, Theron near the eastern stairwell, Riven at the northern edge where black dragons wait. Three hundred souls gathered to witness something the realm hasn't seen in three centuries. Alliance council received notification four days ago. Neutral representatives are already en route—lore masters, bonded riders, legal witnesses. The gamble is absolute. Evelyn stands beside me at the terrace edge. Her dark hair is braided back in the northern style, severe and practical. Her jaw is set with determination that comes from walking through fire and deciding the heat doesn't matter. Her hands rest at her sides, steady as stone, except for the tremor I can feel through the arm pressed against mine. She looks like a warrior preparing for battle. She looks like mine. "Are you ready?" I keep my voice low enough that only she can hear, my gaze fixed on the horizon where sea meets sky. "No," she says, equally quiet, brutally honest. "But we're doing it anyway, so I suppose readiness is irrelevant at this point." Through the bond, Khaira rumbles—deep, ancient, satisfied. "Finally. You've been hiding her like a man hoarding gold in a cave. Dragons are meant for the sky, Draven. So are the women who ride them." I don't answer her because she's right, and because the moment has arrived where words stop mattering and action becomes the only language that counts. I step forward to the terrace edge. *www.novellworm.com* Three hundred faces turn toward me with the attention that comes from years of following orders without question. Dragons mounted along the northern cliff shift their weight, wings rustling, eyes tracking my movement. "Warriors of the House of the Black Dragon," I begin, voice carrying across stone. "You stand here because this house has endured for three centuries through strength, discipline, and the bond between rider and dragon. Today, that bond expands." I make a dramatic pause. "Today, the Alliance learns what I have known for months—that the old legends were not myth, and the realm's need has called forth an answer." Silence holds the terrace like a held breath. Sera's eyes narrow with sharp intelligence. Theron's hand rests on his blade hilt. Riven watches me with attention that misses nothing, and I see him glance at Evelyn, then back to me, approval dawning. *www.NoVélworm.com* "I invoke the Luminary Protocol," I say, and the words land like stones dropped into deep water. "Ancient law, predating the Alliance itself, which recognizes white and black dragons as sovereign entities belonging to their bonded rider and to the realm." *www.NoVélworm.com* I clarify the reason. "Not subject to territorial claims. Not bound by house jurisdiction. Protected under Alliance authority, answerable only to the council itself." Murmurs rise through the crowd—confusion, disbelief, the sharp intake of breath that comes from hearing something impossible. Corwin steps forward with a scroll older than my grandfather's bones, vellum

yellowed like autumn leaves. “I present as witness—Aspis, white dragon of the ancient line, bonded to Evelyn Ashcroft, rider and refugee under the protection of this house.” His voice carries over the compound. “The bond was formed before any territorial claim, recognized under the sovereign right of dragon choice, and verified through months of growth and connection. What you are about to see is not performance. It is the truth made manifest.” He looks up, meeting the people’s gazes. His, is unwavering. I turn to Evelyn, and her blue eyes meet mine with the kind of ferocity that makes my chest tighten—not fear, not hesitation, but the absolute conviction of a woman who has decided the cost doesn’t matter if the outcome is freedom. I nod once. She exhales slowly, closes her eyes, and reaches through the bond with everything she is. “Aspis. It’s time. Show them what you are.” The sea explodes. Water erupts from the cave mouth carved into the cliff face a hundred feet below the terrace—a geyser of spray and foam that catches sunlight and fractures it into a thousand burning fragments.

And through the water, rising like dawn itself, comes Aspis. White scales blazing with reflected light, wings spreading wide enough to cast shadows that sweep across the entire terrace in a single massive arc. She launches upward with a power that makes the air itself scream, water streaming from her body in silver ribbons, every line of her form speaking of strength perfected through ancient breeding. She roars. Not a hatchling’s cry testing its voice, but a full-throated declaration that shakes the compound walls and rattles the stones beneath our feet—the sound of something that knows exactly what it is and refuses to apologize for existing. The black dragons answer immediately, voices rising in a chorus that speaks of recognition, of acknowledgment, of something deeper than territory or house allegiance. This is a dragon calling to dragons across the centuries, and the sound fills the sky like thunder breaking over mountains. Khaira’s voice comes through the bond, rough with emotion I’ve never heard from her. “At last. The light returns. I thought I would die before seeing one again, Draven. Three hundred years of darkness, and now—this.” Aspis circles once above the terrace, wings beating with controlled power, every movement precise despite her size. She’s enormous—already approaching half Khaira’s mass, muscle and bone wrapped in scales that catch the sun and throw it back like weaponized radiance. She descends in a controlled spiral, claws extended, and lands on the terrace with an impact that cracks stone. The crowd parts instinctively, creating space around her, and no one speaks. No one moves. They just stare at the impossible made real. Evelyn walks forward without hesitation, spine straight, chin high—every inch the rider she was born to be. She reaches Aspis and places her hand on the dragon’s snout, palm flat against white scales. Light blooms between them. Not fire, not golden glow of black dragon bonds, but pure white radiance spreading from Evelyn’s palm across Aspis’s scales in branching patterns like lightning frozen mid-strike. The bond made manifest—visible proof of connection that can’t be faked or forced. The light pulses once,

twice, then settles into a steady glow that makes both rider and dragon look carved from moonlight. Silence holds the terrace like a drawn blade. Three hundred people breathing as one, staring at legend, returned to flesh. www.NoV@lwarM.com Corwin steps forward, unrolls the ancient scroll with trembling hands, and begins to read. His voice carries across the terrace with scholarly precision. "By the Luminary Protocol, established in the year of the First Accord and recognized by every founding house, I declare the bond between Aspis and Evelyn Ashcroft sovereign and inviolate." He continues, while my people hold their breath. "No house may claim ownership. No territory may assert jurisdiction. The dragon and rider stand under Alliance protection, and any attempt to seize, separate, or harm either party constitutes an act of war against the realm itself. Let this be witnessed and recorded." The world shifts. Not metaphorically—I feel it, like an earthquake before the ground moves. Political power will realign across the realm as word spreads. Every house will recalculate alliances. Every lord will reassess what it means that the House of the Black Dragon now shelters a white dragon and her rider. Evelyn turns from Aspis and finds my eyes across the terrace. Her expression is raw—triumph and terror and relief tangled together. We did it. And whatever comes next, we face together. The terrace erupts in voices—questions, declarations, commands as Sera and Theron move to establish order. But I don't look away from Evelyn, and she doesn't look away from me, and between us stands a white dragon whose existence just rewrote the realm's future. Khaira's voice rumbles through the bond, dark and satisfied. "The game has changed, Draven. You're no longer playing defense." 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 — 69

[Evelyn's POV] The aftermath is chaos. Riders crowd the terrace, voices colliding in overlapping demands and questions about what they just witnessed. Warriors argue in tight clusters about protocol and precedent. Emergency elder sessions convene in the war room while Alliance representatives gather in urgent conference. Aspis returned to the terrace after her revelation flight, and now stands beside me with wings half-furled, watching the compound process what just happened. Through the bond, I feel her restless energy—the

taste of sky still fresh on her tongue, the pull to return to open air singing through her muscles. *W(w).nôvêl(w)ô(r)m.co(m)* Draven manages it all with iron control. His voice cuts through arguments, directing traffic like a general organizing chaos into order. “Elder sessions continue in the war room. All senior riders report there immediately. Household staff resume normal duties. Alliance representatives will be accommodated in the guest wing.” Sera moves through the crowd with surgical precision, intercepting questions, redirecting energy. Theron establishes a perimeter, keeping the surge of curious warriors at a respectful distance. The machinery of leadership grinds forward, imposing structure on revelation. “Come with me,” he says quietly, his hand finding my elbow. Through the bond, Aspis rumbles. “He thinks he’s protecting you.” “Let him think it,” I murmur back, following Draven through the dispersing crowd toward the clifftop path winding north. Aspis follows, her footfalls heavy enough to vibrate through stone. The path opens onto a promontory overlooking the sea—bare rock jutting into open air, wind tearing at my hair, sunlight pouring down like molten gold. Below us, waves crash against cliffs, and ahead stretches nothing but sky and water and infinite space. “Here,” Draven says, stopping at the edge. “She flew for the revelation. Now let her fly for herself.” I look at him, understanding settling warm in my chest. The formal presentation is done. This is different. “Just fly?” I whisper through the bond to Aspis. “No performance and no watching eyes. Just you and the sky.” Her response is pure hunger. “Yes.” Through the bond, Aspis surges with anticipation. I step back, giving her space. “Go,” I say. “Fly free.” She launches—not the careful, controlled ascent from the revelation, but something wilder. Wings snap open with a crack like thunder, and she throws herself into the air with abandon. No measured beats, no consideration for the crowd below. Just pure, unrestricted flight. And through the bond, I feel the difference. The revelation flight was purpose and presentation—launching from the cave mouth, appearing before the assembly, proving her existence. This is joy. Wind rushing over scales without agenda. Sunlight on wing membrane without witnesses that matter. The compound is shrinking below not because anyone needs to see it, but because the sky is calling and she’s answering. “This,” Aspis breathes, and the word carries ecstasy. “This is what I was made for.” She doesn’t circle the terrace this time. She banks hard east and goes—following the coastline in great sweeping arcs that eat distance, diving toward waves just to feel spray kiss her belly, climbing in spirals that take her so high she becomes a white star against blue. She roars—not for the assembly, but because the sound feels good in her chest and there’s finally room for it. I’m laughing, tears streaming down my face, because through the bond I’m flying with her and it’s nothing like the revelation. That was necessary. This is freedom. She sweeps along the coastline in arcs that map territory for the first time—memorizing landmarks, cataloguing hunting grounds, claiming sky not as proof but as birthright. Through the bond, I feel her discovering what her wings can do when no one’s watching, when there’s no presentation to maintain, when flight is just flight. “Thank you,” I say to Draven, watching Aspis become a distant speck against blue. “For

believing me when you had every reason not to.”Something softens in his expression. “You gave me a white dragon and asked me to trust you. I’m not sure ‘belief’ was ever the difficult part.”“Raven-messages went out an hour ago,” he adds, voice turning serious. “Every major house. Every Alliance representative. Every lord who needs to know that the world just changed.”

I turn to look at him. “How long before they arrive?”“Days, maybe a week. The Alliance have dispatched investigators first—neutral parties to verify the bond, confirm the dragon’s lineage.” He pauses. “Then the delegations. Marriage proposals wrapped in diplomatic language. Trade agreements with impossible clauses. Demands disguised as requests.”“And threats disguised as concern,” I add.“Those too.” He doesn’t soften it. “You’re not a secret anymore, Evelyn. You’re a phenomenon. Every house with ambition will want access to you, to Aspis. And they’ll use every tool they have to get it.”The words should frighten me. A month ago they would have. But standing on this clifftop with wind in my hair and Aspis’s joy flooding through the bond, I’m not afraid. I’m steady. Because hiding was always going to end. Choosing to reveal ourselves—on our terms—means I’m not running anymore.“Those raven-messages,” I say slowly, watching Aspis bank north. “They’ll reach Mintia.”Draven goes very still. “Yes.”“My father will learn what became of the daughter he discarded.” The words taste factual, not bitter. “He’ll know I survived. That I bonded a white dragon. That everything he tried to erase became the most powerful political asset in the realm.”“Does that frighten you?” Draven asks quietly.I think about it, testing the shape of my father’s name in my mind. Aldric Ashcroft. Lord of the Blue Dragon. The man who looked at me like I was a mistake. Who let Cassandra sharpen her cruelty on my skin. Who was relieved when I disappeared. “No,” I say, and mean it. “It doesn’t frighten me. It steadies me.”Draven turns to face me fully, surprise or respect in his expression. “Explain.”“Because now he has to acknowledge what he threw away. Now Cassandra has to face what I became without her poison.” I watch Aspis complete another arc over the compound. “I’m not the frightened girl they remember. I’m the woman who survived them. And I have a dragon.”Through the bond, Aspis laughs—deep and satisfied. “Tell them, Evelyn. Tell them all who you are.”“Not yet,” I murmur back. “Let them come to us first.”www.NoVelWorld.comDraven’s hand finds mine, fingers lacing together. “They’re going to want answers. About who you really are. Where you came from. Why you’re here.”“Then they can ask.” I squeeze his hand. “And I’ll decide what they deserve to know.”He laughs—short, surprised. “You’ve changed.”“I grew scales,” I say, deadpan, and his laugh turns real and warm.Above us, Aspis wheels and dives, playing with thermals, testing her wings against wind that’s finally hers to claim.Standing on this clifftop with Draven beside me and my dragon painting white lines across blue sky, I understand something fundamental has shifted. I’m not hiding anymore. I’m not running. I’m claiming space in the world with the same certainty Aspis claims the sky.www.NoVelWorld.comLet the

messages reach Mintia. Let my father read his discarded daughter's name beside the words "white dragon" and "bonded rider" and choke on everything he threw away. I'm not afraid of him anymore. I'm not afraid of any of them. And that, more than anything else, feels like flight.

[w\(w\)w.nOvelwOR\(m\).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 — 70

[Draven's POV]The Alliance delegation arrives on the third day after the revelation—three neutral bonded riders mounted on dragons bearing colors that belong to no single house, and a woman in scholar's robes whose age sits somewhere between ancient and ageless. Loremaster Thalissa. Her name carries weight in academic circles, and watching her dismount with careful precision, I understand why the Alliance chose her. This is not a woman who can be bought or intimidated. This is a woman who answers only to the truth. I meet them on the landing terrace with Evelyn beside me, her spine rigid with the kind of composure that comes from knowing the world is watching. Aspis waits on the northern roost, wings folded, golden eyes tracking every movement below with the patient intelligence of a creature who has learned to measure threats before they form. "Lord Draven." Thalissa's voice carries a dry precision "Lady Evelyn. Thank you for your cooperation with this verification process. The Alliance recognizes the gravity of your Protocol invocation and requires confirmation before formal recognition can be granted." "Of course, Loremaster." I gesture toward the roost where Aspis waits, massive and luminous in afternoon light. "We welcome the Alliance's scrutiny. The bond is genuine. The Protocol stands." The verification takes hours. Thalissa examines Aspis with methodical thoroughness—scales measured and documented, wing structure analyzed, eye coloration verified against historical texts she produces from a leather satchel that seems impossibly deep.

[w\(w\)w.NoVe1wORM.COm](#) The three bonded riders observe the interaction between Evelyn and Aspis, testing the bond's authenticity through questions designed to catch fabrication. They ask Evelyn to command movements without speaking. They watch Aspis respond to thoughts rather than words. They stand close enough to feel the resonance when light blooms between rider and dragon—that visible pulse of

connection that cannot be faked or forced. I watch from the terrace edge with Sera beside me, both of us silent, both counting heartbeats while strangers decide whether everything we've risked was legal or treasonous. "The bond is genuine," one of the riders finally announces, turning to face Thalissa with something like awe coloring his professional detachment. "There's no question. This is a true bond, formed before any territorial claim, sovereign under the ancient laws." Thalissa stands before Aspis with tears tracking down her weathered face, one hand extended but not quite touching the dragon's snout. Her voice, when it comes, trembles with something I've never heard from a scholar—raw, unguarded emotion. "Three hundred years," she whispers, and the words carry across the terrace like a prayer. "The texts said they'd return when the realm needed them most. I spent my life studying those words, believing them to be metaphors, beautiful myths to comfort us in dark times." She looks at Evelyn, then back to Aspis, tears still falling. "I was wrong. You're real. You're here. And the realm is more fragile than I think any of us wanted to admit." The formal report goes out that evening—sealed documents carried by raven to every major house, every Alliance representative, every lord who needs to know that the Luminary Protocol has been invoked and upheld. The bond between Aspis and Evelyn Ashcroft is recognized as sovereign and inviolate. No house may claim ownership. No territory may assert jurisdiction. Any attempt to seize, separate, or harm either party constitutes an act of war against the realm itself. I stand in my study with the official copy in my hands, and for one clean moment, I let myself believe we've won. That protection under Alliance law means safety. That invoking ancient protocols will be enough to keep predators at bay. The illusion lasts approximately thirty-six hours. Responses flood in from every house—carefully worded congratulations wrapped around barely concealed demands for access, marriage proposals disguised as diplomatic courtesy, trade agreements with clauses so invasive they might as well be annexation attempts. I read them with Sera, sorting genuine overtures from predatory maneuvering, and with each new message, the knot in my chest tightens. But one response is different. "They're not sending a diplomat," Sera says, voice flat as she reads the latest intelligence report. Her eyes lift to meet mine, and I see the calculation there—the mind that has kept this house three steps ahead of its enemies now racing to understand what's coming.

"Mintia mobilized a military escort." She announces. "Full contingent of Blue Dragon warriors. Cassandra leads them. Kael Varenthis accompanies her. Lord Aldric sent his formal representative—not a negotiator, his representative. Official purpose: to contest the Protocol and demand the return of stolen property." The words hit like fists to the ribs, one after another, each one landing where it hurts most. I force myself to breathe evenly, to keep my expression controlled even as my mind catalogs the threat vectors multiplying across the map in my head. "How many warriors?" My voice comes out level, professional, and I'm absurdly proud of that small victory over the panic clawing beneath my sternum. "Forty. Mounted and armed

beyond what diplomatic standards allow.” Sera’s jaw works, the muscle jumping with suppressed fury. “They’re not coming to negotiate, Draven. They’re coming to take her.”

I think of Evelyn sleeping in my chambers—dark hair spread across pillows that smell like us both, my mark visible on her chest where my fingers traced it this morning. I think of Aspis on the roost, free and flying and finally safe after months of hiding. I think of everything I promised to protect, and the armies marching toward us to take it all away. “When do they arrive?” The question tastes like ash. “Three days. Maybe four.” Sera pauses, and something in her expression shifts—the intelligence chief’s mask cracking to reveal the woman beneath it, the friend who has stood beside me through every crisis this house has faced. “Draven. They were already mobilized before the revelation. The timeline doesn’t work otherwise. They would have needed at least a week to assemble a force this size, coordinate with Aldric’s representative, and arrange the logistics.” I see dread beneath the mask. She continues. “They started moving before Corwin read the Protocol invocation. Before Aspis flew. Someone told them it was coming.” The room tilts. Not metaphorically—I feel the ground shift beneath my feet, feel my carefully constructed defenses crumbling as understanding crashes through them like a warhammer through rotted wood.

“Repeat that.” My voice comes from somewhere very far away. “Someone inside the compound leaked the revelation timeline to Mintia.” Sera’s words are careful, measured, each one placed like a surgeon’s scalpel opening a wound she knows will bleed. “I’ve traced the intelligence pattern.” “The information they would have needed to mobilize this fast—it matches details only someone with deep access would know. Patrol schedules. The sea cave location. The planned revelation timeline.” She meets my eyes. “The circle of people who knew all three things is very small, Draven.” My blood runs cold. Not the poetic metaphor—actual physical cold spreading through my veins like poison, turning muscle and bone to ice from the inside out. I think of everyone I told about Aspis. Everyone I brought into the secret. Everyone I trusted with the truth that could destroy us all. The names run through my mind like an execution list, and I know—with the sick certainty of a man who has just looked into the abyss and seen it looking back—that someone in my inner circle sold us out. Someone I trust betrayed everything we built to protect. And they’re already here. Already walking my halls. Already waiting for the moment to finish what they started.

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