

First Chosen by the Dragon

7-9 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 71

[Evelyn's POV] Three days since the revelation, and the compound treats me like something breakable and dangerous at once. Servants stumble over honorifics when I pass, eyes dropping, voices cracking on "Lady Evelyn" like the title might shatter in their mouths. A girl spills tea this morning because her hands shake when she serves me, the cup rattling against the saucer while she stammers apologies I don't want. "Evelyn is fine," I tell her gently. "The same as yesterday." But she backs away anyway, and I'm left holding tea I didn't ask for in a kitchen that suddenly feels too small. Through the bond, Aspis rumbles with amusement. "You terrify them now. Quite the transformation." "I preferred being invisible." I take the tea to the eastern wall where the patrol changes shift and wind carries salt across stone. The view stretches for miles—hills darkening to forest, the eastern road cutting through green like a wound. Empty now, but not for long. Aspis launches from the highest roost, white wings catching sunlight until she blazes against blue sky. She's massive now—the size of a warhorse, scales shimmering like pearl. She circles twice, then banks toward the open ocean where fish run silver beneath the surface. Khaira rises to join her, and they fly in tandem—Khaira leading, Aspis matching her wingbeat with the respect of something younger learning from something ancient. Through the bond, I feel pure joy. Aspis dives, talons extended, emerges with a fish thrashing in her grip. Khaira rumbles approval. "They bonded faster than I expected," Draven says behind me, and I don't startle—I've learned his footsteps. He joins me at the wall, gaze tracking the dragons hunting over churning waves. "Khaira treats her like a daughter. Aspis treats her like an equal who happens to know more. It's respect, not submission." "Khaira raised three clutches before Lyanna died. Maternal instinct runs deep." His voice carries weight saying her name. "She sees potential in Aspis. Something worth protecting." www.novelspirms.com Silence holds while the dragons wheel and hunt, their cries echoing across the empty sky. But it doesn't last. "Sera confirmed the numbers this morning," Draven says, and the shift in his tone pulls my attention from the ocean to his face. His jaw is set, eyes holding the flat darkness of a man preparing for war. "Forty mounted warriors. Full battle gear. Cassandra leads them. They'll be here by tomorrow evening, maybe sooner if they push through the night." www.novelspirms.com My chest tightens, ribs compressing around lungs that can't draw enough air. I grip the stone, feeling rough grain bite into my palms, and force myself to breathe. "Forty warriors for one dragon and a runaway

daughter. That's excessive even for Father." "Your father wants the dragon. Cassandra—" Draven pauses, something unreadable crossing his expression. "Cassandra wants something else. Sera's intelligence suggests the military force is Father's play. But Cassandra requested command personally." The fear coiled in my gut spreads through my chest like ice water, and through the bond, Aspis feels it. She wheels mid-dive, abandoning her hunt, attention snapping toward me with the force of a blow. "Evelyn. Your heart just went cold. What's wrong?" www.NoVELWorld.com "Cassandra is coming. Tomorrow, maybe tonight." Hearing my answer, Aspis banks hard toward shore, wings carving air with violent precision. "Good. Let her come. I've wanted to meet the woman who made you afraid of your own reflection." But something shifts in her, fury cooling into something more deliberate.

She circles lower, amber eyes fixed on me through the distance. "Your sister carries a fire inside her that has nothing to do with politics. She wants to destroy you. Not politically or strategically. She wants you erased from existence. I feel it inside—a pressure building at the horizon, dark and hungry and inevitable." The words land like blows, each one striking true because I've always known this. Buried beneath years of trying to please her, trying to be small enough not to provoke her—I've always known that Cassandra's cruelty ran too deep to be strategic. The insults finding the exact wound to reopen, the humiliations crafted with surgical precision, the way she'd smile when I flinched—it was never just about politics or prophecy or Father's approval. "I know," I tell Aspis. "I've always known. She hates me for existing. For breathing. For being born when she was supposed to be enough." Draven's hand finds mine on the stone, fingers lacing through mine with a grip that grounds me when everything else feels like it's tilting sideways. "We'll handle it. Together. The Protocol protects you. Alliance law protects you. And if law isn't enough—" He doesn't finish the sentence, but I hear it anyway in the set of his shoulders, the way his other hand rests on the blade at his hip. He'll fight. He'll bleed. He'll burn the world before he lets Cassandra take what's his. And I am his. The mark on my chest confirms it, warm beneath my tunic, pulsing in time with my heartbeat. But more than that—the way he looks at me confirms it. The way he stands between me and every threat that comes through those gates. The way his fingers tighten around mine when he thinks I'm not paying attention. "I don't understand it," I say quietly, watching Aspis and Khaira climb toward the highest roost, wings synchronized. "I've spent years trying to understand what I did to make her hate me so much. What was wrong with me, that she couldn't even look at me without contempt. But I never found an answer that made sense." "That's because there isn't one." Draven turns to face me fully, and his free hand comes up to cup my jaw, thumb tracing the line of my cheekbone with a gentleness that contradicts the violence coiled in every other part of him. "Some people carry poison in their blood, and it has nothing to do with you." His conviction is intoxicating. "You could have been perfect, and she still would have hated you for it. There's no version of you that would have

satisfied her because the problem was never you.”The words settle into me like stones dropping into still water, and I let them sink, let them displace the old questions I’ve carried for too long. He’s right. Understanding Cassandra’s hatred won’t change anything. Won’t make me safer. Won’t make tomorrow easier. What matters is surviving it. What matters is that when she comes through those gates with forty warriors and Father’s authority and a fire inside her that wants me erased—I’ll still be standing. With my dragon screaming defiance from the roost above. With this man’s hand in mine and his mark burned into my chest. With every lesson learned in the dark, every wound survived, every chain I broke to get here. Cassandra is coming. And this time, I’m not running. Through the bond, Aspis settles onto the highest roost beside Khaira, white scales gleaming against black, and her voice rumbles through me with absolute certainty. “She can bring her fire. We have ours.” I watch the eastern road stretch empty toward the horizon, and I breathe, and I wait for the storm I’ve always known was coming.

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8-10 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 72

[Draven’s POV] They arrive like an invasion disguised as diplomacy. Forty mounted warriors in Mintian blue crest the eastern ridge at midday, banners snapping in wind that carries the smell of distant storms. The delegation is larger than protocol allows—armored beyond diplomatic standards. I watch from the compound wall as they descend toward our gates, making a point that has nothing to do with negotiation. Cassandra dismounts first. She moves with the composure of a woman who holds every card, spine straight, chin lifted to convey authority without arrogance. Perfect form. The precision now—the way she scans the compound cataloging weaknesses—makes my skin crawl. Kael dismounts behind her, standing apart, watchful in a way that suggests discomfort rather than duty. His eyes find mine across the courtyard—uncertainty, maybe regret. But he’s here regardless. The formal proceedings begin in the great hall. Cassandra presents her case with clinical efficiency, every word rehearsed. “The Luminary Protocol was invoked under false pretenses.”

www.NoVELworm.com She announces, voice carrying. “The dragon egg was

smuggled into Black Dragon territory through deliberate deception—an act of covert warfare against House Aldric. Lady Evelyn should be returned to Mintia for formal tribunal. The dragon should be held in neutral custody pending Alliance investigation.” I let the silence stretch after she finishes, let the weight settle over assembled witnesses—my warriors, her escort, neutral observers. Then I speak, voice level, almost pleasant. “The Protocol makes no distinction regarding how a Luminary arrives. Only that they require sanctuary and the bonding is genuine. Both conditions are met. Lady Evelyn remains under my protection. The dragon remains where she belongs. Your demands are rejected.” Cassandra’s jaw tightens—the only crack in her composure. “You’re harboring stolen property and the daughter of your enemy. That’s not protection, Lord Draven. That’s complicity in theft and treason.” “I’m harboring a woman who was betrayed by her own family and a dragon who chose her bond freely. The Protocol exists precisely for cases like this. Your father’s feelings about losing a weapon he never deserved don’t supersede centuries of Alliance law.” www.novelworm.com The formal exchange continues—legal posturing in diplomatic language—but the outcome was never in doubt. I won’t surrender Evelyn. Cassandra won’t withdraw. We’re performing roles while the real game happens elsewhere. When the proceedings conclude, I retreat to my study. Sera is waiting, and her expression tells me she’s narrowed the leak before she says a word. “The information pattern points to someone with access to patrol schedules, sea cave knowledge, and awareness of the revelation timeline.” She lays documentation on my desk—coded correspondence intercepts, timeline analysis, movement logs. “The circle is very small, Draven.” I study the pattern. See the wound opening. Know before she says the name. “Send for Venna.” She comes with her spine straight and eyes steady, hands perfectly still without a tremor. The stillness gives her away. Venna in crisis fights or argues. This studied calm is someone who’s rehearsed this confrontation a thousand times. I don’t accuse. Don’t rage. I lay the intelligence pattern on the desk between us. “Patrol schedules,” I say quietly. “Sea cave location. Revelation timeline. Who did you tell, Venna?” The silence stretches. I watch her face for deflection, denial. Instead, she says: “The Mintian delegate. Cassandra.” It comes out flat, like a blade laid on a table. No justification, no pleading. Just the truth delivered with the precision of a soldier reporting mission failure. “Tell me the shape of it.” My voice sounds distant even to my own ears. “She approached me during the first delegation visit. Asked questions I answered thinking I was protecting the House from an infiltrator. Before she left, she gave me coded correspondence through a trading intermediary.” She’s brutally honest, and at least that I can respect. Venna’s hands remain still. “I used it once. After the revelation, when I was angry and afraid and convinced you’d lost yourself. I sent patrol rotations, the sea cave entrance, the timing. Everything Mintia needed.” I listen and something in me goes very quiet. Not rage—something worse. Disappointment from a man who doesn’t disappoint easily, who’s built his entire identity on maintaining control even when everything inside is screaming. The knowledge that I failed her before she failed me settles like stone in my chest.

“You gave our defenses to the house that killed Lyanna.” Venna’s composure fractures for the first time. Her hands clench, release, clench again. “I didn’t know. When Cassandra approached me, I didn’t know Evelyn was—I thought I was protecting us from—” “From what? A woman I chose to shelter? A dragon I chose to hide? You didn’t trust my judgment, so you trusted a stranger’s.” My words bite, and I see the wounds they create on Venna’s heart, but I don’t stop. “She wasn’t a stranger.” The honesty in Venna’s voice is devastating. “She was a warrior who spoke to me like an equal when everyone in this compound had stopped.” And there it is. The wound laid bare. I see it clearly now—Cassandra read Venna like a book, found the exact vulnerability I created when I chose Evelyn over my most loyal fighter’s judgment, and pressed until it bled. Venna didn’t betray the House out of malice. She betrayed it out of pain I inflicted when I stopped seeing her as anything but an obstacle to what I wanted. The irony is bitter enough to taste: I pride myself on reading people, on understanding the wounds that drive them, and I missed the one festering in my own second-in-command because acknowledging it would have required acknowledging my own culpability. Easier to frame her resistance as stubbornness than admit I’d sidelined someone who’d bled for this house because she questioned the woman I was falling for. That doesn’t make what she did less dangerous. Doesn’t erase the betrayal or the lives it might cost. But it makes it mine as much as hers. “This is treason during active hostility,” I say quietly. “I know.” “I should take your rank. Your weapons. Your place in this house.” “I know.” She stands there, waiting for the sentence, and the steadiness in her eyes—the absolute absence of self-pity—is somehow worse than if she’d begged. (w)W. novel (w) or M. cOMI study the woman who trained beside me for years, who bled for this house in battles I can still name, who made one catastrophic mistake because someone exploited the exact wound I inflicted. The judgment forms in my mind, shaped by years of command and the bitter knowledge that mercy sometimes cuts deeper than punishment—that forcing someone to live with their choices while still serving the house they betrayed is crueler than exile or execution. It’s also the only punishment I can stomach giving, because stripping her rank would require pretending I had no hand in creating the conditions for this. And I’m tired—so profoundly tired—of performing righteousness when I can barely manage competence. “You’ll stay,” I tell her, and watch something flicker across her face that might be relief or might be dread. “You’ll fight when the time comes. And you will carry what you did for the rest of your life without anyone’s forgiveness making it lighter.” She holds my eyes. Nods once. Turns and leaves without another word. (w)W. novel (w) or M. cOMI sit alone after she’s gone. Khaira shifts on her perch by the window, scales catching afternoon light, but she says nothing. There’s nothing to say. The betrayal is done. The punishment was delivered. And I’m left with the knowledge that I created the conditions for this the moment I chose to protect a woman I was falling for rather than trust the warrior who’d stood beside me for years. Outside, the Mintian delegation prepares to depart. Inside, I sit with the weight of what trust costs when it breaks. 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 — 73

[Cassandra's POV]The great hall reeks of politics and pretense. I watch Lord Corwin present another precedent from the dusty archives, his voice droning through case law everyone here already knows. The Alliance observers nod along, scribes recording every word for reports that will be filed and forgotten. Theater. All of it. Father's delegate sits three seats to my left, presenting our formal objections with the precision of a man reading from a script. "The House of Blue Dragon maintains that the Luminary Protocol was invoked under circumstances that constitute deliberate fraud. The dragon egg was smuggled into Black Dragon territory through covert means, representing an act of warfare disguised as sanctuary-seeking." Draven responds with the exact rebuttals we anticipated days ago. The Protocol makes no distinction regarding how a Luminary arrives, only that they require sanctuary and the bonding is genuine. Both conditions were verified by neutral observers. Case closed. I let the words wash over me without listening. The legal framework is sound—I reviewed every precedent myself. The Alliance verification was thorough, witnessed by three bonded riders and a loremaster whose reputation is beyond question. *www.nov(e)LW©rm.com* Father wants the dragon through political channels, through legal challenges and diplomatic pressure. He believes power can override precedent. He's wrong. The Protocol will hold because it was designed to hold. Three hundred years of legal architecture built to protect what Evelyn has become. But I don't want what the law can give me. I shift my gaze across the hall to where she stands beside Draven at the high table. My sister. Silver hair restored to its natural brilliance, no longer hiding behind dark dye and deception. She wears grey and black—the High House colors—standing tall with her shoulders squared and her hands resting calmly on the table. She should be cowering. Should be broken, crushed under the weight of Father's fury and the realm's scrutiny and her own inadequacy made manifest. The weak daughter. The disappointment. The girl who couldn't hold a candle without burning herself. Instead she looks like the woman the prophecy warned about. *www(n)ov(e)LW©rm.com* Through the open

terrace doors, Aspis gleams on the highest roost—white scales like polished bone in afternoon sun, wings folded with perfect symmetry, golden eyes watching the proceedings. The dragon has grown enormous, already approaching Lord Draven's dragon's size, power radiating in visible waves that make the mounted blacks shift restlessly. The stronger sister. The chosen one. The girl who should never have been born first, who should never have existed to cast her shadow across my life. I watch Evelyn's hand rest on Draven's forearm, watch the way he turns his head slightly toward her when she whispers something, watch the bond between them that goes deeper than politics or alliance. She has claimed everything—the dragon, the man, the power, the destiny that should have been mine. And she stands there like she deserves it. "Lady Cassandra." Father's delegate is speaking to me, his voice cutting through my focus. "The formal inquiry regarding territorial sovereignty—your testimony would support the broader argument." I turn to him with a smile that feels like glass in my mouth. "Of course. Though I suspect Lord Draven will counter with the same jurisdictional precedents we've already discussed. The Protocol supersedes territorial claims when a bonded pair seeks sanctuary." "Nevertheless, the record should reflect—" "The record will reflect exactly what the Alliance observers wish it to reflect." I keep my voice pleasant, reasonable, the dutiful daughter supporting her father's case. "But I'm happy to provide testimony if the delegation believes it will strengthen our position."

It won't. We both know it won't. This entire proceeding is performance art—Father making his formal objections, Draven standing firm behind ancient law, the Alliance documenting everything so no one can claim they weren't heard. The outcome was decided the moment Aspis flew before witnesses. Everything since has been theater. Two hours later, Corwin calls for an evening recess. The delegations will reconvene tomorrow for closing arguments and formal documentation. Tonight there will be a feast, because apparently near-war and legal battles require celebratory meals where everyone pretends to tolerate each other. I excuse myself during the preliminary arrangements, citing fatigue from travel and a need for fresh air. Father's delegate barely notices—he's already negotiating tomorrow's schedule with Sera, trying to extract one more day of proceedings that won't change anything. Kael catches my eye as I leave, and I see the question there. I shake my head once—not now—and he turns back to the discussion without pressing. The compound is vast in the failing light. I walk through courtyards I recognize from Venna's intelligence, past training grounds where warriors drill with focused intensity. The architecture is heavier than Mintian design, built to withstand coastal storms. But I know this place now. Know the guard rotations, the patrol patterns, the blind corners. Know which doors lead to the private wing and which servants use which passages. Venna's intelligence was thorough. More thorough than Father realizes. She gave me everything—floor plans sketched from memory, routine patterns, security weaknesses that someone from inside would recognize. She gave me what I needed.

Whether she understood why is another question. I trace a path along the eastern wall, up stairs that climb toward the residential quarters. Memorizing and preparing. My hand brushes the knife concealed in my sleeve—not the ceremonial blade at my hip that everyone can see, but the working weapon hidden where only someone looking would find it. The witch’s words echo through my head like a prayer or a curse, depending on your perspective. “The prophecy ends when you end it. With your own hands. Blood calls to blood, sister to sister, the stronger extinguishing the weaker.” Mother said the witch looked at her with eyes that saw through decades and certainties, and she said there was only one way to break a prophecy written in blood. www.novelworm.com Father thinks this is about politics. About reclaiming stolen property and asserting House authority. He sees dragons and legal frameworks and Alliance negotiations. He doesn’t understand that some destinies can’t be negotiated. Can’t be argued or bent through political pressure. The prophecy said one of us would rise and one would fall. It didn’t say the prophecy was permanent. Didn’t say the chosen one couldn’t be undone by the one she cast into shadow. I complete my circuit of the compound as twilight deepens. Return to the great hall where servants are setting up for the evening feast, laying out silver and crystal that catches torchlight like captured stars. Take my place at the high table with appropriate grace, accepting wine and responding to diplomatic small talk. Across the table, Evelyn sits beside Draven. She catches my eye and smiles—small, uncertain, still trying to bridge the gap between us even after everything. Still hoping that blood and childhood and shared history might mean something beyond the prophecy that divided us before we understood what we were. My sister. Still naive enough to believe forgiveness is possible. Tonight, while the delegations feast and argue and perform their political theater, while Father’s delegate makes his formal objections and Draven stands behind ancient law, I will end this. Not through courts or councils. With my own hands. The way the witch said it had to be done. The way it was always going to end from the moment we were born under the same cursed stars. www.novelworm.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

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8-10 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 74

[Evelyn's POV]The banquet drags like a blade across stone—endless, deliberate, designed to wear down everyone until exhaustion becomes a weapon. I sit beside Draven at the high table, straight-backed and smiling through courses that taste like ash, nodding through speeches that feel like negotiations wrapped in silk. *www.NoVêDworm.COM* The great hall is packed—Mintian representatives in blue crests, Alliance observers in neutral gray, our household warriors lining the walls in black and bronze. Torchlight catches armor and embroidery, turning the room into a glittering theater where everyone performs and nobody relaxes. Across the table, Cassandra is charm incarnate. She laughs at the ambassador's joke, inclines her head with perfect respect when the Alliance observer speaks, and offers commentary that sounds both reasonable and gracious without committing to anything. Every inch the dutiful diplomat. She catches my eye once and smiles—warm, sisterly, utterly false—and something in my chest tightens. Draven's hand finds mine beneath the table, steady and grounding. Through the bond, Aspis drowns in her sea cave—content, full, radiating lazy satisfaction that bleeds into me in golden waves. Then Cassandra rises, pressing fingertips to her temple with a graceful wince. "My apologies, honored guests. The day has been long, and I fear I'm not as resilient as I once was. If you'll excuse me?" The ambassador waves her away. The Alliance observer nods understanding. Nobody questions it. She's been nothing but gracious all evening, and even diplomats are allowed to be tired. I almost don't think twice about it either. Almost. Then Aspis jolts through the bond—not words but pure visceral alarm that slams into my chest. The lazy contentment evaporates, replaced by something ancient and predatory. 'Danger. Close. NOW.' I'm on my feet before I've decided to move. "Excuse me," I murmur, already stepping away, following the bond's pull like a rope around my ribs. Draven's eyes track me, questioning, but I'm already moving, Aspis screaming warning through every nerve. The hallway outside Draven's private wing is empty, torch-lit and silent. My footsteps echo against stone as I round the corner, heart hammering, every sense heightened and focused. Cassandra stands in the center of the corridor. Not lost or wandering. Not uncertain, just waiting. The blade in her hand catches firelight, slim and lethal, the kind of weapon designed for close work and quiet kills. She holds it with the casual competence of someone who's trained with steel since childhood, balanced on the balls of her feet, utterly still. "Hello, sister." Her voice is soft, almost gentle. "You always did follow your instincts over your brain." My blood turns to ice, then fire. "What are you doing, Cassandra?" "What I should have done the day you stole that egg." She shifts forward, weight settling into a fighter's stance that's terrifyingly familiar. We trained in the same halls, learned from the same masters, but she kept training after I stopped. The truth is, I didn't. And that was something she never knew. "Father wanted to do this through politics, through law, through diplomacy. But you were always mine to fix. The prophecy was always about us." "I don't know what you're talking about—" *www.NoVêDworm.COM* "Liar." The word cracks like a whip. She moves. Fast. So much faster than I remember, blade arcing toward my throat in a strike meant

to open veins and silence screams before they start. I twist sideways, purely on instinct, feeling the steel whisper past my neck close enough to kiss skin. I block her second strike with my forearm, pain flaring where bone meets steel, and drive my shoulder into her chest to create distance. She flows with it, pivoting, slashing across my ribs. I feel fabric tear, feel the hot bite of the blade scoring flesh, and something in me snaps past fear into pure survival rage. She's not fighting for politics or power or Father's approval. She's fighting like someone fulfilling a destiny, like someone who believes this moment was written before we were born, and that belief makes her lethal.

But I'm fighting like someone who refuses to die. Not here. Not now. Not after everything I've survived. We collide again—grappling, striking, bodies moving in the brutal dance of close combat. She slams me against the wall and I drive my knee into her stomach, feeling her breath explode. She catches my hair and I claw at her face, nails raking across skin that shares half my blood. *www.novelworld.com* We're too close for the blade, tangled and snarling, siblings reduced to teeth and fury. Then Aspis screams through the bond. Not warning this time. Command. Protection. The raw primal force of a dragon defending her rider, and something inside me breaks open. Light erupts from my hands—not controlled, not refined, not anything I've practiced or prepared for. Pure incandescent power that floods my vision white and sends Cassandra flying backward like a doll thrown by a furious child. She hits the stone wall with a sickening crack and crumples, blade clattering from her hand, blood streaming from her nose and mouth. I'm left standing in the center of the corridor, hands still glowing with residual light, shaking so hard my teeth chatter, Aspis shrieking triumph and fury from the sea caves in a voice that shakes the compound walls. The noise brings everyone. Guards pour from the barracks, weapons drawn. Warriors burst from side corridors, faces hard and ready. Draven rounds the corner at a dead run, Khaira's presence flooding the air behind him like a shadow made of scales and smoke. And behind them—the delegations, the ambassadors, the observers, the entire banquet spilling into the hallway in a wave of confusion and shock. They find Cassandra on the ground, blade beside her, blood on her face. They find me standing over her, still glowing, still shaking, hands raised and luminous. They find Aspis shrieking from somewhere above, her voice carrying across the compound in the unmistakable rage of a dragon whose rider was threatened. Nobody moves. Nobody breathes. Cassandra lifts her head, eyes meeting mine through blood and pain and something that might be fear or might be fury or might be both. "You were supposed to die," she whispers. I don't answer. I can't. The light fades from my hands but the shaking doesn't stop, adrenaline and power still singing through my veins in discordant harmony. Draven reaches me first, hands on my shoulders, grounding me. But his eyes are on Cassandra, on the blade, on the corridor that almost became a killing ground. His face is stone carved into human form—absolute and unyielding. "Get her up," he orders, voice carrying the weight of

judgment already rendered. “Everyone to the great hall. Now.” The guards lift Cassandra, still bleeding, still defiant. The delegations press closer, murmuring, shocked, calculating. The Alliance observers exchange glances that promise documentation and consequences. I stand in the center of the corridor where my sister tried to murder me, where I threw her across the room with power I didn’t know I possessed, and I feel Aspis’s presence like armor wrapped around my spine. “You’re safe,” she says through the bond, fierce and certain. “You’re mine. And I will burn anyone who tries to take you from me.” I believe her. I just don’t have the reassurance that she won’t have to.

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7-9 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 75

The great hall is packed—every delegate, every warrior, every member of Draven’s household and the Mintian force assembled. Torches cast restless shadows across stone pillars, while the air tastes like smoke and barely contained violence.

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They’ve brought Cassandra to stand in the center, guards flanking but not restraining her. Blood still crusts her upper lip, but she holds herself with perfect composure—wounded dignity wrapped like armor. She’s too smart to struggle, already assembling her narrative, sorting words into weapons. I stand ten feet away, Draven solid and grounding at my back. Through the bond, Aspis paces in her sea cave, restless and furious. The mark on my chest burns, pulsing with my accelerating heartbeat. Cassandra surveys the room with practiced grace, letting her gaze touch each section of the assembled crowd—delegates, warriors, observers—inviting them all into her confidence. When she speaks, her voice carries an unexpected clarity. “My sister has always been volatile. Our family tried to help her, tried to give her structure and purpose, but she struggled. With impulse. With anger. With accepting that some roles are beyond our reach, no matter how desperately we want them.” Murmurs ripple through the crowd like wind across water. I see heads nodding, people leaning forward to catch every word. Cassandra knows exactly what she’s doing—painting me as unstable, as someone whose accusations can’t be trusted, as the problem child who never learned her

place. “Tonight was a tragedy. A misunderstanding between sisters that escalated beyond—”

“Stop.” The word comes out like a blade drawn. Not shouted. Not whispered. Absolute and unyielding, carrying every truth I’ve swallowed for years. The room goes silent, hundreds of conversations dying mid-breath. Something inside me cracks open. Not rage. Not tears. Something harder, cleaner—forged in a year of hiding and a lifetime of learning to make myself small enough to survive. I feel it rising through my chest like light breaking through stone, burning away fear and shame and the desperate need to survive by staying quiet. The silence stretches, taut as a bowstring, and I let them feel the weight of it before I speak again. “You came here with a blade, Cassandra.” My voice doesn’t shake. It should—I’m still trembling from adrenaline and power, still feeling the echo of light that exploded from my hands when Aspis screamed through the bond. But my words come out steady, each one deliberate. “You waited in that corridor to kill me. Not to talk. Not to reconcile. To end me, the way you’ve been trying to end me since we were children.” “Evelyn, you’re not well—” Cassandra starts, but I step forward and she stops. Something in my face, maybe. Something that says I’m done being interrupted, done being dismissed, done letting her control the narrative of my own life. “I was thirteen when you framed me in the training hall. You staged a scene to make it look like I’d sabotaged your training dummy. When the master believed you over me, you smiled. Just for me. To make sure I knew.” Cassandra’s expression doesn’t change, but I see the muscles in her jaw tighten. Around us, the crowd shifts—curious, uncertain, leaning forward to hear every word. “You stole Kael. Not because you wanted him. Because I did. Because letting me have something that made me happy was unbearable to you. So you took him, and when he realized what you were, you kept him anyway, because the point was never love. The point was winning.” My gaze finds him in the crowd—standing with the Mintian delegation, face pale, eyes fixed on the floor. “You stole the dragon egg. The egg I was promised, that chose me when I touched it in the caves. You took it because you couldn’t stand that something wanted me instead of you.”

www.NoVelwo(r)m.©(o)mI continue, relentless to deliver the truth. “And when I took back what was mine, you called me thief and traitor, and now you’re trying to persuade people who are more family to me that you have ever been, that I’m unstable.”

The hall erupts in whispers. I hear “egg” and “dragon” and “stole” bouncing between delegates and warriors. “You raised me to be nothing. You told me I was dangerous, weak and worthless. You took everything—my name, my future, the man I loved, the dragon that chose me—and when I had nothing left, I ran.” I continue. “And I found more in exile than you ever gave me in a lifetime. I found people who saw me as more than a problem to solve. I found purpose. I found a dragon who chose me not despite who I am, but because of it.”

www.NoVelwoRM.comMy gaze swings back to Cassandra. “You came here tonight to kill me. Not for politics. Not for Father. For yourself. Because I was supposed to stay broken,

and I didn't." Cassandra's mask shatters. Real fury floods her face—raw and ugly. Her voice comes out sharp and vicious. "You don't know what you are, Evelyn. You don't know what the—" She stops. The word catches in her throat, visible effort forcing her jaw shut. I file it away and turn to face the assembled hall. Every eye is on me. "I am Evelyn of Mintia. Eldest daughter of Lord Aldric. Rider of Aspis, the White Dragon. I renounce the House of the Blue Dragon. I renounce my father's name, my mother's silence, and my sister's hatred. Whatever I am, I became it despite them." For three heartbeats, nothing. Then Aspis roars from the sea caves—not rage but affirmation, shaking the compound walls. Every dragon in the compound answers. Khaira's deep bass. The younger dragons. The sound builds until the stones shake. The hall erupts. Delegates shout. Warriors surge forward. Someone yells "Mintia" like a curse. Someone else shouts "traitor." But I'm watching Draven's household—warriors who sparred with me in the training yard, staff who nodded to me in corridors. They're hearing for the first time that the woman they trusted is the eldest daughter of their mortal enemy. The house that killed Lyanna. The house that slaughtered their people in raids and betrayals. I see Mira's face go pale. See Torin's hand drop to his blade, uncertain. See a dozen expressions cycling through disbelief and anger. Draven reaches for my hand. His fingers close around mine—steady, deliberate, making a choice in front of everyone. Some see it as loyalty, faces softening. Others see it as betrayal—their leader holding hands with the daughter of the house that murdered his bonded—and their expressions harden. At the back of the hall, Venna watches with an expression I can't read. It could be guilt—she helped Cassandra, enabled tonight. It could be vindication—the outsider revealed as the threat she always said I was. *www.novelworm.com* I stand in the center of the great hall with silver hair blazing, dragon screaming overhead, surrounded by people deciding whether I'm a savior or a threat. The first phase is over—the hiding, the running, the surviving. What comes next isn't survival. It's war. It's reckoning. It's standing in the light and living with the consequences. But first, there's a question I'll carry forward, a word Cassandra swallowed, the one she mentioned during the fight: what prophecy? And why was I never supposed to know about it?

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First Chosen by the Dragon

8-10 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 76

[Evelyn's POV]The echo of my own voice still hangs in the air, and I don't recognize it. That voice was steady and certain. Mine, but belonging to a woman I haven't met before tonight. Aspis screams above the open terrace, white wings spread against the dark sky, and every dragon in the compound answers, a chorus of roars that rolls through the stone beneath my feet like distant thunder. Draven's hand is in mine. His fingers are warm, solid, anchoring me to the floor when every instinct tells me to run. I hold on tighter than I should. He lets me. The great hall fractures. I can see it happening: the exact moment the room splits, not with swords or shouting, but with eyes. With the way bodies shift, creating distance. Old alliances recalculating in real time, loyalties tested against a truth none of them expected. Half the household is staring at our joined hands like it's an open wound. www.NoVELworm.com Mira stands near the east colonnade, and her face has gone white. She is not angry but shocked, the particular shock of someone replaying every conversation and rewriting all of it. Her hands are shaking. I want to go to my dear friend, to explain, but her eyes meet mine and I watch something shatter behind them. She trusted me, but I gave her lies in return. Her lips part, and though I can't hear the word from across the hall, I can read it clearly: Why? Finn stands beside her, with his jaw working like he's chewing glass, his arms crossed so tight against his chest that the tendons in his neck stand rigid. When his gaze finally lands on me, it's fury, raw and justified. "You didn't tell me," he says, loud enough for those nearby to hear. "Every time I talked about my cousins and uncle lost to Mintian raids, you knew but kept silent." The accusation cuts deeper than Cassandra's dagger could have. I want to tell him that his family's loss was never what I took lightly, but the words die in my throat. What defense could I possibly offer? Dorian is different. He watches me the way he does with everything: quietly, with whatever conclusion he's drawn locked behind his teeth. But his hand rests on Mira's shoulder: a protective barrier between her and me. We spent hours together in the training yard, debating strategy over cold meals, sharing the kind of easy silence that comes with trust. Now that silence between me and my friends feels like a wall. The Mintian delegation erupts. Lord Aldric's senior advisor, a gaunt man named Harath, shoves past two guards and jabs his finger toward Draven. "This is an outrage! You've held a Mintian citizen under false pretenses, harbored a fugitive within your walls, and now you assault a diplomatic envoy? The Alliance will hear of every violation committed under this roof!" "Your envoy drew a blade on an unarmed woman in my corridors," Draven replies, his voice carrying the flat calm of a man who has already decided how this ends. "Guest-right was broken by Mintian steel, not mine." "Cassandra acted in self-defense! She discovered a wanted criminal lurking in—" www.NoVELworm.com "She tried to kill her sister! Those are different things." The word sister ripples through the hall. I feel it land on every face, the confirmation, spoken by Draven himself, that the woman they trained beside shares blood with the house that

slaughtered Lyanna's convoy. Cassandra stands between two guards near the western arch. She hasn't spoken since I finished—no struggle, no protest, not so much as shifting her weight. She is perfectly, terrifyingly still. I pull my gaze from her and face the household. The warriors I trained beside. The people who shared bread with me. "I know what you're feeling right now. I know what my name means in this hall, and I—" "You're Mintian." The voice comes from the back of the crowd. A broad-shouldered warrior named Torren, his scarred face tight with something between disgust and disbelief. "You're the firstborn daughter of the house that butchered our people. Lyanna died because of your family's orders. You sat beside us for months knowing that, and you said nothing." The accusation hits like a fist to the sternum. I absorb it without flinching, though every muscle in my body coils tight.

"I know what my family did and what it cost this house. Nothing I say tonight will undo that, and I won't dishonor Lyanna's memory by pretending it could." "Then what do you have to offer us?" Torren demands. "What could possibly make up for months of deception?" Draven's hand tightens around mine — a silent pulse of pressure that says I'm here — but it isn't Draven who answers. *www.(n)(o)velwORm.có(m)* Aspis does. The growl begins low, beneath the threshold of hearing, a vibration that starts in the stone floor and climbs through the walls until it reaches every dragon bond in the compound. I feel it through our connection: not rage, not warning, but something older and deeper. A resonance that speaks to the primal core of every bonded rider in the room. *Www.(n)@vêlwor(m).c@M* Mine, that growl says. She is mine. I chose her, so question that if you dare! The great hall holds its breath. Riders press hands to their chests where their own bonds pulse in response. Sera steps forward from behind Draven's left shoulder. "The hall will be cleared. All delegations will be confined to their assigned quarters under guard until formal proceedings can be established. Household members will report to their commanding officers at dawn for individual briefings." Her voice carries the clipped authority of a woman who expects obedience. "Nobody leaves the compound or sends correspondence. Anyone who violates confinement will answer to me personally before they answer to Lord Draven." The crowd begins to move. Guards form escort lines for the Mintian delegation, who file out with varying degrees of fury and theatrical protest. Harath is still muttering about Alliance violations as he's guided through the eastern doors. I stand rooted to the floor, watching the household disperse and the people I called friends walk away without looking back. Mira pauses at the colonnade, and for one breath I think she'll turn. She doesn't. Finn is already gone, and Dorian follows them both, and at the threshold, he stops. He looks back at me and holds my gaze for three full heartbeats. Then he walks out, and I still can't read his face. The guards escort Cassandra toward the western corridor. She moves between them with perfect composure, spine straight, chin lifted — a diplomat being temporarily inconvenienced, not a woman who held a blade minutes ago. She drifts close as she passes. Enough that I smell the jasmine oil she's always worn. Her lips

barely move, and her words are for me alone. “You think this is the hard part? This is nothing.” Her green eyes find mine, and in them I see something that freezes my blood more thoroughly than any blade could. “Wait until Father hears.” The guards pull her forward, and she goes without resistance, that ghost of a smile still playing at her lips as the doors close behind her. Draven’s hand is still in mine. The great hall is nearly empty, just guards at the doors and the lingering scent of torch smoke and fear. My pulse hammers against my ribs. Aspis keens softly through the bond, feeling what I feel — the adrenaline draining, the trembling starting in my fingers. I stood in this room and declared myself, naming every wound and claiming my truth. However, I’ve lost my friends in the same breath. 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 — 77

[Draven’s POV] The council chamber doors close behind me, and the silence that follows is worse than the roaring hall. Torchlight carves long shadows across the war table. Maps of the coastal territories lie spread beneath iron weights, borders drawn in ink that suddenly feels provisional. www.novelworm.com Three chairs are already occupied. Elder Maren stands rather than sits, arms folded tight across her dark robes, every line of her body vibrating with barely contained fury. Gareth has settled into his usual seat near the hearth, fingers steeped, the compound’s master of coin wearing an expression that calculates losses with every breath. www.novelworm.com Brennan leans against the far wall with his arms crossed and his jaw working like he’s chewing through iron nails: my cavalry commander, the man who trains every mounted unit in this house. They are my senior advisors, the people I trust to hold this house together. Tonight, they learned I’ve been running it without them. “How long?” Maren asks before I’ve fully reached the table. Her voice is controlled, but I hear the blade beneath it. “How long have you known what she is?” “Long enough to make a judgment and verify it.” “What about sharing it with the people responsible for keeping this house functioning?” She steps forward, palms flat on the table. “I’ve sat on this council for twenty-three years, Draven. I advised your father before you, and you let me operate blind while a Mintian heir sleeps under our roof.” “The identity was contained to those who needed it most,

to minimize exactly the kind of fracture we saw tonight.”“Containment failed the moment Cassandra drew that blade. Now every warrior in this compound knows, every delegate knows, and by morning every allied house within raven’s reach will know that the Lord of the Black Dragon has been harboring the eldest daughter of Mintia.”The words hit their marks, and I let them. Gareth clears his throat, the sound deliberate and measured:“Recriminations won’t rebuild what’s broken. We need to assess our legal standing before the Alliance, and our treasury’s ability to weather what comes.”“Our legal standing is sound,” I say, pulling out my chair and sitting. The gesture is intentional: a lord taking his seat, not a man bracing for a fight. “The Luminary Protocol was verified. Aspis is a white dragon, confirmed by Alliance loremasters. The Protocol’s protections hold regardless of the rider’s bloodline.”“It protects the dragon,” Gareth counters carefully. “The rider’s status is more complex. Evelyn entered this territory under a false identity, and the Mintian delegation will argue harboring, conspiracy, perhaps espionage. Any of those charges could justify trade sanctions.”“She entered as a refugee fleeing attempted murder by her own family. The false identity was survival, not subterfuge.”“A distinction the Alliance may or may not appreciate.”Brennan pushes off the wall and plants both fists on the table, leaning forward until the torchlight catches every hard angle of his weathered face.“Forget the Alliance for a moment.”His voice is low, graveled with the particular anger of a man who has spent decades earning the household’s loyalty.“Half this compound thinks you’ve been compromised by an enemy operative. The other half isn’t sure they’re wrong. I’ve commanded the cavalry for years, Draven. I know what doubt looks like when it takes root, and tonight I watched it spread through every rank like rot through timber.”“Evelyn is not an operative.”“Then what is she?” Brennan holds my stare without flinching. “She’s a bonded white dragon rider — that much I accept, the proof flew screaming over our heads. She fled abuse. Okay, I’ll grant that too, her scars speak loudly enough.”He pauses:“And she earned her place in the trials — I watched her bleed for it with my own eyes.”The silence thickens.“But none of that answers the question everyone in this compound is asking. What is she to you, exactly? ‘Political asylum’ and ‘the lord’s bedchamber’ send very different messages, you know. And right now, your household doesn’t know which one they’re supposed to believe.”

The question lands in the center of my chest and stays there.I feel Khaira through the bond: distant, circling the roosts, listening. She says nothing. The absence of her commentary is its own kind of judgment, louder than any observation she could offer.“Cassandra and the full Mintian delegation will be placed under diplomatic detention,” I say, bypassing Brennan’s question with surgical precision. “Guest-right was violated. Under Alliance law, that grants us authority to detain every member of their party pending formal tribunal.”Brennan’s eyes narrow. He sees the deflection and he lets it pass — for now.“Gareth,” I turn to him. “I need a full accounting of our supply reserves and defensive expenditures by dawn. If Mintia

responds militarily, I want to know exactly how long we can hold. Let Sera know I need a full intelligence audit from her, too.”

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Gareth nods once, sharp. “Already calculating. I’ll have preliminary figures within four hours.”

“Maren, draft the formal detention order and a preemptive communication to the Alliance council. Frame it around the guest-right violation. Cassandra’s assassination attempt gives us the stronger position... Use it before Mintia can spin their own version.”

Maren rises, gathering her notes. “I’ll have the draft before sunrise.”

“Brennan, double the perimeter watch. No one enters or leaves without my direct authorization.”

“Done,” Brennan straightens, but his gaze lingers on me for a long, weighted moment before he follows Gareth toward the door. They file out, but Maren doesn’t move. I wait. She stands across the table, the torchlight catching the sharp planes of her face. When she speaks, her voice has lost its earlier fury. What replaces it is worse: the quiet precision of someone delivering a truth they know will draw blood. “You didn’t answer Brennan’s question.”

“I answered what I needed.”

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“You said what was comfortable.” She comes around the table until she’s standing beside my chair, close enough that I can see the tension in the cords of her neck. “Whatever you feel for Evelyn, the household needs to see a lord making strategic decisions right now. They cannot see a man protecting his lover.”

The word lands between us like a dropped blade. Lover. I keep my face still. My hands flat on the desk and my breathing even. “The decisions I’ve made tonight are strategic. They are detention, intelligence audit, and Alliance preemption. Every order I’ve given serves this house.”

“Every order you’ve given also serves her, and that’s the problem,” Elder Maren holds my gaze for a few seconds, then inclines her head with a formality that feels more like a warning than respect. “I’ll have the draft on your desk before the sun clears the eastern cliffs.”

She leaves. The door closes with a sound like a sentence ending. I sit in the empty chamber, pressing my palms flat against the oak until the grain bites into my skin. The maps spread before me — my territory, my borders, my house — and all I can see is the fracture. My breathing comes harder than it should. I force it steady, counting the way I was taught as a boy. In through the nose, the method of a warrior managing pain without letting it show on his face. Khaira’s presence shifts through the bond. She’s landed on the eastern roost, her massive body coiling against the night air. I feel her choosing her words with the care of a creature who has watched me break once before and recognizes the early signs. “Venna called you blind,” she says quietly. “And Maren called you a lover. When will you decide what you actually are?”

The question sits in the torchlit silence, and I have no answer for her. Not yet.

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First Chosen by the Dragon

7-9 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 78

[Evelyn's POV] I knock on Mira's door at dawn. No answer, so I knock again, pressing my forehead against the wood. Nothing. The third knock is barely a graze of knuckles before the latch clicks and the door swings inward. Mira stands in the gap. Her dark hair is loose, uncombed, and her eyes are rimmed red. But her jaw is set hard, chin lifted, and the vulnerability in those swollen eyes is armored by something fiercer. "I wasn't sure you'd open the door," I say. She doesn't step aside and doesn't invite me in. Just stands on the threshold with her arms folded across her chest. "Talk." The part with my name was always real." I swallow hard. "I'm the eldest daughter of Lord Aldric of Mintia from the House of the Blue Dragon. I ran because they wanted me dead, and I lied about who I was because the truth would have gotten me killed here too." "I know all that. You announced it to the entire hall last night." Her voice stays level, but something trembles beneath it. "I'm not asking for the speech, Evelyn." She adds. "Why couldn't you tell me? In a year of training side by side, of me telling you things I've never told another soul — you couldn't give me even a piece of the truth?" The words hit somewhere deep behind my ribs. I deserve every one of them. *w(w)w.m0v@lworm.com* "I was terrified. Every day I woke up expecting someone to see through the lie. If I told you, I'd be putting that danger on your shoulders too." "That should have been my choice to make." Her voice cracks on the last word. "I thought we were close. I thought what we had was honest, even if everything else in this compound was politics and posturing." "It was. Everything I told you about who I am, what I feel, what matters to me — all of that was real." "How am I supposed to know that now?" She searches my face, and I can see her reexamining every conversation, every confidence exchanged over late-night wine — all of it filtered through this new lens. "How do I separate the real parts from the performance?" "There was no performance. I lied about my name and my bloodline. I never lied about being your friend." Mira stares at me for a long, terrible moment. Her throat works, but she doesn't cry. She's already done her crying. What's left is harder: the decision about what comes next. "I always knew you were lying about something." Her voice drops to barely above a whisper. "The way you flinched when people mentioned Mintia or the nightmares you wouldn't explain. I told myself it didn't matter, that everyone here carries ghosts." She exhales slowly. "I just didn't expect it to be this big." She doesn't slam the door, but she doesn't step aside either — standing in the threshold between letting me in and shutting me out. "I'll be here," I tell her quietly. "Whenever you're ready." Mira nods once and closes the door with a soft click

that sounds louder than any slam. I find Finn on the training wall, running drills alone in the early light. His sword moves through standard forms: clean and mechanical. The kind of practice that isn't about improvement but about not thinking. "Finn." His shoulders tighten. The blade pauses mid-arc, then continues its path without breaking rhythm. He doesn't turn around. "Finn, please, let me explain." *www.novelmor.com* "I know who you are." His voice is too steady, the careful control of a man holding something volatile with both hands. "I'm asking you to hear it from me. Not from a crowded room, not filtered through shock and politics, but from me, standing right here." He finishes the form and lowers his blade. Still doesn't turn.

"My uncle Gareth rode patrol along the northern border seven years ago. Mintian raiders caught his squad in a ravine. They sent back his shield with his blood still on it." His grip tightens on the sword's pommel until his knuckles whiten. "My cousins Bram and Torin enlisted the following spring to avenge him. Bram came home missing his left hand, and Torin didn't come home at all." My stomach twists. I knew about his family's losses: Mira told me in fragments, warning me never to mention border raids around him. I never imagined I'd be standing here as the embodiment of everything that took them. "I didn't order those raids or even know about them until I was already here. My family kept me locked away from anything that mattered." *Www.novelmor.com* "I believe you." He turns at last, and the look on his face stops my breath. There's no hatred there: just a grief so deep it's calcified into something permanent, and the exhaustion of a man trying to reconcile the friend he trusts with the bloodline he can't forgive. "But when I look at you right now, all I can see is Aldric's jaw and silver hair. And I need time before I can see past that." "Take whatever you need." "I intend to." He sheathes his sword and walks past me toward the stairs, leaving a deliberate gap between us that tells me everything his steady voice tried to hide. I find Dorian in the armory. He sits on an overturned crate near the back wall, running a whetstone along a short blade with slow, rhythmic strokes. The sound fills the space — metal against stone — steady as a heartbeat. He looks up when I enter and studies my face for a long moment: the shadows under my eyes, the tension in my shoulders, the devastation of a morning spent being measured against sins she didn't commit. "Same person who pulled me out of the mud in the tournament qualifiers?" he asks. The question is so simple it nearly undoes me. I nod, not trusting my voice. "Then sit down. You look terrible." I lower myself onto the crate beside him. The relief is so sharp it cuts through every defense I have left, and my hands start shaking. I press them against my thighs, hard, trying to still them. Dorian doesn't comment on the shaking. He goes back to his whetstone, stroke after patient stroke, and lets the silence between us be companionable rather than accusatory. It isn't forgiveness — he hasn't said the words and I wouldn't insult him by pretending he has. It's a decision that the woman who hauled him out of knee-deep mud and the daughter of Mintia's lord can be the same person

without one erasing the other. I sit beside him and let the steady scrape of stone on steel fill the spaces where words aren't enough. Then Aspis sends a pulse through the bond that straightens my spine. Not pain or alarm. Something formless and cold: a shadow at the edge of perception, like catching movement in the corner of your eye and turning to find nothing there. My dragon's unease bleeds through our connection, tightening every muscle across my shoulders. "What is it?" I reach through the bond. "What's wrong?" Aspis doesn't answer in words. Instead, she sends a single image that floods my mind: a horizon stretching vast and dark, and upon it, something gathering. Patient, ancient, and watching with eyes I cannot see but can feel pressing against my skin like the weight of deep water. www.loveaworm.com Darkness on the horizon, and it is not clouds. 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 — 79

[Cassandra's POV] The guest wing is gilded captivity. Fine linens on the beds, wine on the table, refreshed each morning by servants who won't meet our eyes. And four guards stationed at every exit, hands never far from their hilts. Harath drafts his third formal protestation of the morning, quill scratching furiously, muttering about Alliance precedent and sovereign immunity. Loren argues a legal point between bouts of pacing. The two warriors — Dareth and Vayne — sit cleaning weapons they're no longer permitted to carry, channeling uselessness into the repetitive motion of oiled cloth on empty scabbards. Kael sits by the window. He hasn't spoken since they brought us here. His broad shoulders curve inward, jaw resting against his fist as he stares at the compound below. www.loveaworm.com The hollows beneath his eyes tell me he hasn't slept, but his wakefulness has a different quality than mine. Mine is strategic, and his looks like a man being crushed beneath something he can't name. I study him the way I study every tool: assessing remaining utility. "Kael, walk with me." He lifts his head. The heaviness in his eyes registers — something new, a question he's carrying like a stone in his chest. I file it. Tools don't need to be happy; all they need is to function. We step into the adjacent bedchamber. I close the door and position myself at the

writing desk, letting him stand. “The corridor was a miscalculation,” I begin. “I moved too quickly, relied on proximity when I should have relied on patience. That won’t happen again.” “You tried to kill her, Cassandra.” His voice is quiet and careful. “In the corridors of a lord’s compound, during a diplomatic summit. If Draven wanted to execute you for that, the Alliance would barely blink.” “Draven won’t execute me. I’m more valuable alive — a diplomatic hostage is leverage. A dead diplomat is a declaration of war he’s not ready to make.” I fold my hands on the desk. “Which means we have time, limited, but enough.” “Time for what, exactly?” “Father’s political approach will follow its course. He’ll petition the Alliance, invoke territorial claims, argue that Evelyn is a fugitive and the dragon is stolen property. The legal machinery will grind forward.” I pause, letting the silence frame what comes next. “But I have no intention of waiting for lawyers to deliver what belongs to us.” Kael’s jaw tightens. “What do you need from me?” He is functional. That is good. “Intelligence. You walked this compound freely during the summit. You know the layout — corridors, gates, the distance between the guest wing and the lord’s quarters. You learned the guard rotations, the meal schedules, the rhythms of this place.” “That was weeks ago. They’ll have changed everything after—” “After my arrest, yes, which is precisely why I need you to map the changes. Observe the new patrol patterns from the windows: shift times, overlap gaps, which corridors are visible from which posts.” I lean forward. “More importantly, I need you to identify sympathizers. Warriors who share Venna’s position. The ones who watched Draven reach for Evelyn’s hand last night and felt their loyalty curdle.” I add. *w(W)w.no u(e)IwOrmm.côm* “You want me to find cracks in his household.” “Find the cracks that already exist and make sure we can reach through them. Venna established a coded correspondence channel during the summit. That channel may still be viable, so I need you to locate it and test whether messages can still flow outward.” “The guards let me move to the bathing chamber and the meal hall. That’s the extent of my freedom.”

“The meal hall shares a wall with the kitchen corridor. The kitchen corridor connects to the service passages Venna used.” I watch his face as the route assembles itself behind his eyes. “You were always observant, Kael. It’s why I chose you in the first place.” Something flickers across his expression: a flinch, barely visible, before he smooths it away. That heaviness again, the unvoiced question pressing outward. “Is there something you want to say?” I ask, keeping my tone measured, inviting even. The way you invite a dog to present a wounded paw. He holds my gaze for a moment longer than comfortable. His throat works, the muscles in his neck taut, and I can see the words forming behind his teeth — something raw, something that would cost him if he let it escape. “No,” he says finally. “I’ll map what I can from the windows today. Test the corridor route tomorrow during the morning meal.” “Good, report to me each evening. Details, not impressions. I want patrol counts, shift changes, and the names of any warrior who hesitates when Evelyn’s name is mentioned.” He nods once, turns,

and leaves the bedchamber. The door closes behind him with a soft click. I remain at the desk, turning over what I saw in his face. That heaviness that looks dangerously close to conscience. www.novelform.com He encountered Evelyn during the summit — recognized something in her jaw, her movement. He came to me shaken, and I redirected that recognition toward purpose. But something shifted last night. Since Evelyn stood in the great hall and named every wound, and Kael heard his own cruelty catalogued before strangers. Guilt is a liability in a tool. If his guilt outgrows his obedience, I'll need a contingency. But today he still functions, and that's sufficient. I rise and cross to the window, pulling the shutters open. The compound spreads below — stone and timber built into the coastal cliffs, training yards, and stables. The great hall's arched roof. And beyond it, the lord's wing with its balcony overlooking the dragon roosts. Somewhere in that wing, Evelyn sleeps. She eats, breathes... lives the life she stole from me. My fingers press against the cold glass until the tips go white. The prophecy has lived inside me since I was nine years old. Father brought me to the witch: a reed-thin woman with milky eyes in the caves above Mintia's northern pass. She took one look at me, one look at the locket containing Evelyn's portrait, and spoke in a voice like wind through cracked stone. 'One sister will save the House, and the other one will destroy it. The stronger must end the weaker before the cycle consumes them both.' Father held my hand on the walk home and told me I was the stronger one. Every lesson afterward, every training session, every carefully orchestrated humiliation of my older sister was designed to fulfill that prophecy. Evelyn was supposed to break. Every mechanism we put in place — the isolation, the stolen betrothal, the dragon egg, the systematic erasure of her worth — was meant to ensure she never grew strong enough to become the threat the witch foretold. Instead, she ran. She found shelter with our mortal enemy and bonded with a white dragon! And last night, she stood before an assembly and spoke with a voice that carried the kind of authority I've spent my life cultivating. The corridor was not a failure of strategy. It was a failure of timing. www.Novelform.com I press my palm flat against the glass. Below, a patrol crosses the courtyard — four warriors in Black Dragon armor, moving in tight formation. I count their steps, note the direction, file it alongside every other piece of this compound I'm building inside my skull. Father will receive my coded letter within days. His response will be military, not diplomatic — I know him well enough. But it all takes time, and I don't intend to wait that long. "You got lucky, sister." My breath fogs the glass, obscuring the view of the lord's wing for a moment before fading. "Luck doesn't last." 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

7-9 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 80

[Evelyn's POV]The training yard goes cold the moment I step through the archway. The air is warm, salted with sea breeze and the tang of oiled steel. But what goes cold is everything else: conversations die mid-sentence, blades pause mid-swing...Thirty warriors turn to look at me, and the silence that follows is thick enough to choke on. I keep walking with shoulders back and chin up. My training leathers are laced tight, hair braided over one shoulder. The way I taught myself in Mintia's corridors when the whispers followed me like smoke. The warriors who sparred with me last week won't meet my eyes. They find sudden interest in their boots, their blades, the texture of the courtyard stone. The ones who do look carry something between suspicion and open hostility. Nobody offers to partner. *w(w)w. NovëLworm.Com* I take my position in the open circle and draw my training blade. I begin working through forms — high guard, low sweep, pivot, strike. Every pair of eyes on my back burns like a brand. I move through them again, faster this time. My muscles warm, my breathing steadies, and the rhythm of steel cutting air becomes the only sound in a yard that should be ringing with thirty blades. The silence is worse than insults. This careful, deliberate nothing is a wall made of air. There's nothing to swing at, nothing to push against, just absence where acceptance used to be. Then footsteps cross the packed earth behind me. I turn. A young warrior stands at the edge of the circle — Brennan, one of the newer marks. He is barely twenty, narrow face, ears that stick out beneath cropped brown hair. I remember him from the qualifiers: he'd slipped in mud during the obstacle course, gone down hard, and I'd hauled him up by the collar before the proctor could disqualify him. He doesn't speak, just raises his training blade into guard position. I raise my blade to match. "Thank you," I say quietly. "Don't thank me." His voice comes out thin, strained. "Just spar." We do. It's stiff, formal, nothing like our easy exchanges before — when he'd laugh at his own mistakes and I'd show him the hip rotation that fixes a weak slash. Now every strike is measured. Every parry is careful. He's sparring with me the way you handle something that might bite. But he's here. He stepped into the circle when nobody else would. We finish three rounds. Two more warriors drift in — a tall woman named Seren and a stocky man whose name I've never learned. They don't announce themselves. Just raise their blades when Brennan steps back, their eyes flicking toward the senior fighters for disapproval. I spar with each. The exchanges are cautious and distant, but it's contact. Steel meeting steel — the basic language of this place, spoken haltingly. By the session's end, I've sparred with four people out of thirty. The

rest watched from the edges, arms crossed, stone-faced. Twenty-six people who looked at me and decided that whatever I'd earned in the arena, whatever the Protocol declared: I am still the daughter of the house that killed their people. That stain doesn't wash out with training drills. I sheathe my blade and walk out without looking back. My legs hold until I round the corner, and then the trembling starts: deep in my thighs, climbing through my core, spreading until my hands shake and my jaw aches from clenching. I press my back against the cool stone and breathe. Not from exertion, but from the effort of holding my composure while twenty-six people decided I'm not worth the risk.

Venna wasn't in the yard. She hasn't been seen on the training grounds since the revelation — stripped of rank, carrying her treason like a brand. Her absence should feel like relief, but instead, it feels like a held breath. *www.m0v(e)lW0RM.com* The tunnels to the sea caves are familiar now: narrow passages winding through the cliff's bones, the air shifting from warm stone to cool salt. Torchlight gives way to pale glow seeping through the natural arch where moonlight enters, reflected off dark water. Aspis is waiting. Her wings fold against her flanks: massive, powerful, wings that could carry a rider. She lifts her head as I enter, violet eyes finding me, and a low croon echoes off the cavern walls. I cross to her and press my forehead against her snout. The scales are warm beneath my skin, and the bond hums with a resonance that steadies everything the training yard shattered. "It was hard today," I murmur to her. "I felt it. Every cold shoulder and every turned back. Their fear tastes like copper through our bond." "Four people sparred with me out of thirty. That's something." "Well, it is the beginning. That's where we live, you and I." I smile despite the ache in my chest and run my hand along the ridge above her eye. She leans into the touch, a sound like a deep purr vibrating through her massive skull. Then something shifts. Aspis presses her snout harder against my chest, directly over my heart, and through the bond comes something I haven't felt before. A pull — physical, visceral, like a tide surging through my veins. My muscles tighten, my heels dig into stone, and for a dizzying moment I feel what she feels: the cave walls pressing in, the ceiling too low, the water too still. The desperate, aching need for wind beneath wings that have never tasted sky. The desire crashes through our bond with such force that my knees nearly buckle. I grab her jaw to steady myself, gasping. "I am suffocating in this stone womb. My wings were built for the sky, Evelyn. Every day they grow stronger and every day the walls grow smaller. I cannot breathe down here much longer." *www.n0v(e)lW0(r)m.com* "I know, Aspis." My voice comes out ragged, stripped raw by the echo of her need. I press both palms to her face. "I feel it too. But the compound is fractured, Cassandra is still here, and if we—" "You revealed yourself, and the hall knows my name. What remains to hide?" "The timing. We need the household to see me as something other than a threat before they see us in the sky. If we fly now, every warrior who doubts me will see confirmation that Draven's judgment—" "I have lived in darkness since I hatched." The

words vibrate through my bones, resonant and deep. “I have been patient. I have waited while you hid, while you fought, while you bled for their acceptance. I am telling you now — soon, or I choose for us.”The ultimatum settles between us like stone.I hold her gaze, feeling the truth through every fiber of our bond. She means it. My dragon has reached the edge of what captivity will allow. “Soon,” I whisper against her scales. “I promise.”Aspis says nothing more. But her wings shift in the half-light, stretching wider, and the cave suddenly feels very, very small.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.