

First Chosen by the Dragon

8-10 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 91

Feb 25, 2026[Evelyn's POV]Thalissa stands at the edge of the training yard with her cane planted and a leather notebook open. Her bright eyes track me with the intensity of a scholar watching an experiment she's not sure won't explode. "Show me what you can do," she says. "Start with something small." I raise my right hand and reach for the moonlight — not grasping, but opening. Silver light gathers at my palm, bending the air, creating a shimmer that distorts the stone wall behind me like heat rising from pavement. "Visual distortion," Thalissa notes, scribbling. "You're bending the light spectrum around your hand. Can you extend the radius?" I push outward. The distortion ripples, expanding until the air within arm's reach of my body warps and shifts. Warriors watching from the colonnade lean forward, some squinting. "Good, now intensity." I close my fist and concentrate. The light compresses, brightening, and when I open my hand, a flash bursts from my palm — brief, blinding, sharp enough to make Thalissa flinch and the nearest warriors throw their arms over their eyes. "Controlled burst, useful in combat." She's writing fast. "What about the bond channel? Can you push the energy through Aspis?" I reach through the bond. Aspis is in the courtyard, her presence vast and alert. I feed the moonlight into our connection, and she amplifies it — the power cycles between us like current through a loop, gaining strength with each pass. My skin glows. "Careful," Aspis murmurs. "The loop builds faster than you expect." I pull back, letting the cycle dissipate. The glow fades, and my heart rate is elevated but manageable. Thalissa lowers her notebook. "You've been practicing." "Every night in the caves for the past three weeks." "It shows. The instinctive bursts I read about in Sera's reports — the ones triggered by fear — those were raw and uncontrolled. What you just demonstrated has structure. Intention." She taps her pen against the page. "Now show me the shield." My stomach tightens. The shield is new — a sustained barrier of concentrated light, dense enough to deflect force, bright enough to disorient. In the caves, I've held it for thirty seconds before my control frays. "I haven't perfected it yet." "I need to see what happens when you sustain high-level output." I plant my feet on the flagstones and spread my hands. Through the bond, Aspis feeds me a steady current of encouragement — warm, grounding, an anchor against the tide I'm about to release. The shield forms between my palms. Silver light condenses into something nearly solid — a curved barrier of compressed luminescence, shimmering with patterns that shift like oil on water. I feel its weight in my muscles, my bones, the space behind my eyes where

the bond lives. Ten seconds, and the shield holds. My arms tremble with the effort of sustaining it. “Steady,” Thalissa says from behind me. “Keep the output even.” Fifteen seconds. The patterns in the light grow more complex, spiraling into geometries I don’t recognize. My breath comes harder, and sweat beads along my hairline. Twenty seconds, and the floodgate opens. There’s no warning or gradual escalation. One moment I’m holding the shield with controlled effort, and the next, power surges through me with a violence that blanks my vision. It’s like standing in a stream and having the dam break upstream — the current that was manageable becomes a wall of force that slams through every channel in my body simultaneously. Light erupts from me in a shockwave. The concussion radiates outward in a sphere of blinding silver. The flagstones crack beneath my feet — fractures racing outward in jagged lines. Thalissa stumbles backward, cane clattering. Warriors at the colonnade throw themselves sideways. *wW(w).novelw(o)rM.C00m* The bond with Aspis screams — a raw, piercing frequency that tears through our connection like wire through flesh. From the courtyard, Aspis roars, the sound shaking dust from the training yard walls.

I can’t stop it. The power flows through me faster than I can process, faster than I can channel, burning through pathways I didn’t know existed. My knees buckle. I hit the flagstones, palms slamming against cracked stone, and the light dies as suddenly as it erupted. Silence. My ears ring. My vision swims with afterimages. I’m on my hands and knees, gasping, and the flagstones where I knelt are scorched white — not blackened, but bleached. The color burned out of the stone in a perfect circle around my body. The warriors are frozen. A young sentry has pressed himself flat against the wall. Thalissa recovers first. She retrieves her cane, straightens her robes, and walks to me with steady steps. She takes my arm and helps me to my feet. My legs barely hold. Her grip is stronger than a woman her size should possess. She leans close. Her voice is quiet enough that only I can hear. “Your power is growing faster than your ability to contain it. That surge wasn’t triggered by emotion — it came from sustained output exceeding your body’s capacity to regulate the flow.” Her fingers tighten on my arm. “This is exactly what happened to Seraphine.” My hands are shaking. I look down at them — pale, trembling, faintly luminous. Traces of silver light crawl beneath my skin like veins of liquid metal, fading slowly. “How do I stop it from happening again?” “You can’t stop the growth. The power scales with the bond, and the bond deepens every day whether you intend it to or not. What you need is to expand your capacity to hold it — to build the vessel faster than the water rises.” “And if the water rises faster?” “The vessel breaks, and that’s what we’re trying to prevent.” Through the bond, Aspis pushes through the residual static of the surge. Her presence is agitated but steady — not surprised by what happened, I realize. She expected it. “We are becoming something the world hasn’t seen in three centuries,” she says. “The power will outpace your control before you’re ready. This was always going to happen — the question is whether you learn to ride the flood or drown in it.” “That’s not

comforting.”www.novelworm.com“It isn’t meant to be. It’s meant to be honest.”www.novelworm.comI turn back to Thalissa. The loremaster watches me with an expression I’ve seen on battlefield medics — clinical assessment layered over something they don’t want to feel.www.novelworm.com“What happened to Seraphine’s control?” I ask. “Did she find a way to manage the surges?”Thalissa’s face goes grim. The clinical distance cracks, and beneath it I see something raw — the particular grief of a scholar who has spent a lifetime studying a tragedy she can’t prevent from repeating.“Seraphine never found it. The surges grew stronger and more frequent. By the end, she couldn’t touch another person without the light erupting. She isolated herself from everyone who might have helped her — believed she was protecting them.”Thalissa’s voice drops.“She was alone when the Watcher came and when the judgment fell. Every account agrees on that detail. The most powerful rider in three centuries, and she died alone in a field of scorched earth with no one left who could reach her.”The training yard is still silent around us. The bleached circle on the flagstones glows faintly in the morning light.I look at my trembling hands. The silver traces have almost faded, but I can feel the power beneath — patient, growing, pressing against the walls of a vessel it will eventually outgrow.Seraphine died alone. The power consumed her because she tried to carry it by herself.I won’t make that mistake because I can’t afford to.Cedella is a passionate storyteller known for her bold romantic and spicy novels that keep readers hooked from the very first chapter. With a flair for crafting emotionally intense plots and unforgettable characters, she blends love, desire, and drama into every story she writes. Cedella’s storytelling style is immersive and addictive—perfect for fans of heated romances and heart-pounding twists.

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7-9 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 92

Feb 25, 2026www.novelworm.com[Cassandra’s POV]The message arrives at the secondary drop point behind the armory cistern, folded into a square no larger than my thumbnail. www.novelworm.comKael delivers it during the evening meal, palming it beneath the table while Harath argues with Loren about protestation wording. I lock myself in the bedchamber and unfold the parchment.Father’s cipher and hand — the precise, angular script I’d recognize anywhere.I read it once for content, and twice for detail. Three times for the information between the lines.The fleet mobilizes with twenty-eight warships, confirmed. Twelve minor house vessels committed, estimated arrival at Black Dragon waters: six

weeks. The southern approach, through the deep channels, will carry the primary fleet — visible, overwhelming, designed to pin Draven's defenses along the harbor mouth and western cliffs. But the next paragraph makes my pulse quicken. A secondary force will approach through the Shattered Coast — the rocky channel east of the compound, a maze of reefs and tidal surges marked on every chart as impassable for warships. Impassable for warships, not for longboats. Father has found a pilot. A fisherman from the Strait of Callos who ran smuggling routes through the eastern channels for twenty years. He knows the tides, the gaps in the reef line, the three-day window each lunar cycle when the water clears the worst of the stone teeth. The fleet from the south is a diversion. The bombardment, the naval engagement, the spectacle of thirty warships bearing down on Draven's harbor — all of it designed to pull defenders west while the real assault lands on the unfortified eastern shore. Two hundred warriors in longboats through the back door while every eye watches the front. I memorize the details and hold the parchment over the candle flame. It catches, curls, and blackens. I crush the ash and scatter it across the windowsill. "Kael." He enters from the main chamber and closes the door behind him. His face is composed, but I've learned to read the tension he carries in his shoulders — higher than usual tonight, pulled tight toward his ears. "The fleet sails in six weeks. Father's committed the full strength of the house, plus twelve allied vessels." "Forty ships against a coastal fortress... That's a significant engagement." www.novelworm.com "They are the distraction, and the real assault comes from the east — the Shattered Coast. Father has a pilot who knows the tidal channels. A secondary force of two hundred will land on the eastern shore while Draven's defenses are engaged at the harbor." Kael absorbs this. I watch the information settle behind his eyes, watch him build the tactical picture the way I taught him — approach routes, timing, force distribution. "The eastern shore is barely defended," he says. "Low walls, no catapult positions, a single patrol route along the cliff path." "Which is exactly why Father chose it. I need you to confirm those details. Everything you can observe about the eastern defenses — wall heights, patrol frequency, any recent construction or reinforcement. The assault force needs to know what they're landing against." He nods slowly and then stops. "What happens to the people in this compound when the assault comes?" I look up from the windowsill where I've been scattering the last of the ash. "They fight or they surrender. That's war." "Some of them will die." "That's also war." "Emmon is twenty-two years old, Cassandra. He showed me a drawing his younger sister sent him. He keeps it folded in his boot."

"And my sister is bonded to a stolen dragon in the bedchamber of our family's enemy. Everyone in this compound chose their allegiance when they accepted Draven's authority. The consequences of that choice are theirs to bear." Kael holds my gaze for a moment longer than comfortable. His jaw works, the muscles bunching beneath the skin, and I see the question he won't ask because he already knows my answer: does any of it matter to

you?“Map the eastern defenses,” I say. “I need it within three days.”“Got it.” He turns toward the door. His hand rests on the latch for two full seconds before he opens it and leaves. The hesitation lingers in the room like smoke. I push it aside. Kael’s conscience is a liability I’ve noted and will manage when necessary. For now, he is functional, and for now, that’s enough. I have larger concerns. When Father’s fleet arrives — when the harbor erupts in fire and the eastern force slides through the Shattered Coast like a blade between ribs — I need to be free. Not locked in a guest chamber with Harath’s protestations and Loren’s legal arguments for company. Free to move through the compound and find Evelyn. www.NoVelWorm.com The prophecy demands a confrontation. Father’s fleet can take the compound, seize the dragon, and dismantle Draven’s house stone by stone, but the prophecy requires my hand. My blade and my blood against hers. I begin mapping the extraction in my mind. The guard rotation has a twenty-minute overlap at dawn — single sentry instead of two. The bedchamber window overlooks a service courtyard one story below — a manageable drop. The service courtyard connects to kitchen passages running beneath the main corridors. In peacetime, every route is watched. But when forty warships appear on the horizon and the compound erupts into defensive mobilization, routines shatter. Guards abandon interior posts to man the walls. Sentries rush toward the threat rather than watching prisoners. In the chaos of a military assault, a locked door is just a suggestion. I pace through the timeline. The fleet appears, and Draven scrambles. The compound empties its garrison to man fortifications. In those first frantic minutes, through the window, across the courtyard, into the kitchen passages. The compound opens like the map I’ve been building in my skull for weeks. Find Evelyn. I press my hand to the window glass. The compound sleeps below. Somewhere in the lord’s wing, my sister sleeps beside a man who thinks he can protect her. He can’t. The prophecy is older than his house, older than his bloodline. It will be fulfilled regardless of who stands in its path. My reflection stares back at me from the dark glass — copper hair, green eyes, the face Father built into a weapon. The prophecy has to be done. If it doesn’t — if the witch was wrong, if Father was wrong, if everything I’ve done and everything I’ve become was built on a misreading — then there’s nothing underneath me. No foundation or purpose. Just a woman who destroyed her sister’s life for nothing. That possibility is more terrifying than any war. I press harder against the glass until my palm aches, and I don’t let myself think about it again.

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Feb 25, 2026[Evelyn's POV]Sera calls everyone, literally.Servants who polish the silverware and scrub the hearth stones. Cooks who have fed this compound through drought and plenty. Stable hands with straw in their hair and grime under their fingernails.The invisible backbone of the household, summoned to the great hall on a Tuesday afternoon with no explanation beyond "attendance required."They file in with wary uncertainty. Most have never stood in the great hall for anything but feast days and funerals.They cluster in groups — kitchen staff together, stable hands along the back wall, laundry women near the colonnade. Warriors line the edges.Www.NoVelWo(r)M.cóml stand beside Draven at the front of the hall. My hands hang at my sides and every instinct I possess screams at me to fold them, to hide, to make myself smaller. I keep them where they are.www.NoVelWo(r)M.cómlSera steps forward and carries no notes. Whatever she's about to say lives behind her eyes, organized with the precision I've come to associate with everything she does."Most of you know that the woman standing beside Lord Draven is Evelyn, the daughter of Lord Aldric of Mintia from the House of the Blue Dragon."Her voice carries to every corner without effort."Some of you have formed opinions about what that means. I'm here to give you the facts so those opinions can be informed rather than inherited."www.NoVelWo(r)M.cómlShe begins."Evelyn was identified as a threat by her own family before she could walk. Her younger sister, Cassandra — currently detained in our guest wing — was designated the heir through a process of deliberate erasure. Evelyn's dragon egg, which had bonded to her in the shell, was stolen from her chambers while she slept and awarded to Cassandra in a public ceremony."The hall is silent. I feel every pair of eyes like a physical weight."When Evelyn protested the theft, her sister staged an incident in the training grounds — threw a stone at her own head and blamed the injury on Evelyn. Their parents banned Evelyn from training based on that fabrication. She was eight years old."My throat tightens. Sera warned me, and I agreed — the household needs to hear it from someone they trust, presented as evidence.But knowing doesn't prepare you for your worst memories being catalogued aloud before strangers.A murmur runs through the hall. Someone near the back shifts uncomfortably."She was isolated from peers, denied education beyond basic literacy, excluded from every social function her sister attended. When she was sixteen, her betrothal was arranged and then deliberately sabotaged by Cassandra, who seduced the intended groom and presented the humiliation as evidence of Evelyn's inadequacy."I stare at the far wall. Every wound named aloud feels like being stripped bare — the skin pulled back, the bone exposed, every ugly thing I survived laid out for people I'll face tomorrow in the meal hall."When the family discovered that Evelyn's egg

had bonded to her despite being given to Cassandra, they planned her disappearance and elimination. Evelyn overheard her parents discussing the arrangement and fled that night. She arrived in Black Dragon territory with nothing. She was thrown from a cliff by a border patrol and survived only because Lord Draven's dragon intervened."Sera pauses. The silence is absolute — the kind that has texture, that you could press your hand against and feel it push back."I present this as an intelligence assessment, not an appeal for sympathy. These facts are corroborated by Alliance records, intercepted Mintian correspondence, physical evidence, and my own professional evaluation conducted over the past several weeks."Her dark eyes sweep the hall."What you do with this information is your own decision, but you deserve to make that decision based on truth rather than assumption."She steps back, and the hall holds its breath. Nobody speaks. The silence stretches — five seconds, ten, fifteen — and the weight of it presses against my chest until I can barely breathe. I stand there, exposed, and wait for whatever comes next.

A woman steps forward from the cluster of kitchen staff. Middle-aged, flour still dusting the creases of her elbows. I barely recognize her: we've exchanged maybe a dozen words in passing, always brief, always practical. Her name is Margit, and her son trains in the yard. She looks at me. "My boy Brennan says you helped him with his shield work when you were just another trainee who happened to notice he was dropping his guard." Her voice is plain, unhurried, carrying the practical weight of a woman who has spent her life measuring flour and raising children and not having time for nonsense. www.NoVelwOrM.com "He says you stayed after drills for three days running to make sure he had it right." I nod. My throat is too tight for words. Margit holds my eyes. "That's what I know about you. The rest of this" — she gestures broadly at the hall — "is for the lords to sort out. But I know what my boy told me, and he doesn't lie to his mother." She steps back into the cluster of kitchen staff. A few women pat her shoulder. It's not a declaration of loyalty. It's something smaller and more honest — a refusal to let the new information erase what was already real. A woman who trusts her son's judgment over a bloodline's reputation. Others murmur. A stable hand near the back nods. The room doesn't erupt in support. Nobody rushes forward with pledges or embraces. The household sits with the information the way it sits with everything — practically, carefully, deciding at its own pace. It's enough. It has to be enough. The hall disperses. I hold my position until the last of them file out, because if I move before it's over, I'll shatter. Draven touches my elbow. "There's a room off the eastern corridor." I follow him through the side passage. The room is small — a storage space, mostly empty, cool stone walls and a single shuttered window. He closes the door behind us and steps back. He doesn't touch me or reach for me. He just stands three feet away with his hands at his sides and waits. The shaking starts in my hands and climbs through my arms, my shoulders, my chest. Every wound Sera named is alive beneath my skin — the beatings, the stone, the stolen egg, the parents who planned my

death over dinner like logistics. Hearing it described without emotion makes it real in a way my own memories never did. Sera's account is clear: clean and undeniable. This happened to me, all of it, and a room full of strangers just heard every piece. The first sob tears loose before I can stop it. I reach for Draven. My hands find his chest, his shoulders, the solid warmth of his body. He catches me. His arms close around me and hold — not gently but with the full, steady pressure of a man who understands that right now I need to feel something solid enough to keep me from coming apart. I press my face into his neck and shake, and he holds on, and neither of us speaks, and the small stone room absorbs every sound I make without giving any of it back. Cedella is a passionate storyteller known for her bold romantic and spicy novels that keep readers hooked from the very first chapter. With a flair for crafting emotionally intense plots and unforgettable characters, she blends love, desire, and drama into every story she writes. Cedella's storytelling style is immersive and addictive—perfect for fans of heated romances and heart-pounding twists.

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Feb 25, 2026 [Draven's POV] I find her on the eastern wall, standing at the parapet with her arms wrapped around herself, watching the sea. The moonlight catches her silver hair and I have to stop walking. The ache is physical — a compression behind my ribs, sharp enough to steal breath. Not pain. The particular devastation of seeing something so fierce and fragile that looking feels like holding a blade by the edge. She doesn't turn, but she knows I'm here. I cross the remaining distance and wrap my arms around her from behind. She stiffens for half a second, then leans back against my chest. Her body is still trembling — faint, residual, the aftershock of what Sera's address cost her. "You're shaking," I say against her hair. "It's been happening on and off since the hall. My body apparently has opinions about being publicly dissected." "Do you want to go inside?" "No, the wind helps; and the sea doesn't care about my bloodline." We stand like that for a while. The waves break against the cliffs below, rhythmic and indifferent, and the salt air carries the cold that comes off deep water after dark. "Tell me something that doesn't matter," she says. *www.novellworld.com* "What?" "Something small, something that has nothing to do with prophecies or wars or houses. I need to think about something that doesn't weigh anything." *Ww@.noVe/(w)ôRm.čoml* I rest my chin on the top of her head. "I hate fish." She turns slightly in my arms. "You live on a coastal fortress and you hate fish?" "Every kind. Khaira

loves it — she'd eat nothing but tuna if I let her. But every time the kitchen serves grilled mackerel, I have to keep my face neutral while my stomach tries to leave through my throat." "The feared Lord of the Black Dragon, brought low by a fillet." "What about you?" "Porridge, of any kind and preparation. My mother used to serve it cold as punishment — plain oats, no salt, no honey. Three meals of it when I'd done something wrong, which was most days." She pauses, and I feel the tension in her shoulders shift — not deeper, but sideways, into something she can hold. She continues. "I used to steal bread from the kitchen in Mintia. I waited until the cook's back was turned and hid rolls in my sleeves, and I got caught twice. The second time, my father locked me in my room for three days." "For stealing bread?" "For being hungry without permission and wanting things I hadn't earned — that was the real offense." The words land in my chest and stay there, quiet and heavy. "Khaira once ate a fishing boat," I say. Evelyn turns fully in my arms, eyebrows raised. "An entire boat?" "She was young, barely two years bonded. A fisherman moored his skiff too close to the roosts, and Khaira decided the hull was a very large, very crunchy fish. Ate half of it before I could reach her. I had to pay the man with my father's ceremonial silver, and the father didn't speak to me for a week." She laughs. The sound hits me like a wave. Not the controlled breath that passes for amusement in polite company — a real laugh, full and startled, breaking loose from somewhere she keeps locked. Her head tips back, and her eyes crinkle. The moonlight catches the moisture still clinging to her lashes from earlier, and for a moment she is just a woman laughing on a wall, unburdened, young, alive. www.novellworm.com

I watch her laugh and the truth I've been circling for months lands with the full weight of certainty. I want this woman beside me permanently. Not as a political arrangement or protected asset under the Luminary Protocol. As a consort! The formal bond — public, irrevocable, declaring before every house in the realm that the Lord of the Black Dragon chose the eldest daughter of Mintia and would choose her again. The thought terrifies me. The scale of it, the permanence, the political earthquake it would trigger across every allied house and enemy territory. The vulnerability of standing before the realm and saying this is mine and I am hers and nothing changes that. The terror is how I know it's right. The only decisions that have ever mattered were the ones that frightened me. Lyanna stirs. It's not a ghost, as I stopped believing in them years ago. It's a memory. Her face, the way she'd tilt her head when she thought I was being dense about something obvious. She would have laughed at me for taking this long. She would have liked Evelyn, — the stubbornness, the fire, the refusal to stay down — and she would have told me to stop circling and land. I don't propose. The timing is wrong — war bearing down, the household still fractured, her wounds still fresh from the hall. She deserves more than a desperate declaration on a wall with salt wind stealing the words. She deserves ceremony and intention and the knowledge that it's a choice made in daylight, not a reaction to crisis. But I take her hand, lift it, and press my lips to her knuckles

— gently, deliberately, letting the contact say what my mouth won't. Her fingers tighten around mine. Her eyes find my face, and I see her reading the unspoken words the way she reads everything — carefully, completely, with the particular attention of someone who learned early that what people don't say matters more than what they do. She doesn't ask. She holds my hand and leans into my shoulder, and the words I haven't spoken sit between us, warm and patient, willing to wait. The sea breaks below and the moon tracks across the sky. For five minutes, the world shrinks to two people on a wall and the silence between them that holds more than language can carry. Then footsteps, running. Sera's runner — a young woman named Lira — appears at the stairwell, breathing hard. "My lord, Commander Sera sends an urgent word: intelligence report, priority one." The warmth drains from the moment like water through cracked stone. I straighten, and Evelyn's hand slips from mine as I turn. "Report." "The second spy, my lord. Commander Sera has confirmed the coded channel Venna established is still active. Someone inside the compound has been feeding it fresh intelligence — updated patrol routes, defensive positions, the timing of the Alliance loremaster's arrival. The information is current as of yesterday." My expression goes cold. I feel it happen — the warmth of the last ten minutes retreating behind the mask I wear when the world demands a lord instead of a man. "Who?" "She doesn't have a name yet, my lord, but she says she has a plan to flush the source. She's requesting your authorization to proceed." "Tell her she has it: full authorization and whatever she needs." Lira nods and disappears down the stairwell at a run. I stand at the parapet, the sea wind cutting through my shirt, and the gentle minutes we just shared feel like something viewed through glass. Real but unreachable, separated from the present by the cold fact that someone in my household is still feeding my enemies the information they need to destroy us. *Worm*. © 2017 Evelyn stands beside me. Her hand finds mine again — not tender this time, but firm. A grip that says I'm here and we deal with this together. I hold on. The moonlight bends around her fingers, silver traces crawling beneath her skin, and the war that's coming suddenly feels very close. Cedella is a passionate storyteller known for her bold romantic and spicy novels that keep readers hooked from the very first chapter. With a flair for crafting emotionally intense plots and unforgettable characters, she blends love, desire, and drama into every story she writes. Cedella's storytelling style is immersive and addictive—perfect for fans of heated romances and heart-pounding twists.

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Feb 25, 2026[Evelyn's POV]The knock comes at the council chamber door during Draven's evening briefing, and when the guard announces the visitor, the air in the room changes. "Venna requests a private audience, my lord." Draven's pen stills. He glances at me — a quick look that asks whether I want to leave. I don't move. "Send her in." Venna enters in unmarked leathers, with no sigil or braid. She's thinner than the last time I saw her — hollows beneath her cheekbones deeper, cords in her neck more pronounced. Demotion is eating her from the inside. Her gaze finds me standing beside Draven's chair. Her jaw tightens — a flex she controls so fast it's almost invisible. "Speak," Draven says. Venna plants herself three paces from the desk, feet apart, hands clasped behind her back. The stance of a soldier delivering a report, even without the rank to justify it. "The coded correspondence channel I created with Cassandra during the summit. Someone is using it." Draven's expression doesn't change. "How do you know this?" "I checked the dead drop myself three days ago." She holds his stare without flinching. "Not out of treachery but paranoia. When you stripped my rank, I assumed Sera's team would dismantle the infrastructure — the drop points, the cipher, the relay chain. I wanted to confirm it was done." "It wasn't." "The primary drop in the kitchen corridor was active. Fresh messages, recent ink, intelligence I never shared during my contact with Cassandra. Patrol schedules updated since my demotion. An analysis of the eastern approach — tidal patterns, reef coverage, the three-day window when shallow-draft vessels can navigate the channel." My pulse spikes. The eastern approach — the weakness I showed Draven on the map. Someone with current access is feeding that information outward. "I never had that intelligence," Venna continues. "I lost access to operational briefings the day you demoted me." "Whoever is using my channel has clearance I no longer possess." She adds. "They're seeing duty rosters, defensive assessments, briefing summaries — material that flows through the senior command structure or the administrative corridors adjacent to it." Draven leans forward. "You're telling me someone with active intelligence clearance has co-opted the channel you built for Cassandra and is running it independently." "That's what the evidence shows. The cipher is mine — I designed it, and whoever is using it has the full rotation key. Either they obtained it from Cassandra during the summit, or they were part of the original network I didn't know about." "A second operative, already embedded before you made contact." "Possible... Or someone Cassandra recruited separately using the access my channel provided. Either way, the flow is current and detailed, and this isn't leftover intelligence — it's active espionage." [www.NoV@eLw@rM.co\(m\)](http://www.NoV@eLw@rM.co(m)) Silence fills the chamber. I watch Draven's hands on the desk — still, flat, the controlled stillness of a man calculating distances and trajectories. www.NoV@eLw@rM.com "Why are you bringing this to me?" he asks. The question hangs between them. It's not an accusation but a genuine inquiry. Venna's jaw works, and I see the effort it costs her to answer without defensiveness. "The channel I created is being used to transmit intelligence that will get people in this compound killed. Patrol schedules tell an enemy where your guards aren't. Eastern approach analysis tells

them where to land an assault force. Defensive assessments tell them where to hit and where to avoid.” Her voice stays level, but something raw pushes against the underside of it.

“I made a mistake. I created infrastructure for what I believed was a justified act of loyalty, and that infrastructure is now being used for something I didn’t authorize and can’t control.” “You could have stayed silent and let Sera’s investigation find it on its own.” “Her investigation might find it in time or... might not. If a fleet is coming — and I’ve heard enough whispers to know one is — then ‘might’ isn’t acceptable.” Draven studies her — the same thorough, unhurried assessment I’ve watched him level at maps and enemies, reading her completely, without sentiment. He takes the intelligence without a word and pulls a fresh sheet of parchment toward him and begins noting the details. He gives her nothing in return: no acknowledgment, no gratitude, and no indication of whether this changes anything between them. Just the pen scratching on parchment, recording what she brought. www.novèlworld.com Venna accepts it with rigid composure. She’s been a soldier long enough to know that intelligence delivered is intelligence delivered — you don’t choose how it’s received. She turns toward the door. At the threshold, she pauses and doesn’t look back. “I don’t need your forgiveness. I need the people in this compound to survive what’s coming.” The door closes behind her. Her footsteps fade down the corridor, and the council chamber settles into the particular silence that follows something significant. Draven is already moving. He sends for Sera and reorganizes his notes — cross-referencing Venna’s dead-drop information with the existing investigation. “The eastern approach analysis,” he says, half to me, half to the page. “That information came from our briefing three weeks ago. Limited distribution — council members, senior commanders, and the administrative staff who file the reports.” “That’s still a dozen people.” “Sera has already narrowed it to forty based on access patterns. Venna’s data cuts that further. If the eastern approach analysis appeared in the channel within days of our briefing, the source has direct access to council documents — not secondhand.” “That narrows it to what? Eight? Ten?” “Fewer, once we cross-reference with the other intelligence Venna identified. The patrol schedules were updated on specific dates. Whoever transmitted them had access on those dates and the opportunity to reach the dead drop.” Sera arrives within minutes. Draven briefs her with clipped efficiency, and I watch her face shift as the new data restructures her investigation. She pulls a folded list from her vest and begins striking names, adding annotations. “This changes the geometry,” she says. “Give me forty-eight hours, and I’ll have a name.” She leaves at a pace that’s nearly a run. Draven sits back in his chair and exhales — a long, slow release that carries the weight of everything this evening has delivered. I look at him. He’s staring at the closed door where Venna exited, and his expression holds something he didn’t let her see. He won’t say it aloud, but I caught what his eyes admitted in the moment before Sera arrived — the recognition of what Venna just did. She walked into a room with the woman she blames for her downfall, laid intelligence

on the table that could have been her leverage or her bargaining chip, and asked for nothing. She chose the house over her pride and stripped of everything that defined her, choosing to protect the people who watched her fall. It doesn't erase anything. The treason stands, and the trust she broke is still broken. But it matters — the way four sparring partners out of thirty mattered, the way Margit's words mattered. Small acts of integrity in a house full of fractures. *www(n)@ve(l)@orm.com* Draven catches my eye across the desk. Neither of us speaks. The hunt for the second spy just narrowed to days, and the war it serves is already on the water. 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 — 96

Feb 25, 2026 [Draven's POV] The war council fills the chamber with the smell of leather and lamp oil and the particular tension of soldiers who know what's coming. I've assembled the full command. Sera to my right, Theron at my left, and Riven leaning against the far wall. The senior warriors — Torren, Maret, Seren, a dozen others — lined along the table. "Aldric is bringing a fleet," I say. "Twenty-eight warships confirmed, twelve allied vessels from minor houses along the Strait. Estimated arrival: four to five weeks. This is an invasion." The room absorbs it. Torren's scarred hands flatten on the table, and Maret's eyes narrow. "Additionally, we have confirmed that a second intelligence channel is active inside this compound. Someone with access to operational documents has been feeding Mintia real-time data. Sera is running a counter-intelligence operation to identify the source." Sera steps forward. "We've seeded three distinct pieces of false information through separate access points. Each version contains a unique detail — a fabricated patrol change, a fictional supply route, and an invented meeting schedule. Only one version passes through each access point. Whichever detail surfaces in the enemy's next communication tells us exactly which channel the leak is using." "How long before we know?" Torren asks. "The dead drop is monitored daily. If the source maintains their current frequency, we'll have confirmation within forty-eight hours." Torren nods. He's not satisfied — satisfaction isn't in his vocabulary — but he accepts the logic. "Strategic assessment," I say, and turn to Riven. My brother pushes off the wall and

approaches the map. The warriors watch him with a respect that has everything to do with the scars on his knuckles. “We can’t match Aldric in open water. Forty ships against our coastal fleet of twelve is a losing proposition no matter how you arrange the numbers—” He traces the coastline with his finger. “But we don’t need to fight in open water. The approaches to this compound are a defender’s dream — narrow channels, submerged reefs, tidal patterns that change the navigable depth every six hours. Aldric’s numerical advantage evaporates the moment he enters our coastal waters.” “The harbor approach?” Theron asks. “Fortified. Cliff batteries on both flanks, harbor chains at the narrows, catapult positions covering two hundred yards. An attacking fleet comes through a single file. We bleed them for hours.” “He won’t come single file,” Seren says. “He’ll bombard from a distance, then rush the narrows with sacrificial ships.” “Which is why we don’t rely on the harbor alone.” Riven moves his finger east. “The western cliffs are a killing ground. The harbor narrows are a chokepoint, but the eastern approach through the Shattered Coast — we’ve always considered it impassable for warships.” “It is impassable for warships,” Maret says. “For warships, yes. For shallow-draft longboats during the spring tide — three days per cycle when the reef submerges — it’s passable. Two hundred soldiers could land on the eastern flats while we’re engaged at the harbor.” Warriors exchange glances. The Shattered Coast has been an afterthought for generations — an assumption of safety that no one questioned. [www.NoVeLwo\(r\)m.com](http://www.NoVeLwo(r)m.com) “Who identified this vulnerability?” Torren asks. “Evelyn,” I say. “She mapped our entire coastline during her time with the fishing patrols. The tidal patterns, the reef cycles, the navigable channels. She brought it to me three weeks ago.” Torren’s expression doesn’t change, but something moves behind his eyes — the veteran recalculating, again, what this woman represents. “The eastern approach needs a dedicated defense force,” Riven continues. “Independent command, positioned to intercept a landing party before they can establish a beachhead. If Aldric’s secondary force comes through the Shattered Coast, they need to meet resistance the moment they hit shore.” The discussion sharpens. Theron raises supply logistics, and Maret argues for concentrating at the harbor. Riven counters that a screening force against two hundred is a speed bump. [www.NoVeLwo\(r\)m.com](http://www.NoVeLwo(r)m.com) Sera weighs in — if the spy is neutralized, Aldric loses his window, and the eastern assault becomes a blind gamble. I listen. The voices layer over each other — professional, focused, urgent. I notice something that settles into my chest like a breath I’ve been holding for weeks. The warriors are engaged. Not fractured by politics, not whispering about Evelyn’s bloodline. They are soldiers facing a fleet, and the fleet has given them something clearer to fight than their own doubts. War simplifies; it strips ambiguity from a room and replaces it with geometry — approach angles, supply lines, kill zones.

The council ends with assignments distributed. Warriors file out with purpose. Torren pauses at the door, looks back — a long, unreadable look — then leaves. “Riven, stay, please.” My

brother stops mid-stride. The door closes behind the last warrior, and we're alone. "The eastern flanking force. I want you to command it." He turns. "Independent command?" "Answerable only to me. You pick your fighters, you position them, you make the tactical calls on the ground. If the longboats come through the Shattered Coast, you're the wall they hit." "That's a significant amount of trust for a man you've spent the last six months worrying about." "I've spent the last six months worrying about you because you're reckless, not because you're incompetent. There's nobody in this compound I'd rather have holding that flank." www.novelworm.com The casual irreverence cracks, and beneath it I see the brother who grew up in my shadow and spent his life proving he could stand on his own. "I'll hold it," he says. We look at each other. The silence holds everything we can't say — fear that the fleet will come and one of us might not survive. Also, there is the pride that exists between brothers who've never learned to speak it, and the possibility that this is the last campaign we fight together. Riven nods — curt, final. He leaves, footsteps carrying the weight of command he didn't have when he walked in. www.novelworm.com Sera lingers. She's been by the window, quiet through the exchange with Riven, waiting with the patience of someone carrying information that changes everything. "The false detail surfaced," she says. My pulse kicks. "Which one?" "The fabricated patrol changed. It was seeded through the administrative document flow — the reports that pass through the clerks' office before being filed in the records hall." "An administrative servant." "Someone with access to document traffic. Every report that moves between the council chamber and archive crosses their desk." She pulls a folded paper from her vest: "No military clearance or combat training, but the kind of person you walk past fifty times without remembering their face." "Recruited when?" "After Venna's channel was established. Cassandra used Venna's infrastructure to identify someone with access and cultivated them separately. A secondary asset — Venna never knew they existed." "Name?" Sera unfolds the paper and holds it out. I read the name, but it means nothing — a face I've passed in corridors without a glance, a person so embedded in the household's mundane machinery that their presence registered as furniture. "I'm closing the net tonight," Sera says. "Quiet extraction, no alarms, and no spectacle. By morning, the channel goes dark." She takes the paper back and leaves. The door closes, and I stand alone in the war room with the map of my coastline spread before me and the knowledge that the invisible enemy has a name. By morning, one threat ends. The fleet that carries the rest of them is already on the water.

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First Chosen by the Dragon

8-10 minutes

Dreams Beyond Broken Wings — 97

Feb 25, 2026[Evelyn's POV]Sera pairs me with senior warriors. These are structured tactical drills, designed to integrate moonlight abilities with conventional combat formations. We practice two-person flanking sequences, shield-wall disruption patterns, and coordinated strikes that use light distortion to create openings a partner can exploit. "You're not a solo fighter anymore," Sera tells me before the session begins. "You're a tactical asset. That means learning to fight alongside people, not in front of them." The first pairing is Brennan, who grins through every combination and treats the moonlight flares like fireworks at a festival. The second is Seren, precise and analytical, asking sharp questions about timing and radius. The third pairing is the one that stops my breath. Torren. He walks into the ring with the rigid posture of a man fulfilling an order he didn't request. His scarred face gives nothing away. He doesn't greet me, doesn't acknowledge the strangeness of what we're about to do — just raises his shield and settles into a guard stance. "Flanking combination seven," Sera calls from the side. "Evelyn leads with distortion. Torren, you exploit the gap." We begin. The combination is complex — I generate a localized light distortion on the target's left, bending the air to create a visual displacement that makes my position appear two feet from where I actually stand. [www.moe\(v\)\(e\)/Worm.com](http://www.moe/v(e)/Worm.com) While the target adjusts to the false image, Torren drives through the exposed right side with a shield bash and blade strike. The first attempt is mechanical. Torren's timing is half a second late — he doesn't trust the distortion, keeps checking my actual position with peripheral glances instead of committing to the gap. "Again," Sera says. The second attempt improves, and the third is even better. By the seventh, Torren had stopped checking and started trusting the technique. His shield bash lands with conviction, his blade follows clean, and the wooden target takes the strike exactly where the combination intends. We drill for two hours. The conversation between us is entirely tactical, consisting of phrases like "hold the distortion longer" and "shift the angle left" and "the gap closes faster than I can reach it." Nothing personal passes between us, nothing warm. The exchange is professional in a way that feels deliberate, like a wall built from careful bricks of military protocol. Near the end, I notice something in his guard. The way he angles his shield during the combination leaves his left shoulder slightly exposed, not enough to matter in a conventional fight, but the light distortion amplifies visual errors. If an enemy adjusted to the false image, the exposed shoulder would be the first thing they'd target. "Torren, your shield angle, drop it two inches on the left during the distortion phase. The light bends perception,

and your current angle puts your shoulder in the opponent's corrected sight line."He stops and studies me with that unreadable expression. Then he adjusts the shield angle, runs the combination again, and the correction works. The shoulder disappears behind the shield edge, invisible in the distorted light. *www.nowellw.com* He nods once, a single curt dip of his scarred chin. That nod is worth more than any speech in this compound, carrying the acknowledgment of competence from a man who respects nothing except skill earned under pressure. Sera calls the session. Torren sheathes his blade, inclines his head — the formal gesture he'd offer any drill partner — and walks toward the barracks. I'm reaching for the water barrel when a shadow falls across my path. Finn. He stands three paces away, arms folded across his chest. His jaw works — muscles bunching, releasing. He's been watching from the yard's edge, probably the entire session. I waited until he was ready to speak. Not pushing him out of his comfort, enough to let him know I was still there to listen. "I keep thinking about the night in the hall," he says. "The way you stood there... All that hatred aimed at you, and you didn't flinch."

His voice is steady. The steadiness costs him, I can see it in the tendons along his forearms, the white knuckles of his folded arms. "What did you expect?" I ask. "Excuses. Or, maybe some speech about how you were different from them," he stops and stares at the ground, then back at my face before starting again. "Instead, you just... accepted it, like you'd been carrying that weight your whole life already." "It's so. In Mintia, I wasn't a daughter but a mistake my father couldn't erase. I had no voice in any decision he made. Gosh, Finn... I couldn't even leave my room without permission! His wars were fought under my family's banner, and I learned about them the same way his enemies did: after the blood was already spilled." *www.nowellw.com* "But you still carry it." "I do." "Mira says you're still you," he says finally. "That the person she became friends with didn't stop existing because a name changed. Dorian says the same — that what he knows about you from the yard matters more than what he learned in the great hall." His arms tighten across his chest. "I'm trying to figure out if they're right or if I'm betraying my family by standing in a yard with the daughter of the man who killed them." The words land like stones. "I can't answer that for you, Finn. I can't tell you what loyalty to your uncle looks like, or where the line falls between forgiving me and betraying his memory. That's yours to decide. The only thing I can tell you is that I didn't choose my father, and I didn't choose what he did, and I spent my entire life paying for the crime of being born into his house." He holds my eyes for a long time. The yard moves around us — warriors cleaning blades, Sera conferring with an instructor, wind carrying salt from the cliffs — but the space between us is sealed, airless, waiting. *www.nowellw.com* He nods and unfolds his arms. His hands hang at his sides, open and uncertain. Then he turns and walks away. Nothing is resolved, and the grief is still there with the dead uncle still between us. But the door cracked open instead of slamming shut. He came, he asked, and

he listened. When he walked away, his shoulders weren't carrying the rigid fury they held when he arrived. And that was enough for now. The rest of the afternoon passes in the haze of physical exhaustion and emotional depletion. I clean my blade, strip my training leathers, wash at the barracks basin, and make my way to the mess hall. The hall is half-full. Warriors cluster at long tables, conversations low — war preparations, supply runs, fortification schedules. I take a plate and find the empty seat at the far end, the spot I've occupied since the revelation. The seat nobody contests because nobody wants it. Three bites into the stew, someone sits across from me. Mira. She doesn't announce herself and doesn't make a speech or offer a reconciliation or explain what changed. She sets her plate down, picks up her fork, and starts eating. Her red hair falls across her face, and her expression is the practical calm she wears when she's decided something and isn't interested in discussing it. My eyes sting. The heat rushes from my chest, presses behind my lids, and my vision blurs before I can stop it. Mira looks up with her fork paused mid-air. "Don't you dare cry in the mess hall," she says. "Eat your food." I laugh, the sound is wet and broken and ridiculous, and then I eat my food. Mira eats hers. Neither of us says another word, and the silence between us holds more forgiveness than any conversation could carry. 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 — 98

Feb 25, 2026 [Draven's POV] I've fought in three wars, killed men whose faces I still remember, and held my wife while she bled out on a road that smelled like wet stone. None of it scared me as much as what I'm about to do. The great hall fills the way it did weeks ago when Evelyn stood at this same front and declared herself. Warriors along the walls. Servants and household staff crowding the back. Council members at the flanks. The room buzzes with the particular energy of people who know they've been summoned for something political — war councils are private, but assemblies are theater. [www.NoV\(e\)lWOrM.Com](http://www.NoV(e)lWOrM.Com) Evelyn doesn't know. I told Sera, who looked at me for ten silent seconds before saying "about time." I told Riven, who laughed and called me an idiot, which is how he says he's proud. I told Corwin, who pulled the relevant house law from memory and confirmed the binding language

without being asked. I didn't tell Evelyn. She stands near the front, silver hair caught in the torchlight, and when our eyes meet across the room, she frowns slightly — reading my expression, sensing something off but unable to place it. Sera closes the doors, and the hall quiets. I step forward. The floor beneath my boots is the same stone my father stood on when he declared wars and resolved disputes and made the decisions that built this house into what it is. I've stood on it a hundred times. It has never felt like this. www.novélworm.com "I've called this assembly to make a declaration under house law," I say. My voice carries to the back wall without effort — years of command have built a projection I don't have to think about. "What I'm about to propose is binding and irrevocable. It requires no vote, no council approval, and no consensus. It requires only the consent of the person I'm addressing." The room stills. I see Torren's eyes narrow. Theron's hand stops mid-reach for the cup in front of him. Mira, standing near the back with Dorian and Finn, goes absolutely rigid. www.novélworm.com I turn to Evelyn. She looks back at me, and I watch the understanding arrive — not all at once but in stages, like dawn breaking. The confusion clears. Her lips part, and her eyes widen. The color drains from her face and then rushes back, flooding her cheeks with heat. "The consort bond is the highest declaration a lord of this house can make." I say. "It is not marriage but deeper. It ties the consort's fate to the house permanently, grants standing equal to the lord's in matters of governance, and announces to every house in the realm that this person stands beside the lord as partner and equal. It cannot be dissolved or retracted. It is the lord's declaration that his judgment and his house are one with the person he chooses." The silence in the hall has weight, and I feel it pressing against my chest. "I am proposing the consort bond to Evelyn, eldest daughter of House Aldric of Mintia, bonded rider of the white dragon Aspis."

The hall freezes. Two hundred people holding their breath at the same time creates a vacuum that swallows sound. I keep my eyes on Evelyn, but my words are for the room. "She came to this house with nothing." I let the words land, each one measured. "She gave this house everything she had. She trained alongside warriors who didn't know her real name and earned their respect on skill alone, bled in our training yard, stood watch on our walls, and went out with our fishing patrols to learn coastlines she had no obligation to map." Torren shifts his weight. I catch the movement at the edge of my vision. "When Cassandra came for her with a blade in a dark corridor, she survived. When the truth came out in this hall, she stood there and took it. She didn't run or beg. She looked this household in the eye and told the truth about what she was and where she came from, and she let every person in this room decide for themselves." I pause and the torches crackle. "She identified a vulnerability in our eastern defenses that three generations of commanders missed. She has been training alongside senior warriors to develop tactics that will save lives when the fleet arrives. The war that's coming — the war her own father is bringing — she is preparing to fight it beside us." I

let the silence hold for a beat. “Anyone in this household who still questions her loyalty should examine their own. She chose this house when choosing it meant death if she was discovered. That’s a commitment most people in this room have never been asked to make.” The words settle into the hall like stones into still water. I see faces shifting — warriors processing, servants exchanging glances, Sera standing at the door with an expression that gives nothing away. Then I lower my voice. The hall is quiet enough that everyone will hear what I say next, but the tone shifts — from the lord addressing the household to the man speaking to the woman in front of him. “Evelyn.” www.moveLworm.com She’s trembling. Her hands are clenched at her sides, her silver hair catching the firelight, her violet eyes bright with something she’s holding back through sheer force of will. “I’m not offering you safety. I can’t promise that — there’s a fleet coming, and the world we’re standing in gets more dangerous every day. I’m not offering you a political arrangement or a title or a shield against what’s next.” I hold her gaze. My chest aches with the weight of what I’m about to say and the terror that she might not want it. “I’m asking you to be mine, publicly and permanently, in front of every person in this hall and every house in the realm. Whatever comes next, I’m asking you to face them beside me as my consort. As the person I chose when choosing was the most dangerous thing I could do.” Evelyn looks at me. Her eyes are wet but her jaw is set, and the combination — vulnerability and steel braided together — is everything I’ve learned about her compressed into a single expression. She opens her mouth. The hall leans forward. Two hundred bodies shifting an inch, breath held, the collective weight of a household balanced on the edge of a woman’s answer. She doesn’t speak. Her eyes hold mine, and in them I see every calculation she’s running — what this means for the household, for the war, for the prophecy, for the two of us standing at the center of forces that destroyed the last people who stood where we’re standing. The silence stretches, and the hall waits. The question hangs between us like a blade — bright, sharp, suspended in air, waiting to fall. 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

Feb 25, 2026[Evelyn's POV]www.novelworld.comThe hall is holding its breath and I'm looking at his face. The controlled intensity and the vulnerability he's letting three hundred people see. Draven, who guards his emotions the way other men guard fortresses, standing in front of his entire household with his chest cracked open and his hand extended toward a Mintian woman the world says he should despise. I think of Lyanna. The grief he buried so deep it became architecture. He just tore those walls down in front of everyone who serves him, for me. My legs carry me forward before my mind finishes calculating. I take his hand. His fingers close around mine — warm, steady, slightly trembling in a way only I can feel. "Yes," I say. "Permanently." The hall erupts. This isn't a celebration or a protest. Cheers from the left — Brennan's voice, Seren's sharp whistle. Stony silence from the right wall, warriors with folded arms. Torren stares from the colonnade, unreadable. Mira is crying — openly, without apology. Dorian claps. He doesn't stop until others join — scattered at first, then growing, a rhythm that isn't unanimous but is undeniable. The formal ceremony will come later. But the declaration is made — spoken in the language of house law, irrevocable. I am Draven's consort, his partner in everything that comes next. Draven pulls me close. Not a kiss — not here, not in front of the household. But his forehead touches mine, and his hand settles on the back of my neck, and for one suspended moment the war and the prophecy and the ancient thing watching from beyond the horizon don't exist. Just the pressure of his skin against mine, the warmth of his breath, the heartbeat I can feel through his chest where it presses against my collarbone. "Thank you," he murmurs, and only I can hear it. www.novelworld.com "You just declared political war on half the realm." "I declared the truth, and politics can catch up." Sera is already managing the room — directing servants toward the wine stores, intercepting warriors whose expressions suggest they need a conversation before they need a drink. Corwin confers with Thalissa near the council entrance. Riven catches my eye across the crowd and raises an invisible cup, grinning. The evening dissolves into controlled chaos. I accept handshakes from strangers and measured silences from people who aren't ready. www.NoV(e)lWorM.com Hours later, the compound quiets. I follow Draven to his chambers with the particular awareness of a woman who is finally walking through a door she's been standing outside for months. He closes the door behind us. The room is dim — moonlight through tall windows, a low fire in the hearth, shadows pooling in the corners. w(W)w.mov(e)IWorM.com We stand three feet apart, and the space between us hums with everything the hall didn't allow. "No more secrets," I say. "No pretending." He reaches for me. His hand curves along my jaw, thumb tracing my cheekbone, and his touch carries a quality I haven't felt before — reverence laced with hunger, tenderness with an edge sharp enough to cut. He touches me like I'm both precious and dangerous, like I might shatter or burn him and he's willing to risk either. I pull him closer by the collar of his shirt. My fingers find the buttons, the warm skin beneath, the ridged scar tissue that maps his chest in a language of old violence.

I touch him the way you memorize something you might lose — carefully, completely, pressing each detail into memory because the world is weeks from trying to take it away. His mouth finds mine. The kiss starts gentle and doesn't stay that way. His hands slide into my hair, down my spine, pulling me against him with an urgency that strips the last of the restraint we've been carrying. I arch into him, my back bowing, and the sound I make against his mouth is raw and real and nothing I'd allow anyone else to hear. We move toward the bed. Clothes shed in fragments — his shirt, my tunic, the practical layers of people who dress for war even when they're reaching for each other. His skin is hot against mine, his weight a pressure that anchors me to the present moment. Every place our bodies meet becomes a point of heat, of electricity, of the sharp-edged tenderness that comes from knowing this might be all the time we get. He is careful with me and fierce with me in equal measure. I am the same with him. The moonlight bends toward my skin without my asking — silver light pooling in the hollows of my collarbones, tracing the line of my ribs, illuminating us both in a glow that pulses with my heartbeat. Afterward, we lie tangled in sheets that smell like him. His hand traces absent patterns on my shoulder — circles, spirals, the idle geometry of a mind still processing what the day demanded. My head rests against his chest, rising and falling with his breathing. "There's something I haven't told you about the Watcher," I say. His hand pauses and resumes. "Tell me." "Aspis has been showing me more. The watching presence — it's not just observing but measuring us. Every interaction between the white and black bloodlines, every choice we make, every time the old patterns repeat or break. The prophecy is a living test, and the Watcher is the one administering it." "Thalissa told me something similar. The entity judges whether the riders are worthy of the power they carry. If it decides we aren't—"

"Seraphine... Everything collapses." "Yes." The moonlight shifts across the ceiling. My fingers trace the scar on his ribs — the long one, the one he got defending a border that doesn't exist anymore. "What do we do about something like that?" I ask. "An ancient force watching us, judging whether we deserve to exist? How do you fight something that isn't an army?" His hand settles on the back of my neck — the same gesture from the hall, warm and grounding. "We give it nothing to judge us for. We make the choices that break the cycle instead of feeding it. We do what Seraphine couldn't — we hold onto each other instead of pulling apart." "That simple?" "Nothing about this is simple, but the principle is." He presses his lips to my temple. "We don't repeat the pattern, we end it." I settle deeper against him. Through the bond, Aspis sends warmth — a pulse of contentment, of completion, the dragon equivalent of a breath released after long holding. But beneath the warmth, threading through it like a cold current beneath a warm sea, something else. A tightening at the edges of perception, the way the air changes before a storm that hasn't reached the horizon yet. The tides turned tonight. The consort bond, the public declaration, the joining of white and black bloodlines in a way that hasn't happened in centuries — the Watcher felt it. I'm certain of that the way I'm certain of gravity. Something is closer now. Draven's arm tightens around me in

sleep, and the moonlight bends and bends, and through the bond Aspis whispers what she always whispers when the darkness presses in. "I am watching too." 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 — 100

Feb 25, 2026 [Worm.com](#) [Cassandra's POV] I can feel it through the walls how the compound is changing around me. Patrols are now changing more often behind my doors. I can hear the sounds of construction and wagons somewhere behind my window: I can't see them, but I suppose it may be related to upcoming events, inevitable anymore. War preparations! The house is bracing for what's coming. Good. Kael enters the bedchamber with the evening meal and closes the door. His face is carefully blank, but there's something behind his eyes — a hesitation I've learned to read like weather. "What happened?" I ask. "There was an assembly this afternoon, full household." "About the war?" "No," he sets the tray on the desk. "Draven proposed the consort bond to Evelyn, and she accepted." The words arrive like a blade between my ribs. I absorb the impact without moving — years of training, years of Father's lessons on never letting an enemy see where the cut lands. "The consort bond," I repeat. "Binding." "Irrevocable under house law. She has standing equal to the lord in matters of governance. The declaration was public — the entire household witnessed it." "How did they react?" "Mixed. But nobody walked out or challenged it." I turn to the window. The courtyard below is busy — warriors carrying timber, a blacksmith hauling an anvil toward the western gate. The organized urgency of people who've been told an enemy is coming. Evelyn is consort. The word rolls through my mind like acid, dissolving the careful architecture of assumption I've built around my sister's position here. She isn't a protected refugee anymore. She isn't a political inconvenience or a temporary complication. She is Lady of the House of Black Dragon, with the legal authority and household standing that title carries. My weak, pathetic sister — the girl who cried in corners, who Father called cursed — has been elevated to a position I spent my entire life training to occupy. The fury rises, but I convert it, press it down, reshape it into fuel. Fury is

energy, and energy is only useful when directed. “Anything else?” Kael hesitates. “There’s a message at the secondary drop.” “Get it.” He leaves. I stand at the window and breathe through the burning in my chest until my hands stop trembling. By the time he returns with the folded parchment, my composure is restored — sealed, locked, and operational. I decode the message by candlelight. The fleet launches in four weeks. Twenty-eight warships plus twelve allied vessels. The Shattered Coast pilot is secured — the tidal window aligns five weeks from today. Two hundred elite warriors will approach the eastern shore in longboats while the main fleet engages the harbor. I’m about to destroy the message when the final line stops me. One additional sentence, encoded in the priority cipher Father reserves for matters of house command. *W W W . n o v e l w o r m . c o m* “Lord Aldric will command from the flagship. He will be present for all operations.” I read it twice. My pulse accelerates, and this time I let it — this isn’t fury, this is recognition. Father is coming personally! “Cassandra?” Kael watches me from across the room. “What does it say?” “The fleet launches in four weeks, and the Shattered Coast approach is confirmed. And the King is coming personally, he’ll command from the flagship.” Kael absorbs this. “That’s unprecedented. He hasn’t taken the field since the Border Campaigns.” “A stolen dragon, a shamed daughter, a house that made his firstborn its lady — that’s reason enough to remind the realm what Mintia looks like when it moves.”

“Or he’s lost perspective. A lord on the field is a lord who can be killed.” “Father does the killing.” I hold the parchment over the candle and watch it burn. “He’s coming to recover Aspis, punish the Black Dragon house, and deal with the daughter who humiliated him. But he’s also coming to witness. He wants to see the prophecy fulfilled. He wants to watch Evelyn fall.” The ash drifts onto the desk. I brush it into my palm and scatter it from the window. “The consort bond changes things,” Kael says carefully. “Cassandra —” “What?” He pauses. The unnamed weight shifts behind his eyes. “When the assault comes, and the guards are pulled away, and you go after her — what happens if you’re wrong about the prophecy?” “I’m not wrong.” “But if you are, if killing Evelyn doesn’t break any cycle but only continues one...” “Then the cycle continues, and I’ll have done what Father asked and what I was born to do. That’s enough.” “Is it?” I meet his eyes. The question sits in the candlelit space between us, and for a fraction of a second, something cracks beneath the surface I’ve maintained for twenty years. A hairline fracture, thin as a thread, running through the foundation of everything I believe. I seal it, instantly, completely, the way you seal a wound before it bleeds. “Go to bed, Kael.” He holds my gaze for one more heartbeat, then turns and leaves. The door closes. The room fills with the particular silence of a woman alone with her convictions and the whisper of doubt she refuses to name. I wait until the midnight shift settles — the sound of boots changing at the corridor junction, Emmon’s voice murmuring to his replacement. Then I move to the bedchamber door. The hinges are wrought iron, bolted into stone. Heavy, solid, designed for permanence. But permanence is an illusion maintained by the assumption that no one has

the patience to dismantle it. ~~www.novelsor.com~~ I have patience. I have weeks. I pull a thin eating knife from the dinner tray — dull, inadequate for combat, perfect for what I need. I work the tip into the gap between the lowest hinge pin and its housing. The metal resists. I apply steady pressure, angling the blade, creating the smallest possible leverage. The pin shifts. A fraction of a millimeter, invisible to the eye, but I feel it through the blade's handle — the tiny give that means the mechanism is no longer perfectly seated. I move to the middle hinge. Same technique, same patient, imperceptible pressure. The work will take weeks — a few minutes each night, loosening each pin by increments so small that no inspection would detect the change. When the assault begins, the guards will be called to the walls. The corridor will empty. All I need is enough play in these hinges to push the door free from the frame. I work in silence, the knife scraping metal in strokes too quiet to carry past the stone walls. My hands are steady. The hands that held a blade against my sister in the corridor. The hands Father trained to serve the prophecy. I flex them, feeling the strength in my fingers, and I keep working. When the fleet arrives, this door becomes nothing. I will find my sister, and the prophecy will end as it was written.

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