



SALVATION HAS
ITS PRICE

ORDER
OF THE
SEERS

THE LAST SEER

CERECE RENNIE MURPHY

Order of the Seers:
The Last Seer

By

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to you. Yes, YOU—the one holding this book. Through the span of more than three years and three books, you have trusted me, waited for me, and allowed me to share this story with you. From Jessica Faulkner, the first person to ever read *Order of the Seers*, to those of you who I will never meet, know that you have touched me, inspired and humbled me.

I hope, in some way, this story has done the same for you.

May you take hold of your light and shine it for all of us to see.

Best Always,
Cerece

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. – Ephesians 6:12

Prologue

The Cover of Darkness

Bamiyan Province, Afghanistan

The high-pitched wail of the creatures was deafening as their black wings beat against the red sky. From the caves scraped out of the mountainside, the valley looked desolate, a place of ruin. Beasts ruled the heavens as the damned lay broken below. And in between, Ghazal, and what was left of her village, huddled, trapped between two hells.

Whether anyone else in the world was aware of what was happening to them, Ghazal had no way of knowing. With the preparations for her dowry, her family didn't have the money to replace their old TV when it died and the radio they had was gone—smashed to pieces in the rush to escape the creatures that now held them confined in their cave.

Barely half an hour before, while the watchmen were catching their first glimpse of something on the horizon, Ghazal's neighbors had only just entered her home, carrying news of strange sightings from around the world—Geneva, London, Paris—places she had read about, but was sure she would never see.

Though at first their forms were little more than blotches against the setting sun, the screeching sounds that echoed before them erased any question in the watchmen's minds about the nature of what approached. Whatever it was meant them harm. They sounded the alarm. Her betrothed, her father, and all the other men of the valley ran forth to set a perimeter and face the threat head on.

The clerics, the women, and the children were left behind to run and endure as best they could.

It was just as in her vision.

At the time, Ghazal had called after the men wildly, telling them it was useless, but no one listened. She had to be dragged away in her grief as she saw her vision unfold—bodies thrown, fires burning, and the sound of bones crushed under the weight of merciless feet.

Clarity came at the mouth of the precipice. She looked back at those who had carried and comforted her up the mountain one last time before stepping out onto the cliff's edge. The blue draping of her burka billowed and soared in the hot air as she leapt off into the unsuspecting clutches of a beast that had no hope of surviving what she could do.

Chapter 1: Set in Motion

They drove back to Geneva in silence, each consumed by the dread of what was to come. Occasionally, you could hear the soft vibration of Joel's thumb tapping his phone screen as he made arrangements for a plane to take them back to London, but otherwise, no one made a sound. Though unspoken, each of them understood that they were listening for the screeching sounds that had been echoing in their ears ever since they left Crane's castle.

"I'm sorry," Lilli finally said to no one in particular as she stared out of the backseat window. Joel tried to bring her closer into his one-armed embrace, but she resisted, feeling unworthy of the comfort.

"You did everything you could, Lilli. Everything," Joel whispered.

"Yeah. Maybe I did too much. Look at what's happened. There are more, you know, so many more. 'Legions', he said, and I can feel them. I know Maura can too, like a darkness spreading."

"This wasn't your fault," Joel tried again, but his words made no difference.

"He was their leader. He kept them...contained," Lilli continued. "But now...I've unleashed them. They follow no one."

"How do you know this?" Joel asked. He had no choice but to focus on her words. Her mind was moving too fast for him to comprehend.

Lilli turned from the window to face him. For an instant, she wondered why he didn't know the answer, just as she did. But then she felt it, the incongruence in their thoughts. For the first time since they'd met, she realized that her consciousness had become somehow separate from his, and the new distance hurt her deeply.

"Because I *know*." Lilli answered with tears burning in her eyes.

As Joel watched them run silently down her cheeks, he understood what she was trying to tell him. From the place she now inhabited, she could sense them clearly. She could see and understand more than she ever had before.

It won't be long, he thought. I will join you whenever we decide.

Lilli nodded her head slightly after shooting a quick glance at Liam in the driver's seat. Closing her eyes, Lilli willed her thoughts to slow until she could feel her connection with Joel restored.

Yes, she answered in relief, after we tell him. We'll wait until then.

Having resolved at least one of the many problems that plagued her mind, Lilli finally allowed herself the comfort of Joel's embrace. She'd just begun to release the tension in her body when Liam spoke up.

From the driver's seat, Liam had been listening in on their conversation, hoping to glean something that would explain what they'd witnessed. But just as she and Joel had finally gotten to the heart of his questions, they fell silent. As the quiet stretched on, Liam risked an impatient glance in the rear view mirror to find them engrossed in silent conversation.

"Ah, you guys mind sharing with the rest of the class?" Liam asked. "Who or what was that back there? I'd like to know what we're dealing with."

"The demon you saw was Crane," Lilli explained. "I killed him, but in doing that I think I've unleashed something worse. Something that was at least partially under control before, but now...now, they are more dangerous."

"The creatures..." Liam said.

"Yes, they were with Crane. But those were just a few. There are more—many more—that have been unleashed because of me."

Liam squinted at his sister in the rearview mirror. "Why do you keep saying that—'because of me'? Even you have blind spots, Lilli. How could you have known? You were fighting for your life." When she didn't immediately disregard what he'd said, Liam seized the chance to ask one of the questions he really wanted to know.

"And how did you kill him, by the way? You didn't even lift a finger. You just...spoke to him. I've never seen you do that before. When did you learn that?"

As Liam was talking, Alessandra turned in her seat to look back at Lilli. She had seen the difference in Lilli as soon as they broke down the castle door. In the heat of the moment, Alessandra hadn't given it any thought, but looking at her now, even the feeling of Lilli's presence in the Collective was different. Brighter, but somehow more dispersed.

Don't say anything! Please! Not yet.

Alessandra heard Lilli's pleading words in her mind clearer than she ever had before. Not spoken through the Collective, but directly into her thoughts.

Why? She asked silently.

Because I am becoming something different...

Alessandra eyed Lilli and Joel suspiciously, but said nothing as she processed the warning in Lilli's words—the clear notion that “different” was not a good thing in this case. *Liam*, she realized. *This is about protecting Liam.*

Yes, Lilli answered while keeping her outward attention on her brother.

Alessandra hesitated for only a moment before turning back around in her seat. Whatever Lilli had to say would hurt Liam and as far as Alessandra was concerned, there was no need to do that now.

Before her silent exchange with Alessandra was over, Lilli answered her brother aloud, as if theirs was the only conversation taking place.

“No, I didn't know this would happen, but I should have tried to see it. I was just so focused on him not hurting me or you guys that I just wanted him gone.”

Liam was quiet again, considering the few facts he knew with the guilt he could still hear in Lilli's voice.

“Listen, you did what you had to back there. Demons, flying creatures, whatever—this whole thing is crazy. Crazy. I don't think any of us could have imagined how deep this thing really is. We still don't even know exactly what we're into now, so let's just try to make it home, regroup with the others, and figure this out. We're going to figure this out, Lilli. Don't worry.”

As Liam watched her from the rearview, Lilli made sure she gave him the small smile he was looking for even though she wasn't at all sure that what he said was true.

Satisfied that Lilli seemed a little more settled, Liam shifting his attention to the shaken man directly behind him.

“What about you, Christof?” Liam asked. “Should we drop you somewhere or are you coming with us?”

Christof turned his weary gaze away from the blurred landscape outside his window to meet Liam's eyes in the mirror.

"Where else am I going to go?"

"This is absolutely insane! You said you tested Crane's DNA? How could that be right? How could there have been *no* evidence of an anomaly?" Eli paced frantically as he questioned Christof.

"I don't know," Christof stammered. "I was just Andreas' assistant. I'm not a scientist..."

"Perhaps you should sit down, Eli," Ngozi interrupted, noticing the deepening red in Eli's complexion. "This is a new species we're talking about here—something that can transform from an average-looking man to a 20-foot winged beast. I think we can put conventional wisdom aside for the moment.

"It's entirely possible, likely even, that we don't have the technology to detect whatever variant would identify him as something other than human. At least we know that these creatures are similar enough to our own kind to share some vulnerabilities. Lilli was able to kill one of these things. If she did it once, there's a chance that we can recreate the necessary conditions to do it again."

Eli knew Ngozi was right, he just couldn't stop pacing. Between the near-constant loop of grainy images on the news and his own mental replay of Lilli's account of what she'd seen and experienced, he was having a hard time reconciling the world he knew with all the evidence to the contrary.

Unlike Eli, his colleagues, Neva and Hasaam, were motionless where they stood in front of the TV. As soon as Lilli had finished her story, they turned on the news to find reports of sightings of the creatures Lilli had described all over the world. Occasionally, Eli noticed Neva writing notes as the news anchors speculated about events, but she said nothing.

Since Lilli, Joel, Liam, and Alessandra's return, the entire facility seemed to be divided into two groups—the smaller gathering that was listening in on the exchange between Eli, Christof, and Ngozi, and the larger crowd huddled in disbelief and worry around the TV.

"They're everywhere," Lilli whispered as she watched the sighting reports. "They've been here all along..."

Several heads nodded in agreement, but all eyes remained focused on the screen.

"Then why are they revealing themselves now? If they've been here all this time, hiding among us, then why are they suddenly willing to risk exposure?" Liam wondered aloud. "What do they gain?"

"Revenge," Lilli answered, turning towards Liam. All eyes turned to her. "Revenge for what I've done. For killing Crane."

"Not just you," Alessandra countered. "All of us. If what he told you was true about how he sees our power, then this is about more than just Crane. If these creatures feel the same way, then we have been reclaiming their access to our power ever since the first of us escaped. With Crane alive, maybe they thought they had a chance of regaining that control. Maybe that was the only incentive to keep themselves hidden. But now, with free Seers growing in strength and their leader gone, maybe now there is nothing to stop them from making us all suffer for what they believe was taken from them."

The sound of a woman sobbing into the camera drew their attention back to the TV. Though the woman spoke Farsi, a language no one in the room understood, the expression of raw terror and misery on her face was unmistakable.

The wave of nausea hit Alessandra so sharply, she barely made it to the bathroom in time with Liam rushing after her.

"Are you all right?" he asked as he jiggled the locked bathroom door handle.

"Yes. Go away," Alessandra groaned in between retching. "I'm just upset. I'll be out in a minute."

By the time Liam returned to the main room, Neva was writing furiously in her notebook as she tried to capture the interpreter's crude translation of the woman's account.

"They came from the sky! So many."

"How many?" the interpreter asked on the reporter's behalf.

"I don't know. I don't know. They had wings. Giant wings that blocked out the sun. They covered us in darkness. There was no time. No time. We ran."

"What happened to your daughter? Tell us what happened to your daughter."

The woman trembled silently for several moments before she could speak again, clinging to the embrace of an older woman who seemed to be the only thing keeping her upright.

"We lost her. She fell. They took her from us! I don't know. There was a light—a bright, bright light outside the cave, and then they were gone. All of them, gone!"

"What do you mean, gone? How did she fall? Did they take her?"

"I don't know. I saw her, but I don't know. She...jumped. But it can't be this. Why would she do that? Why would she leave her family? She was a good daughter."

"I don't understand. Please, we need more information!" The reporter tried, but it was no use. The mother descended into her grief as the older woman holding her fended off the reporter's attempts for further questions with a wave of her hand and a stern look of warning.

As they began walking towards a small group of mourners, the reporter finally turned back to the camera in frustration. "What truly happened here...what happened to the young woman and the terrible beasts that descended on this remote corner of Afghanistan, we may never--"

"Jim!" the cameraman exclaimed as he saw the older woman return, reaching out her wizened hand to catch their translator's attention.

"She warned us, before they came. She saved us," she whispered to him intently in Farsi. "Seer. She was Seer."

There was a rush of commotion around them as Jim waited impatiently for the translator to convey her message, but by the time he understood enough of her message to ask what she meant, the old woman had disappeared.

Neva paused the broadcast then, and turned toward Lilli pensively.

Instinctively, Joel drew closer to Lilli, as they prepared to cautiously answer the barrage of questions they knew were coming.

"Do you think she was able to do what you did, Lilli, to defeat them?" Neva asked.

"I don't know," Lilli answered.

"She couldn't have," Liam interjected. "There's no trace of that girl. She could be dead, whereas Lilli is obviously fine."

Lilli kept her expression as neutral as possible as she avoided Liam's gaze.

"Well, regardless, our circumstances have changed," Neva continued. "I agree with Alessandra. There is more to this than just you, Lilli. There is a reason they are revealing themselves now. Whatever they are, they have chosen to exist in secrecy up until they first revealed themselves to us in Berlin—when they were chasing Liam and Alessandra. This started back then. I think our entire operation is a threat to them.

"What we know about the fallacy of the genetic marker, what we are trying to do with the Restoration Project, all of it threatens to destroy their ability to use Seers as a means of control—possibly forever. Who knows if the restoration process will be passed down genetically? But more than that, now they know that without the Luridium, Seers have the power to destroy them. Maybe the threat of the Seers and what we know is severe enough to make them come out of hiding just to ensure their survival."

The room was still for a moment as they each reflected on the pieces that Neva had put together before Jared spoke up.

"If we're the key to getting rid of them, then teach us, Lilli. Tell us how you did it," Jared urged.

"I'm not sure. I've never done it before," Lilli began, grateful that Liam had left the room to check on Alessandra again. "Ummm, I think it could--"

"Be dangerous," Joel finished. "Lilli's powers have always been unique. This was something even she wasn't prepared for. If we can really do this, then we will find a way to do it, but let's not rush into anything."

Seeing Liam reenter the room with a clearly weakened Alessandra, Joel continued, "As Liam mentioned, the girl in Afghanistan may be missing or worse. We don't want that to happen to any of us unprepared. So let's take a minute to figure out exactly what happened, with Lilli and in Afghanistan, before we make any moves to--"

Joel's voice was interrupted by the sound of Christof's cellphone ringing in a tone that was reserved for only one person. Embarrassed by the interruption, Christof fumbled with the screen before finally answering.

"Andreas?"

"So, you are alive," Andreas answered, sounding more irritated than relieved. "Did you find Crane? Where is he?"

It surprised Christof how pleased he was to deliver the news.

"He's dead."

There was a long pause before Andreas asked his next question. "Where are you?"

Christof's hesitation as he looked around the room confirmed Andreas' suspicions.

"I know you're with them. Give the phone to whoever is in charge. Tell them we want to talk."