

THE
WATCHERS
THE
SILVER PHOENIX



DEIRDRA EDEN



The Silver Phoenix

by

Deirdra Eden

Book Six of *The Watchers Series*

————— *For the Original Edition* —————

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DEDICATION



To my wonderful Sanctuary family.

CHAPTER ONE

EREBUS'S NEW TARGET

"THERE IS DOOM WAITING FOR YOU. It grows inside your belly every day—a super being even more powerful than the Immortals. I couldn't have planned this better. You and Azrael have created your own demise. Starfire will be mine."

The white moonlight melted with the orange firelight and danced off the ivory parchment in the cold longhouse. Zacaris lowered the letter and looked at Azrael and I. "It's signed 'King Erebus'. Apparently he thinks he is king now."

Azrael tucked me under his arm, holding me close. The shock and sickness that comes with being pregnant had passed and I was actually excited to have a baby. Now my baby was the Shadow Legion's number one target.

Azrael blood and mine had combined to create our baby. Only a monster like Erebus would think to drain the blood out of a helpless newborn. A new flood of questions washed over me. How were we going to protect our baby? Where on this Earth could we go to raise our child in peace? Was there a Sanctuary fortified enough to protect our unique family?

I buried my face in my hand and wiped away my tears. Lately, it seems all I did was cry. Azrael said it was because I was pregnant, but losing my powers, being hunted by Shadow Queens, Truth-Twisters ruining my reputation, and now this threat from Erebus was more than enough to make anyone cry.

Eva shifted her weight and wrung her hands together, "So he knows," she said, realizing all hope of keeping our pregnancy a secret was extinguished.

Zacaris stood with the letter in his hand as if waiting for us to make a decision about what to do. We only had three months until the baby would be born. I looked at Azrael for any insight or suggestion. Azrael was my rock. I could always count on him to stay imperturbable. He had been excited from the moment we discovered our pregnancy, but now worry clouded his face. I had never seen him like this, and it made me realize I needed to be stronger now, more than ever.

"Azrael?" I caught his attention. He glanced at me before his gaze darted back to the letter. "What are you thinking?" I begged, hoping he had something comforting to say. Maybe he was coming up with a plan to save our baby, or perhaps he thought the situation was hopeless. It was times like this I wish I had the superpower to read minds.

The tendons in his arms strained as he pressed his lips into a hard line. Azrael finally opened his mouth but struggled to get the air to speak. "I need to face him." His voice was quiet, but fierce. Azrael finally looked at me for longer than a second and said more surely, "I need to meet Erebus head on in battle." Azrael put his hand over the hilt of the Flaming Sword and relaxed it there. He always carried it now, along with his Shield of Light made by King Samuel.

"Azrael!" I scolded before Zacaris had the chance. "That is a horrible idea. Erebus can only be defeated with Starfire. It takes both our powers combined to make Starfire and right now . . ." I

trailed off and looked down at my growing belly. “I don’t have any powers and you can’t make Starfire without me.”

Eva had assured me that my powers would return as soon as the baby was born. My Lifelight was also shining brighter than usual. All this was normal for Neviah women, but I hated being so helpless, especially when there was so much at stake. I was accustomed to seeing Zacaris angry, but now he looked like he was about to explode with rage. He clenched his fists tighter and leaned against the fireplace mantel of the longhouse.

Eva stood up from the chair. I thought she would rush to him to calm him down like she always did, but instead she glided toward me with a smile. “This is a happy time.” She beamed, adding to the polarization in the room. Despite her words, Zacaris didn’t look pleased as he stared at my belly like I had a parasite growing inside me that would cause the destruction of the entire human race. Eva ignored him and asked me, “Do you hope for a boy or a girl?” She gently patted my stomach.

I hadn’t thought about it much. Like most parents, I just wanted my baby to be safe and healthy.

“They were never supposed to be together,” Zacaris interrupted. “Azrael was Auriella’s protector and look what he’s done!” His nostrils flared and he pointed at my pregnant figure like Azrael had inflicted me with a disease. “Once he brought her to the Sanctuary I was to send them to opposite ends of the Earth so there was no chance of something like this happening and I should have done so! Erebus’s highest ambition was to combine your blood and take the power of gods—Starfire. If Erebus had Starfire he could not only destroy Earth but overthrow the Great Kingdom of Neviah.” He took several deep breaths, but no one interrupted him as he continued his tirade. “Not only are they married, but now they have combined their blood into a single being—an easy target for Erebus. Auriella, who was our secret weapon, is useless now, a walking disaster!”

“Zacaris stop!” Eva shouted, startling us all as she narrowed her eyes. Zacaris froze under her lethal gaze. Apparently he’d never heard her sound so fierce either. She didn’t smile, but continued in a soft, but dangerous tone, “What’s done is done and given the evidence, I believe Azrael and Auriella’s union was meant to be.”

“Evidence?” Zacaris didn’t sound convinced.

Eva motioned toward me in my long maternity dress. “Would the Great King of Neviah send Azrael and Auriella a child if they were not supposed to be parents?”

I dropped my shoulders and exhaled the breath I was holding. It was true. Her question filled me with relief and nullified my guilt. I wrapped my arms around my stomach as if cradling my baby. The King doesn’t make mistakes and wouldn’t have sent us a child if it would eventually lead to the destruction of an entire planet and the Kingdom of Neviah itself.

Azrael and I were both adults with more than enough ability to take care of ourselves and our family. Despite everyone trying to tell us that our love was forbidden because of Starfire, Azrael and I had a very strong relationship. We were a team, completely open and vulnerable to each other, and were secure in every way. Not only did the King of Neviah bless our union, but he knew somehow, some way, we would protect this child and raise it to be a great Neviahan Warrior.

Zacaris didn't have an argument to strike back with and I could tell by the satisfied smile on her face that Eva knew this. She turned to face Azrael and I. "You two were destined to be the parents of a very special Star Child, and if anyone could do it, it's you two." This meant a lot coming from the Watcher whose superpowers were completely maternal.

Azrael relaxed his stiff battle-ready stance and kissed the top of my head. "She's right. Everything is as it should be. We are going to be the best mother and father for little Azrael the Second."

I laughed, nervous, but excited. "What makes you think it's going to be a boy?"

Zacaris gave up and shoved Erebus's letter into Azrael's hand. "How are we going to protect Starfire now?" he asked. The log in the fireplace snapped with heat and ash momentarily whipped into the air and distorted the light in the room.

Azrael crumpled the letter in his fist and gave Zacaris a half smile, but his jaw stayed tight. "Obviously, you can't keep Auriella and I apart."

"And obviously," Zacaris sounded annoyed. "You can't stay here either," he said flatly.

The Eastern Sanctuary was still recovering from the war of Lake Poyang, attacks from human pirates, and the Legion's Shadow Queens. The scent of burning wood brought back horrible memories of the burning ships on the lake. So many Watchers and humans had died, and Zacaris and Eva had lost their daughter, Celeste. I never wanted to have to feel the pain of losing a child and watching their powers be used in heinous ways by The Legion. We had to find another place to go, perhaps another Sanctuary or free country. Apparently Azrael was thinking the same thing.

"The Scottish have won their war of independence. My homeland would be a fine place to raise a family." Azrael beamed. I knew that look of Scottish pride in his smile. His endearing accent always came out thicker when he was talking about his Highland home.

Zacaris shook his head. "Scotland has enough problems. Even though the war is won the economy is still recovering. It's not fair to ask the exhausted Watchers in that area to protect you and we can't risk any more human lives."

We couldn't risk human lives in any area. Azrael and I would have no choice but to raise our baby in isolation. Perhaps on an uncharted island or in some damp cold cave like Neanderthals. I didn't like any of those options, but what could we do?

With narrowed eyes Azrael leaned forward so close to Zacaris that their noses almost touched. Neither of them flinched. "You died for love, I'm willing to do the same," Azrael's words came out sounding more like a growl than speech.

"But this time there is no third chance to return to Earth if you or Auriella are killed," Zacaris reminded with the same feral intensity.

Eva stepped between Azrael and Zacaris. "We have enough opposition against us, and we can't afford to quarrel with each other. We shouldn't be making decisions based on fear. We should be making decisions based on faith."

I loved Eva. To me she represented the strength of divine femininity, love, beauty, and hope. She was the kind of woman who could persuade men to go to war or surrender and could bring out the good in anyone—even Zacaris.

“What do you suggest, my dear?” Zacaris asked in a much calmer tone though his arms were still crossed against his rigid body.

She tilted her head slightly and smiled at Zacaris. “You, my love, are the High Druid of Fire. Don’t forget that there are eleven other high druids who also have a say in times like this.”

“So, we are to let the council decide?” Zacaris said as if asking for me and Azrael to agree.

Right now, it sounded like our only option. Perhaps the council could tell us how we could protect our baby.