



JASPER KENT
THE THIRD
SECTION

Russia, 1855.

They lay entombed beneath the earth.
But a thirst for blood cannot be
buried for ever . . .

From the author of the bestselling *Twelve*

About the Book

It was dark now. The moon outside was a thin crescent, shining its light through the doorway and through several holes in the ceiling, cutting through the cave in glowing, ethereal columns. The skin of the dead Russian, lying in one such ray of moonlight, looked as grey as the rocks beside him. Next to the body stood the figure of a man ...

1855. After forty years of peace in Europe, war rages. In the Crimea, the city of Sevastopol is under siege. To the north, Saint Petersburg is blockaded. But in Moscow there is one who sits and waits - for the death of a tsar, and for the curse upon his blood to be passed to a new generation.

As their country grows weaker, a man and a woman - unaware of the hidden ties that bind them - must come to terms with their shared legacy.

In Moscow, Tamara Valentinovna Komarova - an agent of the tsar - uncovers a brutal murder. It seems this is not the first death of its kind, but the most recent in a sequence of similar killings committed by one who has stalked the city since 1812.

And in the ruins of Sevastopol, Dmitry Alekseevich Danilov confronts not only the guns of the British and French but also another, unnatural enemy - those creatures his father

had thought buried beneath the earth, thirty years before

...

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THE THIRD SECTION

Jasper Kent



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For my parents

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Measurements

A verst is a Russian unit of distance, slightly greater than a kilometre.

Dates

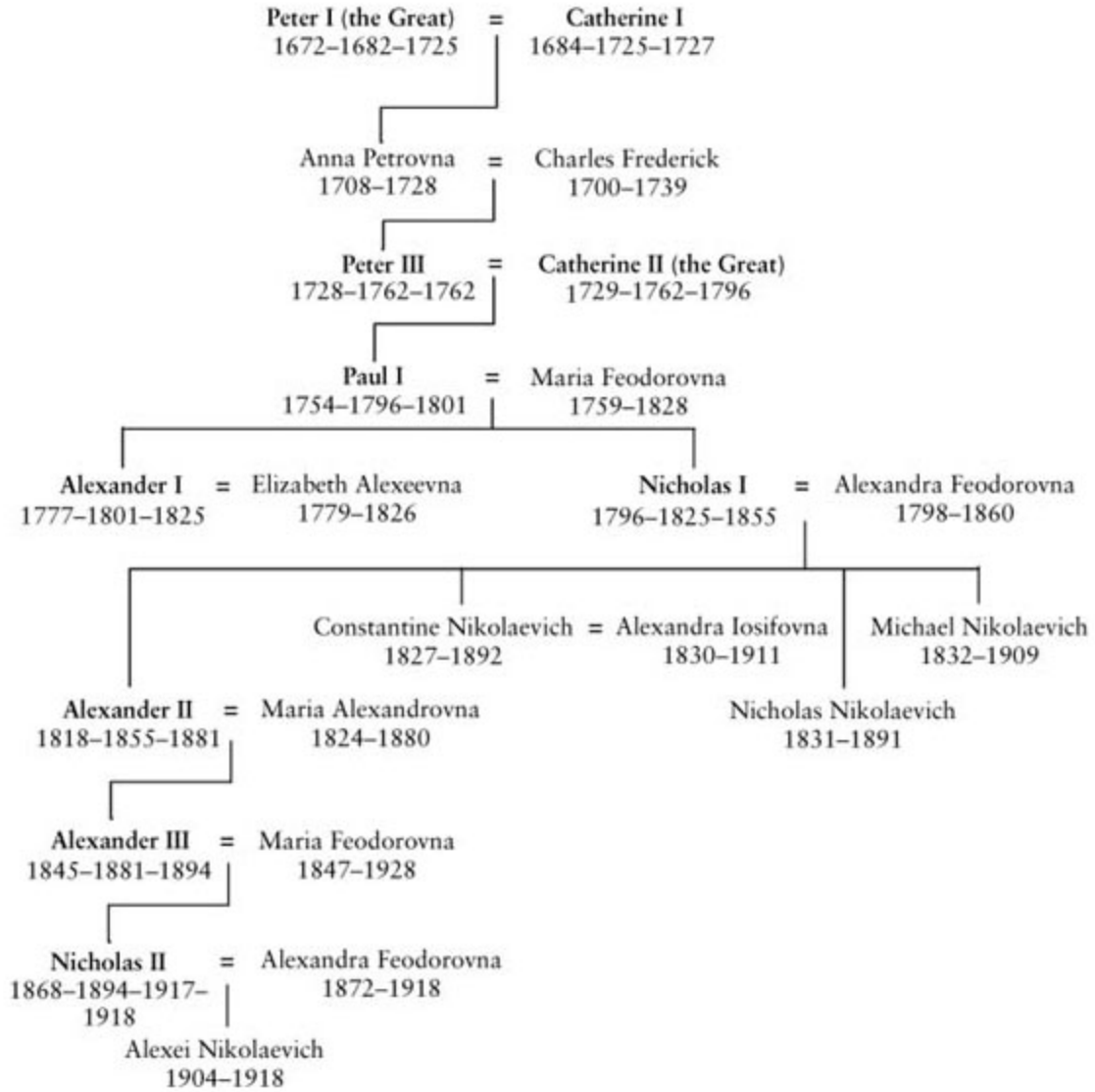
During the nineteenth century, Russians based their dates on the old Julian Calendar, which in the 1850s was twelve days behind the Gregorian Calendar used in Western Europe. All dates in the text are given in the Russian form and so, for example, the coronation of Alexander II is placed on 26 August 1856, where Western history books have it on 7 September.

Characters

A list of characters in the Danilov Quintet appears [here](#).

Thanks to Stéphane Marsan and Hilary Casey for assistance with French and German.

Selected Romanov Family
 Reigning tsars and tsaritsas shown in **bold**
 Dates are *birth*–[*start of reign*–]*[end of reign]*



THE CRIMEAN WAR

In 1853 Russia went to war with the Ottoman Empire for the eleventh time in three hundred years. The difference on this occasion was that Great Britain and France allied with the Turks, leading to a European war on a scale not seen since the time of Napoleon. There were major engagements around the Danube, in the Baltic and the White Sea, in the Caucasus and even in the Pacific, but the most significant theatre of conflict was the Black Sea, where the Allies attempted to destroy the Russian fleet harboured in Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula. Hence in the West at least, the conflict became known as the Crimean War.

The immediate cause of the war was the argument over who should have control of the Christian holy sites within the Muslim Ottoman Empire; the Catholic Church, championed by France, or the Orthodox Church, by Russia. More generally, antagonism between the two sides was due to fears of Russian expansion into the British Empire. Russia had the potential of reaching British India over land, while Britain's access was by sea, over the circuitous route around the Cape of Good Hope. Turkish influence in the east acted as a buffer against Russian ambitions, but the anticipated collapse of the Ottoman Empire - nicknamed by Tsar Nicholas I as the 'Sick Man of Europe' - would mean that Russia could gain much of the Turkish territory and take a step closer to the subcontinent.

While the French had little interest in this dispute, the French Emperor, Napoleon III, was, like the British, concerned over Russian naval access to the Mediterranean,

through the Black Sea. Moreover, Napoleon III saw that making a stand against Russia might consolidate his recently acquired position (he became emperor in the coup d'état of 1851) as well as offering a chance to take revenge for his uncle Napoleon Bonaparte's defeat by Russia in 1812 and Tsar Nicholas' failure to properly recognize Napoleon III's claim to be emperor.

To test Turkey's determination during negotiations over the holy sites, Nicholas I ordered the Russian occupation of Moldavia and Wallachia - autonomous principalities within the Ottoman Empire and historically the lands over which the two nations had often clashed. The Conference of Vienna led to a proposed compromise which gave Russia limited authority over the holy sites. This was enough for Russia, which began to withdraw from the principalities, but not for Turkey, which declared war on Russia. The remaining players began to take sides.

Austria and Prussia remained neutral, but in March 1854 Britain and France jointly declared war on Russia. Within six months their troops landed in the Crimea and had soon besieged the naval base of Sevastopol. By the end of 1855, Sevastopol had fallen, and in 1856 the Treaty of Paris brought the war to an end. The most significant result was the demilitarization of the Black Sea, which applied equally to Russia and Turkey. However, the Turks had coastline on the Mediterranean itself, whereas Russia was denied a southern fleet for a quarter of a century.



TE DEUM!

Tsar Nicholas I, in a *Punch* cartoon by John Leech from January 1854



HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY'S OWN CHANCELLERY

Following his ascension to the throne in 1825, Tsar Nicholas I consolidated his personal authority by taking powers away from individual ministries and incorporating them into a body known as His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery. The chancellery was divided into several departments, or sections.

The First Section of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery dealt with imperial decrees and orders. The Second Section was responsible for the codification of law; the Fourth for the administration of charitable and educational institutions.

The Third Section was in charge of political crimes, censorship, espionage and internal suppression. It was the tsar's secret police.

1854

PROLOGUE

THE VALLEY OF death lay far behind.

Even so, Owen could still hear the rhythmic thump of cannon fire - four tightly grouped reports, then silence, then four again, and again, and again. He looked over his shoulder, but could see nothing - no men, no horses. There must have been over six hundred of them at the beginning. All dead now, probably. Owen slowed his own horse to a canter.

The rhythm of the cannon changed - volleys of three now, rather than four. Owen laughed, briefly. There were no guns, not here. Back in the valley they might still be firing, but not here. He slowed his horse even more and the rhythm of hoofbeats changed again, quietening to almost nothing. There had been a point when the cannon had been loud enough to engulf the sound of twenty-four hundred thundering hooves, but not any more. He halted Byron. The horse breathed noisily. Byron had been at the gallop from the beginning, never questioning what he was instructed to do, just as Owen had never questioned. None of them had.

They'd charged down the valley behind Lord Cardigan, not for a moment pausing to query his command, even as canister hailed down from the hills to the left and right of them. Ahead had been the guns, the guns that they must take at any cost, because that was what they had been told to do. Cannonballs spun and bounced towards them along the valley floor, threatening to rip the brigade into tatters, but that only went to prove how essential it was to capture the position. Men and horses fell on either side, the blood

of both spattering Owen's face and uniform, but he kept going. Cardigan had kept on too - Owen remembered that much - as did everyone else, all those who hadn't lost their mounts, or their lives. They got as far as the Russian guns; Owen, Cardigan, maybe a few hundred others. And once among them, it was child's play to cut the gunners down, sabres making easy meat of men on foot, trained to fight targets at a distance of a thousand yards, not face to face. The Russians ran like cowards, and those who didn't run perished. British casualties were heavy, but the guns had been taken.

And then realization had dawned upon them, realization of the futility of the whole charge. They were in Russian territory, and unsupported. They could never hold what they had gained, even if reinforcements arrived - and there was no sign of that. The retreat was sounded and the survivors of the Light Brigade had turned their horses, but there was only one path of escape - the corpse-strewn valley down which they had come. And there were still gun emplacements on the hills on either side, and when they left, the guns here would soon be manned once again. As many would die as had been lost already. Even so, it was the only way to go.

But not for Owen; he did not retreat. Instead he'd carried on at full tilt through the guns, through the cavalry behind, shocked into inaction by the futility of the British attack. Some might have seen him as brave to ride on further into enemy territory, others as a coward who had disobeyed orders and abandoned his comrades, but he was neither. Fear had made him incapable of any rational action - for both cowardice and bravery required decisiveness. He had done nothing, merely allowed Byron to continue his onward gallop, leading them where he might.

But no one need know that. When the count was taken, the name of Lieutenant P. E. A. Owen of the 17th Lancers would be among the hundreds missing, presumed dead. If

he could make it back to the British lines soon enough, there would be no questions as to what had happened. They'd just be happy to know that there was one more healthy soldier - and healthy horse - able to fight another day. One less man dead or captured.

Though that wasn't a certainty yet. He'd survived the battle, but was deep behind enemy lines. He was a good way north of Balaklava now, and heading north-east. That was for the best. He'd need to make a wide arc to get back to the British camp. If he circled left, he'd end up going past Sevastopol, which wouldn't be clever. So he'd curve round to the right towards the coast and talk his way past the French - or even the Turks, God help him. But at least you knew where you were with the Turks; it was hard to break the habit of thinking of the French as the enemy.

Already the hills on his right were beginning to look intimidating. The land he was going through was pretty flat - mostly used for growing vines, though all hope of that seemed to have been abandoned for the time being with the arrival of armies from four nations. But Owen knew the line of the rocky hills ran from south-west to north-east and that if he didn't venture across that line within an hour or so, then he'd be spending the night out in the open. He scanned the terrain, looking for an easy route between the peaks.

The pounding noise came again, but this time he wasn't fooled into thinking it was gunfire. Anyone on horseback around here was likely to be Russian and a glance over Owen's shoulder confirmed it. He cursed his stupidity at not having made some effort to disguise his uniform, but it was too late now. Byron showed no reluctance to break into his fastest gallop and they raced onwards, forced further from the prospective safety of the British lines with every yard they went. It was five minutes before Owen slowed the horse a little and risked turning to examine his pursuers.

There were three of them, over half a mile behind him. They weren't going fast enough to get close very soon, but in this terrain they were unlikely to lose sight of him. Moreover, they knew the deployment of the other Russian troops in the area. They didn't need to catch him - simply corral him.

The road, such as it was, forked, the less trodden path leading into the hills. This seemed the better bet, with more than enough twists in the road to put him out of their sight.

He quickly began to doubt his decision. He was coming to a town. If there were troops stationed here, he was finished. So far, he could see only peasants - Tatars by the look of them. He doubted that they could even tell a Russian from an Englishman, with or without the uniform.

The road weaved on ahead and began to steepen as the hills on either side turned into cliffs. Owen looked behind him again, but could not see the three horsemen. That didn't mean they had given up. With the cliffs now rising on both sides, he had no choice over the direction he took. They didn't need to see him to know that.

He was at the centre of the town now. On his right was a palace, in the Tatar style. Two towers - minarets, he supposed - strained elegantly towards the sky. From the roadside a woman stopped to look at him. She was old, and it was hard to tell whether the darkness of her skin was a result of dirt, or its natural hue. She showed no surprise at his arrival, making him fear that she was used to the presence of soldiers. On his left, the cliff ran alongside the road now, hanging over the palace. At one point natural weathering had shaped it into what could almost be interpreted as a face - a skull perhaps. He thought of the skull and bones of his regiment's insignia on his cap badge. Death or Glory, it meant; and he'd abandoned any hope of glory.

He was soon out of the town and into the hills. The last building he saw was some kind of monastery, built into the

cliffside itself. It was an odd contrast, so close to a Mohammedan village. The road had switched to the right-hand side of the valley and the hill dropped steeply away to his left before rising as a cliff on the other side. On his right the wooded slope towered above him. He was reminded of the valley he had ridden into at Balaklava. This was narrower and steeper, but he had no doubt the whole of the Light Brigade - what was left of them - would have merrily charged in here if so commanded. If there were any cannon lurking on the brow of the hill, waiting to fire down on him, then he was doomed.

He drew to a halt and looked ahead. Now he could see what his pursuers must always have known. It was a dead end. The track curved round the head of the valley and then wound up the other side to some sort of settlement. From here he had a reasonable view back down the route he had come, the leafless trees allowing glimpses of the path. The three horsemen were still there - advancing slowly towards him, but closer than when he had last seen them, before the village. They knew he was trapped.

He dismounted. The route ahead was impassable for Byron, or for any horse. He loosely tied the reins to a tree and patted the creature's neck in a casual way that might fool both of them into believing their separation would be only temporary. The path tacked from side to side on the grassy slope, all of a sudden too steep for trees or bushes to find purchase. He would be a sitting duck if he followed it, so instead he scrambled directly up the steepest incline, towards the buildings he had seen.

It was more of a citadel than a settlement. The top part of the slope was a vertical cliff of perhaps twenty or thirty feet, making the buildings at its summit unassailable. Where there was no cliff, a wall had been built in its stead, with a gateway to which the path led. If Owen could get inside, then he might have some hope of defending himself. If he could get inside.

He tried the gate, but it was chained shut. He had no time to attempt to break through. To the right, where the wall and the natural cliff merged, there had been a rock fall. He scrambled up the collapsed boulders and was soon level with the top of the wall. At that moment he heard a shot and a bullet slammed into the rock, just yards away from him. He threw himself over the wall and on to the stone pathway below, landing badly, but not so badly that he couldn't walk.

Inside was quite a sizeable town - a cave city where habitations had been built from naturally occurring structures in the rock. A few buildings were entirely manmade, but most owed their existence half to man, half to nature.

He heard voices from outside and peeped back over the cliff. The three Russians were approaching. Like him, they had dismounted. Two of them carried pistols, but Owen knew how primitive their weapons were. The other must have been the one who had fired and would have to reload before he could do so again. Owen squeezed his fingers around the grip of his Dean and Adams revolver and smiled. Five shots without reloading - and only three targets.

The men approached the rock fall that had been Owen's path over the wall. They spoke to each other briefly, but he could make nothing of it. The one without a gun began to climb and the others eyed the cliff top, ready to take aim at anything that dared raise its head.

Owen's shot rang out before they even saw his movement. The Russian climbing towards him made no sound, but fell away limply from the rocks, landing at the feet of his comrades. Owen stood and fired again, aiming at the one nearer to him. The bullet missed, but before the men could turn Owen was able to squeeze the trigger again and get off another shot.

He felt a searing pain in his hand and forearm. The powder had blown back from the chamber and he could see the black scorch-marks on the skin of his arm. He didn't even realize he'd dropped the gun until he heard it clattering against the rocks below. It was well out of his reach, and thankfully out of theirs too. But now they were emboldened, and the two began climbing up towards him.

Owen ran. The citadel - abandoned by whoever had once lived here - stood on a narrow plateau, just a few hundred yards across. On the far side it was even less accessible. Another cliff dropped away vertically for twenty feet and then a steep, grassy slope descended hundreds more into the valley. There was no sign of a path on this side. In times of invasion, the place would have been impregnable.

He heard a sound behind him and turned. There was only one of them, picking his way between the cave mouths that covered this part of the plateau, pistol in hand. Owen drew his sword. The man fired, but missed. Owen charged across the rocky ground. Where the Russian stood was actually the roof of a cave. Several holes, quite large enough for either of them to fall through, were scattered in the rock around him - manmade, to guess by their shape. Beneath them the cave floor could be seen, six feet down.

The Russian had drawn his own sword and their blades clashed with the full force of Owen's charge. The Russian stepped back, nearer to one of the gaps in the rock. Owen brought his blade down again, and again the Russian parried, spotting the trap that Owen had hoped would catch him and leaping over it, landing on the far side with both feet together. Now it was Owen who risked falling, his momentum carrying him forward so that he teetered on the edge, swinging his arms to keep his balance and having to abandon any defensive stance.

The Russian lunged at him, and even though he was falling, Owen managed to direct himself away from the

blade. In an instant he was ready to counterattack. His opponent, overconfident in his assault, had been forced to step over the opening in the rock beneath him. Now he was in no position to bring his feet back together. He stood there, steady but ungainly, one foot on either edge of the aperture, as though a parade-ground march had been frozen in mid-step.

He would have done better to fall. Owen raised his sword in a feint to bring it down on his adversary's left arm, but the intent was only to draw away the Russian's own sword. Owen changed the direction of his blow and the blade embedded itself in the inside of the man's leading thigh, slicing through the rough material of his uniform and sliding smoothly into the flesh beneath.

The Russian fell instantly, with no strength in his leg to support him. The ground seemed almost to swallow him up as he dropped into the cave below, and Owen heard a nauseating crack as his head caught the stone lip.

Moments later, he heard another sound - the report of one more pistol firing - and felt in the same instant a bullet hit his arm, just below the right shoulder. It was a flesh wound, but it would be enough to limit his ability with a sword. The last of his pursuers approached warily across the plateau. Owen stepped backwards, glancing at the ground behind him to avoid the fate that had so recently befallen his opponent. The surviving Russian, able to see where he was going, moved faster, but was still some yards away when Owen reached the cliff edge and knew he could go no further. He raised his sword, trying not to show the pain that it caused in his arm. There was little he could do to fight, and he knew he could not retreat.

But Owen had one advantage over his foe - he had already surveyed the terrain.

The Russian seemed hesitant to approach, but Owen knew it would be his only chance of survival. He clenched his left fist and shook both arms, baring his teeth to shout.

‘Come on, you fucking coward! Fight me!’

He doubted the Russian had understood a word, but the meaning must have been clear. The man ran towards him, sword in the air. He wasn't a fool, and didn't run so fast that Owen needed merely to sidestep to see him fling himself, arms flailing, over the precipice. But Owen's plan was more subtle than that.

As he approached, Owen threw his sword to the ground and then, in a single motion, grabbed the soldier's lapels and took a step backwards off the edge of the cliff. The Russian might have been able to stop himself alone from falling, but he had not been prepared for anything so suicidal.

The drop was not far - four feet at most. Owen had seen the ledge running just below the cliff top when he first looked out over that edge of the plateau. He landed heavily, feeling his head hit stone, but managed to remain conscious. With the Russian's momentum still behind him, it was easy for Owen to roll and propel him those few extra feet which meant there would be no hidden ledge to save him. Owen felt fingers tugging at the sleeve of his tunic, but they could find no grip.

It took him a few seconds to crawl over and look down. The Russian's body had hit the steep grass slope below the cliff and was now rolling over and over down to the valley beyond. It must have been thirty seconds before he came to a stop. As Owen watched, the Russian tried to pull himself to his feet, then collapsed. He would be horribly bruised, but perhaps not fatally injured. But even if he could walk, it would take him hours to get back round to the accessible side of the citadel, and by then it would be dark, and Owen could easily slip past him.

It was not too tricky to get back on to the plateau. A little way along the ledge were some roughly cut steps leading up. The cliff face itself was marked with a number of cave mouths to which the ledge gave access. Most of

them were blocked by rubble, but even had they been open, Owen would have felt no desire to explore.

He made his way back to the scene of his swordfight and peered into the hole through which his opponent had fallen, but saw nothing. Now that the sun was low, he could not even make out the ground beneath. He scouted around and soon found another set of rough-hewn steps that led down to what seemed to be the more normal entrance of the cave. Inside, the man's body lay on a pile of rocks. He was dead. It would not have been pleasant. The loss of blood from his leg would have been slow, but unceasing. Owen was surprised how little of it there was to be seen, but the boulders on which he lay were not tightly packed, and the blood would easily have found its way between them, to drip down on to whatever lay below. With luck, the man would have been knocked out by the fall, and not felt the life draining from him into the ground.

Owen walked back to the cave entrance and sat beside it, leaning against the wall. He put his hand to his arm. It was damp with blood, but he doubted the wound was serious. The pain in the back of his head from where it had hit the ground was more of a concern, and he could feel it blurring his senses. All he needed now was to get off the plateau and, in the shadow of darkness, make his way back to the British camp. With luck, Byron would still be there to carry him.

But first he would rest.

Owen didn't know how long he had dozed, but it was dark now. The moon outside was a thin crescent, shining its light through the doorway and through the several holes in the ceiling, cutting through the cave in glowing, ethereal columns. The skin of the dead Russian, lying in one such ray of moonlight, looked as grey as the rocks beside him.

Next to the body stood the figure of a man.

Owen was instantly alert, afraid that one of his enemies had somehow survived, but fear soon gave way to confusion. The man was tall, and looked very old. Or perhaps more aged than old. He stood like a young man, proud and upright, without any hint of frailty, but his skin was wizened and wrinkled. He was dreadfully thin - emaciated. Owen could count every rib. His lips were dark, almost black.

He spoke. It sounded like Russian.

'Ya nye gavaryu pa ruski,' stammered Owen, using the one, self-contradictory fragment of the language that he knew.

'En quelle année sommes-nous?' said the man. Owen understood the language well enough, but it was a strange question.

'1854,' he replied, using the French with which he had been addressed.

'1854?' The man stuck with the same language. 'Twenty-nine years.'

He said nothing more, but seemed to smile. Owen noticed that behind him a dark tunnel led downwards to more caves. When he had first arrived that afternoon, there had only been rubble lying there.

'Who are you?' Owen asked.

The man paused, thinking. Perhaps it had been twenty-nine years since anyone had asked him such a question. Perhaps he was the only remaining inhabitant of this citadel, abandoned when the others left.

'I am called Prometheus,' he said at length.

'That's a strange name.'

'I'm a strange creature.' Prometheus glanced at the body of the dead Russian. 'Did you slaughter him?'

Owen nodded.

'Thank you,' said Prometheus. 'But it will not be enough for all of us.'

'Enough?'

Prometheus continued as if Owen had said nothing. 'We must learn to share.' He walked across the cave towards Owen at tremendous speed. 'It will taste better if not filtered through the rocks.'

Prometheus opened his mouth wide and Owen saw for the first time his fang-like teeth. Owen raised his sword, but Prometheus grasped it by the blade and wrenched it from his grip. He felt a hand grab his head and another his arm and Prometheus' mouth fell upon his neck. He could not see what was happening, but it felt as though his skin were being tightly pinched before suddenly yielding.

There was little pain. A sense of light-headedness filled him and he lost both the strength and the will to struggle. The most horrible part of it was the slurping sound as, gulp by gulp, the blood left Owen's body and entered Prometheus. And at the same time, some splinter of Prometheus' mind seemed to enter Owen's. He could taste blood on his tongue, and knew it was his own. He could sense the gradual satiation of an ancient thirst. It was a strange but not unpleasant way to die.

And yet he did not die. Not straight away. After a few minutes, Prometheus stopped, and laid Owen gently down on the cave floor. He turned and called over his shoulder into the dark tunnel from which he must have come. Shadows moved and more figures emerged into the cave. And Owen knew - because he knew Prometheus' mind - that they would not be so gentle with him.

1855

CHAPTER I

LIGHT TUMBLES FROM the stars, rushing downwards, heading for wherever it might fall. Some will be lost in the darkness of the sky; some will land upon planets where no eye can witness its arrival; some will hurtle towards the Earth. And as it looks down upon the Earth, it will see the land as though it were a gigantic map, laid out to be read by the stars themselves. Great cities, illuminated by the flames of candles and lamps, shine back at the starlight, and dark, straight lines stretch between them. Closer still, points of light travel along those lines, between the cities, as flames and sparks billow into the darkness, testimony to the power that man has harnessed.

Behind the flames, a procession - a train of candlelit windows dragged across the countryside by the fiery engine, and behind each window, people. Behind one such sits a little girl, her curls - the colour of fire - cascading over her shoulders. She looks up and smiles at the two adults opposite - her beloved parents - as the starlight hits their faces, augmenting, however slightly, the light from the candle at the window. The little girl frowns, but the starlight can do no more than it already has to help her see what she so desperately wants to see. But it has not done enough.

The little girl looks from her mother to her father and back to her mother, but their faces are unchanged. They remain what they have always been to her - a smooth, perfect, unrecognizable blank.

* * *

Tamara Valentinovna Komarova awoke. She was alone. There were a few other passengers in the second-class carriage but none near her - none she knew.

She often dreamed of her parents - her real parents - more even than she dreamed of her husband and children. The faces of Valentin and Yelena Lavrov rarely troubled her mind, awake or asleep. They had been good to her and no child could have asked for more, but Tamara had carried with her for as long as she could remember the conviction that they were not her true parents. The house she grew up in had been haunted by ghosts - memories of two people for whom she cherished the most unutterable love, whose presence in her mind could only be explained if they were her father and her mother. But they came to her not as true recollections but as dark reflections in a looking glass, memories not of reality but perhaps of a game she had once played; a game in which she conjured up idealized replacements for those who had loved her and raised her. It was the remembrance of a child's foolishness.

And yet she knew the Lavrovs were not her parents.

It had distanced her from them, which wasn't fair to anyone, but whenever she had tried to raise the issue they had dismissed her suspicions as absurdity. She was thirty-three now, and couldn't remember a time when they hadn't been there, teaching her, nurturing her, doting on her as any true parent would; but neither could she remember a time when she had not been certain she was not their child.

There was a brief moment when she thought she had identified her true father: Prince Pyetr Mihailovich Volkonsky. It might be the whim of many a little girl to believe that her father was a prince, but the idea had not come to Tamara until she was seventeen, and was no whim. She had been idly rummaging - as she presumed all girls of that age did - through her official father's desk when she