

Legacy

The Reunion

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Chapter One

To London

London, Spring, 1843

Hundreds of buyers and sellers packed Spitalfields Market. Customers and vendors alike worked to elevate their voices over the loud auctioneers. Some auctioneers were extremely audible as they spoke into their mechanical speaking trumpets. Animal dung and meats left out in the sun too long tainted April's sweet air.

The bustling marketplace was the perfect hunting grounds for Jasper. His wife, Nona, and their companion, a young black woman named Taisia Kuzentsov, had arrived in London that very morning. The journey from Newcastle had been exhausting. Traveling without the rest of the nomadic clan had proven more daunting than expected. Halfway

through the trip, food had become scarce. They had sold trinkets and told fortunes, but it wasn't enough to pay for meals.

The sight of fresh fish sitting on slow melting ice, as well the thick cuts of beef and lamb, made Jasper's stomach growl

"We should go to the lawyer," Nona urged.

"The market will close at noon," he argued.

His wife looked at him scornfully. "This is not what we came here for."

He should have listened.

"Perhaps we could sell the horse," Taisia suggested in her Russian accent.

She held the reins to their only transport, an old mare on her last legs. The mangy animal looked half dead just standing there.

That nag isn't worth piss. Jasper thought grimly. *No one would buy or barter for her.*

He didn't see the marketplace as an obstacle, merely a short stop to gaining easy money. He eyed a dark-skinned Persian man in decent clothing who was buying cuts of meat and a pound of cheese. Jasper studied his target and his leather coin purse. After the man placed the purse in his right pocket, he grabbed his sack of goods and left.

"Wait here," he told both women.

"Jasper, no," Nona whispered.

He ignored her and pressed on. He snaked his way between the people, doing his best not to be distracted by the sights and smells of the food surrounding him. The act of pocket-picking was far less dangerous than stealing from vendors directly. Constables were everywhere, keeping watch.

The target headed for a horse. Jasper assumed the mount belonged to him. He needed to act quickly.

It had been ages since he'd done this, yet his hand slipped into the man's pocket like it was a comfortable old glove. He grabbed the purse and slid it out flawlessly. Once the coin purse was his, Jasper spun on his heel and went in the opposite direction.

"Hold it right there," someone laden with a thick foreign accent commanded from behind.

Jasper stopped cold. A voice inside his mind told him those four words were meant for him. He craned his neck, only to find the person he had just robbed pointing a pistol at him.

"I saw you eyeing me, thief. You're not as clever as you think."

"Neither are you, *monsieur*," Nona said, coming up behind the Persian. "Lower your gun."

Jasper couldn't see it, but he knew she was holding her knife against the man's spine, the same blade she used for skinning prey. For a moment, Jasper believed they'd make it out of this. Then the Persian jerked his elbow back, hitting her in the stomach. He quickly turned and shoved her hard to the ground. He moved with such speed and precision that, in the blink of an eye, Jasper's wife was down.

"Nona!" Jasper yelled.

He almost ran to her, except the revolver was trained on him.

“Don’t,” the foreigner warned.

Nona clutched her belly. To Jasper’s dismay, Taisia appeared and took her into her arms.

“Nona,” she asked. “Are you all right?”

“Guards!” the dark-skinned man yelled. “Thieves!”

Taisia grabbed Nona’s knife and leaped to her feet. “Bastard!”

She charged and sliced at him. He jumped back from the swooshing dagger, barely avoiding having it slice open his belly. He could have shot her, but he threw a tight fist instead. She ducked and went at him again. He cried out when she carved the blade across his arm. He caught her wrist as she made another attempt to cut him and struck her across the cheek with his gun. Jasper rushed at him, but the Persian was quicker. He swung the weapon, striking Jasper across the face with it. By then, guards had arrived and surrounded the group with their rifles aimed at the threesome.

“Arrest them!” the Persian shouted. “Do it before I shoot them dead!”

The constables grabbed Jasper, his wife, and Taisia, who was yelling angrily in Russian.

“Did these people attempt to steal from you, Lieutenant?” a constable asked.

Jasper was stunned. “Lieutenant?” he repeated and then swallowed thickly.

“Yes,” he confirmed vehemently. “I am Lieutenant Darius Javan. I come to the market every Saturday. These officers know me here.”

As the officers hauled the prisoners off, the lieutenant ordered, “Hold up.”

Lieutenant Javan approached Jasper. He yanked down his unbuttoned shirt lapel and read off the tattoos imprinted above his breast.

“Joaquin, August 4, 1810. Pierce, June 18, 1817.” He eyed Jasper. “Landcross, is it?”

Jasper gave no answer.

The lieutenant snorted. “It appears we have caught the father of a pair of famous outlaws.”

“Do you know what has happened to them?” Nona asked while being held by the constables.

The lieutenant grinned at her. “And you must be the mother.”

Jasper cringed.

Lieutenant Javan could’ve been cruel and given her no reply, yet he displayed the same courtesy, and answered, “Word drifts through once in a while, but nothing recent.” To the constables, he ordered, “Take them to Newgate.”

Jasper forgot his hunger pangs as his stomach shriveled up with utter dread. He had made a critical error, one that would cost his family everything.

* * *

One month later . . .

Pierce Landcross rode silently with manacles clamped to his wrists. The shackles secured his biceps with a chain that stretched across his back and kept his arms hugged tightly against his sides. It almost surprised him they hadn't chained him to his blasted horse.

Since his capture in France, Pierce hadn't said much. Not that the soldiers were striking up conversations with him, anyway. Usually, Pierce was a chatterbox. The weight of despair he felt, however, when he thought about how close he'd come to freedom had killed all his liveliness. He had nearly made it to Chief Sea Wind's ship, the *Ekta*. That vessel was supposed to sail him off to the Hawaiian Islands, where Pierce had planned to start anew. Instead, he had missed the ship and watched as she sailed away just before Lieutenant Darius Javan and his troops found him.

His sorrow had accompanied him from Le Havre and over the English Channel, where a nasty spring storm had forced their ferryboat to make port in Dover. The rains had stopped the following day, although the winds continued. Instead of waiting for the choppy sea to calm, Darius decided to press on to London on horseback.

Pierce admired the countryside. Despite his bad luck here, he had to admit England was a beautiful old country. The lush green scenery offered a pleasant distraction. He would let himself become lost in it until a guard or two glared at him, breaking his trance.

Darius eventually came up alongside him. "You're not an easy man to catch, Mr. Landcross."

"Is that so?" Pierce grumbled.

"It is. I can actually understand how you've remained alive all these years."

"Fortunate, I s'pose."

"Fortunate? Perhaps. As I mentioned before, you were not an easy catch. Your parents, however . . ."

From under the brim of his black hat, Pierce raised his sights to meet the man's gaze. The lieutenant was smirking, blatantly waiting to see his expression.

"Pardon?" Pierce asked at length.

The Persian snorted. "I was at the market last month when your father picked my pocket. Your mother foolishly attempted to save him, which only resulted in getting herself arrested, as well."

Pierce absolutely couldn't believe it.

"You're lying," he managed to say in the midst of his shock.

Predicting this response, Darius set his sights forward, still holding his blasted smirk. "Your father is five-eight, black hair, brown eyes, and very lanky. He has tattoos of your and your brother's names. Your mother is a young-looking Frenchwoman with dark hair." He returned his focus on Pierce. "You have her green eyes."

Pierce slumped and nearly slid right off his damn mount. His breath fell heavy and his heart quickened in its beats. His next question hurt him to ask. "Are they dead?"

Darius's grin vanished. He almost seemed surprised Pierce expressed such concern.

"No. They're in Newgate, awaiting trial."

Pierce sucked in a breath, allowing air to flow back into his lungs. He breathed in deeply and sighed out with relief. What blasted luck the Landcross family had!

In a tone drenched with desperation, he asked, "Can you help them? Set them free?"

The lieutenant again snorted. "No, Mr. Landcross. Once they are tried, they shall serve out their sentence. They did attack an officer of the law, and that, alone, will earn them a lengthy sentence, if not death."

His answer did anything but offer surprise.

"Picked your pocket, you say? Damn," Pierce muttered to himself. To Darius, he asked, "So they have been imprisoned in that shithole for the past month without any funds?"

Darius only looked at him, and Pierce grimaced. How things operated inside Newgate Prison was common knowledge, for it had been that way for centuries. Several years ago, London reckoned it was time to reform the prison, which only consisted of remodeling the interior with new cellblocks and in-stalling some up-to-date technologies, yet the unfair practices remained more or less the same. The prison guards worked for little or no wages, so the guards taxed prisoners or their loved ones for whatever they could weasel out of them in exchange for meals, water, and even a place to sleep. If there was nothing with which to pay for these necessities, sex was also an option, resulting in countless childbirths behind the prison walls.

"The loot you found on me," Pierce said.

"What about it?" the lieutenant demanded.

"Will you pay the sheriff with it for their food and clean water?"

Darius considered him.

"You want to give it to your parents, leaving yourself penniless?"

Pierce tilted his head sideways and arched an eyebrow. "Were you planning on using the money for *my* benefit?"

The lieutenant's smirk returned. "Perhaps. If you begged."

Pierce huffed vexingly. "I see."

"In truth," the lieutenant went on, "I've been paying for them all along.

Pierce leaned forward with a wide expression. "Come again?"

"I knew they wouldn't survive a week in the state they were in, so I've made sure they were well-fed until their sentencing. When the Leeds Prison in West Yorkshire is complete, I may have them transferred."

Pierce didn't appreciate what he was saying.

"Do you get your jollies from tormenting the unfortunate? Why are you lying to me, Darius?"

"That's *Lieutenant* Javan to you," he retorted. "And I'm quite serious."

Pierce considered him.

Darius had the physical qualities of a true soldier. He stood six feet tall and was built like a gladiator. His rich umber skin was darker than any bark on the trees surrounding them. It was uncertain when he had immigrated to Britain, but his British brogue skimmed the surface of his Middle Eastern accent. Darius struck Pierce as the firm

but fair sort. Even after Pierce had escaped him twice, extending his exhaustive manhunt, the lieutenant treated him with humanity. Pierce was fed, not left too uncomfortable, and granted modest privacy when he needed to use the lavatory. Considering how things could have been in this situation, Pierce found comfort in those small blessings.

When looking into the Persian's ochre eyes, he saw no fraud in them.

Pierce finally blinked. "Why would you do that?"

"Believe it or not, I pitied them. They ought to be punished for their crime, but I also understand why they tried robbing me. Hunger can push people to their limits."

"So you'll keep paying their way, then?"

Darius thought that amusing, and it showed in his returning smile.

"Not now since you have kindly offered to give your own money."

Pierce half-grimaced and narrowed his eyes. "You're too kind."

The lieutenant turned away. "I do believe I am."

* * *

They traveled a few more hours before night caught up to them. They decided to make camp on the edge of the forest beside the road. Darius had sent a pair of guards off to hunt for dinner while the rest set up the encampment. They tied Pierce to a tree trunk. When the soldiers returned with the hares they'd killed, they cooked rabbit stew. Pierce was given a bowl. He had no idea what they had done to the stew, but it tasted the same as sewage water.

While he ate, Pierce sized up the troops. If he did manage to escape his chains and make a break for it, it would only take minutes for them to catch up. Accepting the situation was a bitter poison to drink. He'd always hoped that when he died, it would happen either in the blink of an eye or he would drift away peacefully in his old age, perhaps beside someone he loved. Not this prolonged death that had already dragged on for days. A trial lay ahead. Fuckin' hell, he just knew it'd be a highly publicized spectacle, to boot. Pierce also didn't fancy the idea of having an audience watch him hang. His charade of a trial would lead to that, and hanging wasn't an experience he cared to relive, either. When execution day came, perhaps the quick drop and sudden stop would snap his neck, ending him on the spot.

After forcing down the horrible stew, Pierce sat quietly, looking at his shackled hands. Eventually, all but a single watchman went to sleep.

Pierce shifted in his bonds. The tight line tied over his torso irritated the wounds he had received from the beating he took from Ivor Norwich only days ago. His ribs ached, although the pain had become more of a numbing annoyance now. The pain prevented him from falling asleep for any length of time, as did the fire, which was being kept burning by the watchman. Pierce sat too far off to enjoy the warmth, yet close enough to be bothered by its light, forcing him to lower the brim of his hat over his eyes. He wished he could at least lie down.

A rustle in the darkness beyond the firelight snatched Pierce from his delicate slumber. With a snort, he snapped his head up. The soldier warming his hands by the fire perked up and touched the butt of his pistol. Pierce shook his head at him. By a slim chance, it was human—a robber or a bounty hunter wanting to collect on Pierce's head—and they'd be completely daft to try taking on a band of highly trained British soldiers.

It's only an animal, wanker.

Pierce found the soldier's suspicion slightly amusing until he disappeared. Not only vanished, but also snatched away into the dark as if he were an insect on a frog's tongue. Pierce blinked, believing he was hallucinating, but the lad remained missing.

"Bloody hell," Pierce whispered.

Darius, lying asleep nearby, let out a loud snort and sat up. He searched for his absent man. Another rustle got the lieutenant quickly to his feet, holding tight to his pistol. The missing soldier drew instant suspicion, for Darius had given orders for none to leave the campsite, not even to take a piss. His eyes darted everywhere until he pinned them on Pierce.

"Where is he?"

Pierce hadn't the foggiest notion on how to answer, and so only shrugged.

Sensing something amiss, the lieutenant said to his troop, "Look alive, men."

They began rising like Lazarus. Most groaned and were on the verge of complaining before their leader ordered, "Come now. Get up!"

Every soldier jolted to life. They got to their feet, and a moment later, an object appeared in a blur, scooping up another person. His wide, shocked face was the last thing everyone saw.

"Llandudno!" shouted a guard who had stood abreast to his taken comrade. He twisted his body around and fired into the woods.

"Hold fire!" Darius ordered just before someone else was snatched away.

"What the devil!" a soldier exclaimed.

The troops began to buckle. Even Darius strained to maintain his warrior demeanor as he worked to grasp what was happening. A man's hollering got everyone aiming pistols in a single direction.

"Help me!" the voice cried.

Someone else shouted from a different area in the woods, "Lieutenant! Help!"

"You, men," Darius instructed to some of his soldiers, "go over there." He looked to a handful more. "You four, come with me. The rest of you: stay with the prisoner."

The troops scattered into action and vanished. The others posted at the camp stood with backs against each other, keeping a panoramic view of their surroundings. Without drawing attention, Pierce tried squeezing free from the manacle. He didn't fancy the idea of being bound to a tree while people were picked off one by one by an unknown assailant.

"Where are you, Llandudno?" a soldier asked in the dark.

"Up here."

“There he is, sir,” another guard exclaimed. “He’s bloody well hanging upside down in that tree!”

Amusing, yet when gunshots split the air on the other end of the campsite, followed by shouting, it drove fear into him. Pierce couldn’t say whether the men were being slaughtered or not. On the opposite side, the soldiers’ footsteps crunched toward camp. Then someone again shouted, and a firework show lit up the forest. Their cries prompted the others at the camp into action. They split up and charged into the woods. With them gone, Pierce vigorously strained to slip free. As he struggled, something dropped right between his legs. He leaned forward as far as he could and spied the keys.

“What the fu . . . ?” he started to say as he looked up.

The firelight couldn’t reach high enough to illuminate anything above. No matter. He reached out for the keys. Although his arms were over the rope, getting the keys proved difficult.

More shouting from the guards ensued, their voices echoing like frightened creatures emerging from hell itself. It certainly sped Pierce up into freeing himself. He pushed against his restraints, scratching at the ground until he hooked his finger into the iron ring.

“Brilliant!”

He dragged the set of keys to him and began unlocking his chains. Once all the irons were unclamped, he lifted the rope up to where he could wiggle himself out from under it. He clambered to his feet and dashed over to the horses hitched near the road. He was about to mount up when he was suddenly grabbed and flung around. It happened so fast, his brain kept twirling seconds after he stopped. When his vision settled, he saw none other than the vampire, Robin of Locksley. Smoke fumed from the hand he had touched him with. Pierce had his coin necklace to thank for that. As long as he wore his single coin from Judas’s thirty pieces of silver, no vampire could harm him.

The last time Pierce had seen Robin Hood—known these days as The Magician, Robin the Magnificent—it was on the Isle of Wight when they stormed Norwich Castle to save the girl, Clover. In exchange for the vampire’s help, Pierce had agreed to surrender the coin, but Pierce fooled him with a simple switch. The bloodsucker sure did know how to hold a grudge.

“Still have it, eh?” Robin remarked, shaking his wounded hand.

Pierce touched the coin and said with levity, “Always.”

Pierce’s good spirits vanished the moment Robin raised the gun on him. Pierce realized the vampire didn’t need to use his fangs to fulfill his revenge.

“Robin, wait now.”

Pierce truly believed his face was about to be blown off when someone yelled, “Find it! Find that demon!”

Darius.

Of course, the bugger would still be alive. Robin possessed an insight into people’s true nature, either granted to him when he became a vampire, or an instinct he had carried

since he was mortal. Whatever the case, Robin wouldn't kill anyone who wasn't evil or hadn't crossed him as Pierce had done when he tried robbing him some time ago. Robin turned the gun around and held the handle out to him.

"Crack on now," Robin ordered. "I'll catch up."

Pierce arched an eyebrow at him. Did Robin want to drink his blood so badly he was willing to cut him loose until the coin was somehow removed? He decided not to ask, and instead, raised a shaky hand and took hold of his own Oak Leaf revolver. He tucked the gun under his waistband, and when he looked up, Robin was gone. Moments later, more shouting sounded in the forest, along with gunfire. Pierce mounted the horse and steered it toward the nearby road. When he came upon the path, his first instinct was to ride back south toward Dover, for it might be safer than trying to board a ship in the north. Then he remembered his parents. If he ran, he'd be leaving them to a horrible fate. He hadn't the foggiest idea what he'd do, but he would think of something on the way to London.