



PART ONE

RISING

West Africa

They came the summer she was six. She and her brother were alone in the house when strangers broke in, armed with muskets and knives. Her brother yelled to her to run, but she stumbled on the ground outside, and a pair of hands seized her. They took her brother too. She never knew what happened to her parents.

When she saw the blanched white faces and pale eyes of the men to whom she was to be sold, her attempts at bravery broke, and she burst into tears. Her brother and his friends had told stories about the ghosts that came and took people away. The ghosts lived in a hollow world, they said, that roamed the sea and swallowed people up. The people brought to them were placed under evil magic, so that their minds fell asleep and their bodies belonged to the ghosts.

The man who sold her told her that it wasn't true. The ghosts were men, white men, and they were from a country over the sea. They didn't want to feed her to their hollow world—which was called a ship and was used for traveling oceans. They only wanted her to work for them in their own country. It was true about the magic, though. They would feed it to her on the first day. From then on, she would belong to them.

They took the men and older boys into the ship first. Her brother crying out to her as she was torn away from his arms wrenched her heart in two. It was the last time she would hear her name for a very long time.

It was dark in the belly of the ship, and the fetid stench was worse than anything she had ever imagined. She cried and fought not to go

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down, but one of the men cuffed her hard so she was dizzy, and before her head could recover she was lying in a tiny, filthy space with shackles about her wrists and ankles. The metal was cold, and sticky with someone else's blood.

When they gave her the food that would spellbind her, she swallowed it. She wanted to. In her village, when the children had talked about the ghosts that took people over the seas, they had said that your mind fell asleep under the spell. They said it was like dying, and she wanted to die.

She waited while the creeping numbness took her fingers and her toes and her heart. She waited until she felt her breathing become harsh and regular and her tears stop. At last she could not move even her eyes. She waited for her thoughts to still in the same way, as she might wait to fall asleep on a hot night; she longed for it, as an escape from the fear and the pain. But it never came. Her body was asleep. Her mind was still awake inside. When she realized this, she screamed and screamed, but her screams never made it farther than her own head.

All the way across the world, she was awake. She couldn't move unless they told her to, not even a finger, not even to make a sound. She breathed; she blinked; she retched when the motion of the ship became too much. Outside of this and other such involuntary spasms, she was helpless. But she felt everything. She felt the bite of iron at her wrists and the cramping of her muscles as her limbs lay rigid in the small space. She felt the grain of the wooden floor against her skin as the ship rocked, rubbing until her back and legs were raw and bleeding. She smelled the urine and blood and vomit, and she heard the strange, jarring language of the men tromping the decks overhead. Sometimes, right before they were fed and the last dose of the spell was beginning to wear off, she heard the others in the hold begin to groan or sob or speak. All day, she fought to make a sound herself, just enough to call out and see if any of her family were there to answer her. But then the men would come with their food again, and the hold would fall silent. If someone else had died, that was when they took

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the bodies away. Sometimes they took people away who were still alive, and did things to them. She didn't know what they did, but they came back more broken, and sometimes they didn't come back at all.

She didn't know where her family was, and everything hurt so much. She was a child. She had never hurt like that before.

After they sold her in the marketplace, they branded her. Part of this was to mark her, once and for all, as property. She belonged to a sugar plantation now, in Jamaica. In time, she would learn what that meant.

The other part was to test that the spellbinding really had taken effect entirely. One of the men in line in front of her let out a strangled noise when the iron seared his flesh, and he was taken away. She didn't know what happened to him.

She was perfectly bound now. The metal touched her skin and scorched it with heat that seemed to go clear through to the bone. In her head, she writhed and screamed. Her body never made a sound.

Her new owners named her Fina. From now on, she was to answer to that name, and that alone.

France

Camille Desmoulins was five years old, and he was playing with shadows.

It was midsummer's eve, and Guise was sleepy and sunbaked in the deepening twilight. Camille was outside the main town, down by the river, where the grass grew thick under the old stone bridge. He was too young to be away from home alone, but his father was at work, and his tutor, on such a languid evening, was content to believe that his pupil liked to study alone. Soon, he would enter the tiny makeshift schoolroom to check on his charge and realize, with irritation and alarm, that he had wandered away again, but that would come too late. In fact, Camille did like to study alone. Today, though, his magic had stirred in his blood and set his heart racing. He had come to the river to make the shadows dance.

The shadows with which he played weren't shadows of anything in particular, or they didn't seem to be. They lurked in cracks and crevices between the borders of this world and another, watching and waiting. Camille stirred them with a feather touch, as lightly as he could, and they responded at once. He swirled them in the air, the way one might swirl a leaf in the water, making patterns, watching the ripples. He paused once to scratch his wrist, where his bracelet was beginning to heat in response to his magic. The bracelet had been locked about his arm from infancy, as was the case for all Commoner magicians. Its smooth metallic band was meant to grow with him, but it always felt too tight. It felt particularly so today. The air was translucent with light and shade.

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It was at this point that he usually stopped, before his bracelet could scald him further. This time, however, he did not. The evening bewitched him. It all seemed a lucid dream: the green-blue sky, the cool water, the warmth of the summer air. He reached out with his magic, and pulled.

The shadows began to converge. What had been faint wisps of darkness gathered in front of him in a tall plume like smoke. His bracelet burned at his wrist, hotter and hotter. He drew the shadows closer. They struggled; his heart beat in his chest like a kite tugging at the end of a rope in a high wind. The plume of smoke-darkness writhed, twisted—and then, at last, resolved itself into a single black shadow. Human-formed, trailing lighter fragments like whispers of fog. It turned to Camille and looked at him.

Something was screaming: a high, piercing note that penetrated the haze of magic and heat. Dimly, Camille recognized that it was coming from his wrist. His bracelet wailed a long note of warning, and still it burned, hotter than ever, so hot that reflexive tears spilled down his cheeks. But the pain was nothing compared to the wonder he felt. There was a living shadow in front of him, and it was real, and it was him but not him at once. It was tall and thin—a human shape, yes, but one that had been stretched like dough under a baker's hands.

The shadow regarded him for a long moment. Then, quite deliberately, it bowed. Camille bowed back, his burning wrist held clumsily apart from his body. It was as though his soul had opened its eyes for the first time.

“Get back!” Without further warning, a pistol shot cracked the air. There was a faint hiss as the shot passed through vapor, and then the shadow was gone. Nothing but a smoke trail was left to show it had ever been there.

Camille screamed. The bullet had not hit him, yet he felt it sear as though through his heart, and the nothingness that came to engulf him in its wake was worse. His cries joined the wail of the bracelet, as though both were being killed together. He screamed, over and over, as the crowd drawn from the village by his bracelet’s alarm rushed

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forward. He was still screaming as Leroy the blacksmith grabbed him by the arms and held him roughly, careful to avoid the shrieking piece of hot metal at his wrist. He still screamed as the Knight Templar from the village came on the scene. He screamed right until the Templar, fumbling, touched his bracelet with the spell to silence the alarm, and then he stopped so abruptly that some of the onlookers thought he was dead. He wasn't. He was white and limp, but gasping, as Leroy caught him up in his arms and took him to the Temple Church.

He was in the underground cell for twelve hours. The Templar tried to offer him food, and even words of comfort. Camille was a tiny waif, with eyes too big for his face under a fringe of black curls, and the Templar was not a monster. The child remained curled up in the corner, unresponsive, shaking, and distraught.

It was perhaps the best thing he could have done, though he could not have known or cared. By the early hours of the morning, Jean Benoit Nicolas Desmoulins had come to bargain, quietly, for the freedom of his son. He was a well-connected man in the town, a lawyer and lieutenant general of the local bailliage; it was unlikely under any circumstances that Camille would be convicted of illegal magic and carted off to the Bastille like a common street urchin. But by the time Desmoulins arrived with his purse and his double meanings, the Templar was unnerved enough by the small, haunted figure in the bowels of the church that he was willing to surrender him without a fight. He had taken illegal magicians before—even underage ones, even in Guise. He was used to their fear and their guilt. Little Camille was incapacitated by neither. He could not imagine what was happening in the child's head, but it sent a shiver down his spine.

For a while, when they brought him home, there were fears that nothing would ever happen in Camille's head again. His father, still burning with shame and anger, pushed him into his mother's waiting arms. Camille had walked to and from the carriage under his own power, but he still had not spoken.

“Take him,” Desmoulins said roughly. “Not that it'll do much

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good. My son and heir, no better than an idiot now. Those bastards. Someone needs to teach them a lesson.”

He had underestimated the resilience of small children, or at least of this one. Late that morning, Camille came back downstairs, fed and washed and rested, and little the worse for his dark night. He spoke as brightly and intelligently as he ever had, a little too much so for some people’s liking. But he had changed. His voice had been clear as a bell; now it had an unmistakable stammer that never went away, no matter how his father frowned and encouraged in turn. At times his eyes would stare, disconcertingly, at things that weren’t there. He had been somewhere that nobody could quite understand. And every so often, at church, or in the street, the local Knight Templar would look up to see Camille watching him, and would know that he had not forgiven it.

London

Autumn 1779

On the night of 22 October 1779, John Terrell, London saddler and unbraceleted Commoner, was surprised in his bed by a would-be burglar brandishing a pistol. Strictly speaking, it was his wife who surprised him. Her cry upon awakening to a dark shape entering their bedroom woke Mr. Terrell in turn, and the burglar swiftly found himself lying on the floor, groaning from a blow to the head. The commotion woke the neighbors, who arrived on the scene to find Mr. Terrell holding the man down while Mrs. Terrell held the heavy poker that had struck him. The burglar was arrested.

The Bow Street Runners were not impolite enough to ask how the burglar came to be struck from behind, when the only two occupants of the house were both in front of him in bed. Unfortunately, the burglar was more than happy to tell them, as soon as he had recovered speech. The Terrells were soon wakened again, this time by a member of the Knights Templar knocking on the door. A week later, while the burglar in question still languished in Newgate Prison, John Terrell was standing in the dock at the Old Bailey, facing charges of unregistered magic and failure to report a magical Inheritance to the appropriate authorities.

It was a perfectly ordinary incident. It would not change the world. But it was as good a place to begin as any.

William Pitt was late to the parliamentary debates that night, not because the trial had run late—in fact, the judge had adjourned early

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to attend a dinner—but because he had held back to argue the case with the senior advocate.

“The point is,” he said, as his older colleague gathered his notes, “Mr. Terrell would have been legally within his rights to use his Inheritance had he been registered. Even Commoners are allowed to use magic to defend themselves, if circumstances call for it. They clearly called for it in this case. His house was broken into, and the housebreaker was armed. Mr. Terrell used his weak telekinesis to pick up a fire poker and hit the assailant from behind. It’s hardly vampirism, is it?”

“The problem is, he *wasn’t* registered,” his colleague said. “The Temple Church have no record of his magic. He had no bracelet.” He said it patiently, in Pitt’s opinion. John Drudge had been working these courts for twenty years—Pitt’s entire lifetime. He would probably have quite liked to go to dinner himself, rather than be pressed about a routine case of unregistered magic by an inexperienced junior.

Given this, Pitt managed to be patient in turn, even though his thoughts were racing. “Yes, I know. And of course he cannot avoid punishment for that. But *had* he been registered, the incident itself would not have been illegal. His bracelet would have detected the use of magic, the Knights Templar would have been summoned, he may even have appeared before the courts, but he would have been cleared. If we can argue that, the judge might agree to drop the charge of unregistered magic. In that case, the only thing he’s left with is failure to report an Inheritance. That’s practically a misdemeanor.”

“It’s ten years in the Tower of London,” his colleague reminded him, but he was paying attention now. “Hardly a misdemeanor. Besides, to my knowledge there has never been a case of failure to report an Inheritance without a charge of illegal magic. How could there be? An Inheritance couldn’t be detected if it weren’t used.”

“It happened in Norwich last year,” Pitt said. He’d gone to check during the brief recess earlier that afternoon, spurred by a faint memory of reading it in the papers. “Not under these circumstances, I admit: the man’s relatives informed the Templars, and the Templars

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confirmed the Inheritance without any documented incident of his abilities being used. But it gives us some precedent. And ten years in the Tower is a good deal better than the thirty-five he'll receive with the illegal-magic charge added."

His colleague was wavering. "It's very clever, Mr. Pitt. You've forgotten one thing, though. The prosecution can still argue that the self-defense law doesn't apply, since he was defending his wife and not himself."

"That's true," Pitt conceded. It was their usual stumbling block. "But it's still a chance, which is more than he has now. If the prosecution are distracted enough by us pressing for failure to report only, it might just slip by them. They may well try to argue, as you just did, that you cannot have failure to report without an illegal-magic charge, and let the question of self-defense rest altogether. Which, by the way, is an interesting precedent to set for future cases, isn't it?"

His colleague hesitated a moment longer, then smiled reluctantly. "Oh, very well. We'll try it, at least. I'll speak to the judge at the club tonight about changing the plea."

Pitt kept a smile of triumph off his own face, but he suspected some of it came through in his voice. "Thank you."

"It won't make the Knights Templar very happy, mind you," the other advocate warned. "Unregistered magic has been climbing every generation—they want to come down hard on it these days."

"With all due respect to the Knights Templar," Pitt returned, "surely that's for the law and the government to decide."

Said law and government—or at least the House of Commoners, which Pitt considered the same thing, though intellectually he knew better—were assembling at five o'clock that evening. As fortune would have it, the debates had not quite begun as Pitt fought his way through the crowds. The public gallery was scarcely fifteen feet above the floor of the House of Commoners, and its pillars thrust down among the benches right into the midst of the debaters. Below, he could see Edmund Burke arriving, and the prime minister, Lord

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North, with an entourage about him. Charles Fox was already seated and talking on the opposition benches; his bright yellow waistcoat was stretched across his round frame, and his bushy eyebrows were animated as he turned to a new arrival. Already the visitors' platform was a rowdy crush of people.

Pitt had been five when he had first been brought from the safe haven of their family home to watch his father speak. Their mother had been at home with little James, but his tutor had brought him along with his older brother and sisters. The five Pitt children were only a year or two apart in age, all educated at home and constantly in the company of their parents or each other. John, eight years old and destined for the army, leaned over the railings to wave at their father; Hester stood with her usual self-possession at his side. Harriot chatted to their tutor excitedly with half a protective eye on her younger brother. Even then, William Pitt had been tall, thin, and awkward for his age, quietly confident in adult company but shy in crowds. Coming after a frosty evening outside, the sudden enveloping warmth of bodies had overwhelmed him, as had the equal warmth of the shouts and protests while the debates raged below. He had felt that he was pitching on a storm-tossed raft above crashing waves, only the waves were people and ideas, and the storm around him was the same. It had taken his breath away.

“Do you hear the walls singing?” his tutor had said, bending down beside him. Pitt had listened attentively and thought he could. It was a faint pulse and hum, felt more than heard. His elder siblings paid it no attention: they had seen it all before. “The panels are made of laburnum laced with silver. They respond to the speeches. Particular combinations of language and ideas make them vibrate and chime. The great orators, like your father, can play them like a symphony.”

“But Father’s not allowed to use magic,” Pitt had pointed out. It was before his father had been titled. “We’re Commoner blood.”

“Words have a magic of their own, William,” his tutor had said. “Especially in here. It has nothing to do with blood.”

Pitt had been working in the law courts for a year or so now, and

on the whole he enjoyed it. His brain reveled in its mix of order and invention, and he enjoyed the company of his colleagues, most of whom were lively and quick-witted and so appreciated those qualities in him. He liked the occasional opportunity, as with his case right now, to make a difference. There was no doubt in his mind, however, that it was employment only to support himself until he was old enough to take a seat in the House of Commons. He needed the work, and he was grateful to have it. But he needed politics like he needed the air he breathed, perhaps because it had always been part of the air in his home growing up, perhaps because it was indeed in his blood.

This, he had been told, was where change happened. Not in the courts, one Mr. Terrell at a time, but here, where words had power to make a building sing and alter the course of the country.

“Good evening,” came a voice. The politely insistent tone implied that it wasn’t the first time it had been said.

It took Pitt a few moments to locate the speaker. The voice that had addressed him had been pleasantly resonant, even melodious, yet its owner was tiny: almost a foot shorter than Pitt, and his slight figure was half-swallowed by the crowds. He was a young man, perhaps Pitt’s own age. His features were not striking or remarkable, leaving only a vague impression of strong eyebrows, a delicate cleft chin, and a nose that turned up at the end. There was an air of lively curiosity and intelligence about his face and eyes, however, that drew Pitt’s attention toward him out of the press of people.

Unfortunately, if he had ever seen either features or owner before, they had made no impression, and he couldn’t now put a name to them. That wasn’t uncommon for him, but it was very embarrassing.

“We’ve met once or twice at Cambridge,” the man said, without a hint of reproach. Apparently, he had recognized the problem. “You would have no cause to remember. You were always doing something studious, and I was and am being constantly persuaded to do anything but; I’m also nobody of real consequence. As a result, I know that you’re Mr. William Pitt, younger son of the famous Earl of Chatham,

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and you have no idea what peculiarly impertinent person is forcing himself upon your notice. I hope you'll forgive me."

The introduction, and the impish smile that accompanied it, was so without any trace of unease that Pitt felt his usual self-consciousness abate.

"I'll forgive you," he countered, "if you remedy my ignorance immediately."

"I'm William Wilberforce," the man said. His cheeks were flushed, either from the cold outside or the hot, rambunctious atmosphere of the platform, and his eyes were twinkling. "My father was a Commoner merchant from Hull, and I'm supposedly reading at Cambridge, although I fear I spend more time outside its walls than in lately. As I said, I'm being actively encouraged to do as little work as possible. If you desire proof, ask me what brought me into London."

"What brought you into London?"

"I'm glad you asked. I was told I might as well spend some time here and enjoy myself, since my inheritance—monetary, I mean, not magical—means I have no real need to pass the exams. My own tutor told me this. But in fairness, I've found London extremely diverting. I only came into the House last week because a group of us were walking between a dinner engagement and a ball and wanted to escape the snow, if I'm honest, but as you see, I've come back alone today when there's been but a light frost. I've shocked you."

"No, of course not," Pitt said, more stiffly than he intended. He had been brought up to regard a visit to the House of Commons as a reward for being exceptionally well behaved, and therefore to hate the thought of idle spectators. He hadn't meant to hold that against his new acquaintance, though, and he certainly hadn't meant to make it obvious he was doing so.

"That is a very polite lie," Wilberforce said adamantly. "I was watching you, and your nose wrinkled a little in distaste. It was the look given to me by a gambling friend of mine when I mentioned that I quite like playing cards, and the look given to me by my religious aunt when I was very small and said I liked the parts of the Bible that

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had animals in them, so I know it well. Just tell me I'm committing heresy."

It was Pitt's turn to smile. "Very well," he said, matching Wilberforce's gravity. "Coming into the House of Commons to escape the snow is heresy. Akin to using hundred-year-old wine to clean your toothbrush."

"Thank you so much for explaining." His tone became a little less playful. "In fact, I'm taking it more seriously than I made it sound. I don't, you see, happen to agree with my tutor that I have no need of anything except my inheritance. I want to have a career of some kind very soon, and I really did find the debate last week fascinating."

"Which one did you hear?"

"It was about the American War," Wilberforce said at once. This could have described any number of debates from last week, but from the way his face ignited, Pitt suspected he knew the one he meant. "Edmund Burke called for the government to make peace."

"Again." Pitt felt his own excitement ignite at the memory. "I heard it too."

"He was brilliant, wasn't he?"

"He was. At the end he was transcendent."

"The part that went—I can't quite remember the phrase, but it was something about how the struggle for liberty always manifests as a struggle for the right to magic—"

"Abstract liberty, like other mere abstractions, is not to be found. Liberty inheres in some sensible object; and every nation has formed to itself some favorite point, which by way of eminence becomes the criterion of their happiness. It happened that the great contests for freedom in this country were from the earliest times chiefly upon the question of magic.'" Pitt smiled at Wilberforce's look, slightly embarrassed. "I tend to remember speeches. Did you agree with him?"

"Wholeheartedly, as far as making peace with America is concerned. I know your father did too. What he said about magic and liberty just made me think about the reverse, in this country."

That was unexpected, and interesting. "How so?"

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“Well—it struck me that if struggles for liberty usually take the form of struggles for the right to practice magic, then the liberty of a given nation ought to be reflected in how freely magic is practiced in that nation. And our magical laws really are terribly out of date, aren’t they? There’s almost no leeway for Commoners to use their magic at all, even when it would be foolish for them not to do so.”

“Dear God, yes.” The courtroom was fresh in his mind. “There’s but one legal exception allowing for magic in the case of self-defense. The accused has to be under direct attack, with clear and present risk to his life. There are a thousand other reasons why a Commoner might reasonably use magic: to push a child out of danger, to warm a freezing house in winter, to heal a dying man. The law needs to account for them.”

“Do you not agree, then, that legislation of that kind can be abused?”

“All legislation can be abused; that’s what courts are designed to prevent. We need to reexamine exactly why magic is illegal to Commoners and make sure the laws reflect that and nothing else. We also need to—”

The renewed commotion in the gallery told Pitt that the debate was beginning down in the House. For once he felt a flare of disappointment—not because he wouldn’t have the opportunity to finish, but because he wouldn’t hear the reply. He hadn’t had such a promising start to a conversation in a while, and certainly not with somebody he hardly knew.

“Better give them a turn, I suppose,” Wilberforce said, with such convincing magnanimity it made Pitt smile. “Tell me what you were thinking later, though?”

“If you’re still here at the end of the debates,” Pitt promised. He had work to do for the trial tomorrow, but that could wait. “Most won’t stay.”

“Oh, believe me,” Wilberforce said, “you will find it nearly impossible to lose me.”

The following day, John Terrell was sentenced to ten years in the Tower of London for failure to report an Inheritance, after a hard-fought trial

that lasted well into the evening. The charge of unregistered magic was dropped without sentence. The courtroom was plunged into uproar as the sentence was passed, and Pitt, sitting in his place by the senior advocate, couldn't help but feel a quiet glow of triumph. It was an unprecedented victory: an admission that even an unregistered magician could use his or her abilities in an act of self-defense without prosecution for the act itself. It also, though most wouldn't have noticed, stretched the definition of "self-defense" by more than a little.

It wasn't, he was painfully aware, quite so much of a triumph for Mr. Terrell. The man stood as if dazed, the pallor of his face already that of a prisoner, and looked with anguished eyes at the tearful woman who was surely his wife. He would be parted from her for but ten years, Pitt reminded himself. However difficult that would be, it was still an astonishing improvement on thirty-five.

He told Wilberforce about it as they dined at White's that night: the two of them had met once again in the House of Commons and once again found their conversation had spilled outside the debates. This had involved Wilberforce rearranging what seemed to Pitt a dizzying entangle of social engagements, but he assured Pitt that he was notoriously unreliable, and his friends would expect nothing less.

"It's just a piece of legal trickery, really," Pitt said. "But with any luck the issue will be raised in Parliament the next time somebody tries to implement fairer penalties for unregistered magic."

"Good," Wilberforce declared. "And if nobody has done so by the time you're old enough to run for Parliament, you can bring it up yourself."

"Or you can," Pitt returned.

"If I ever decide to run for office. I still don't know if I will."

"Oh, I'm fairly convinced you will. After all, you were there at the House again tonight, when there were only intermittent showers."

Wilberforce smiled, though something passed across his face. Not quite a cloud, but a shadow of a cloud. "The last time I tried to do something I thought was important, it was not received very well by

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my family. I was twelve, and I decided I wanted to retire from the world, join the church, and become a Methodist.”

“Really?” Pitt glanced at his companion’s very un-Methodist-like demeanor with what could charitably be called surprise, but confined himself to saying, “I don’t think I’ve ever met a Methodist.”

“My aunt and uncle are Methodists. I went to live with them for a time, after my father died. But don’t worry, you still haven’t met one. My mother and grandfather were horrified. They pulled me from that house at once and banished me to boarding school for a course of strict hedonism. I think no parents ever labored more to impress their child with sentiments of piety than they did to give me a taste of the world’s diversion.”

“Did it work?”

“Oh yes. I’d make a terrible Methodist now. I like society too much. But I don’t think I ever quite recovered from the idea that there was something greater.”

“Well,” Pitt said, “perhaps you need to know the world in order to find it.”

“Perhaps.” His smile this time had its customary warmth. “It’s a good beginning, at least.”

“It is,” Pitt agreed. Neither of them was quite sure what it was that was supposed to be beginning, but it didn’t matter. They were twenty. Everything was beginning.