

A HERO . . . A HERITAGE . . . A HISTORY

WINSTON GRAHAM



THE BLACK MOON



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A Novel of Cornwall, 1794–1795

WINSTON GRAHAM

PAN BOOKS

For Marjory

Jonathan CHYNOWETH (of Cusgarne) (1690–1750)
m. Anna Tregear (1693–1760)

Jonathan (1710–77)
m. Elizabeth Lanyon (1716–50)

Robert (1712–50)
m. Ursula Venning (1720–88)

Jonathan (1737–)
m. Joan Le Grice (1730–)

Hubert (1750–93)
m. Amelia Tregellas (1751–)

Elizabeth (1764–99)
m. (1) Francis Poldark
(2) George Warleggan

Morwenna (1776–)
Garlanda (1778–)
Carenza (1780–)
Rowella (1781–)

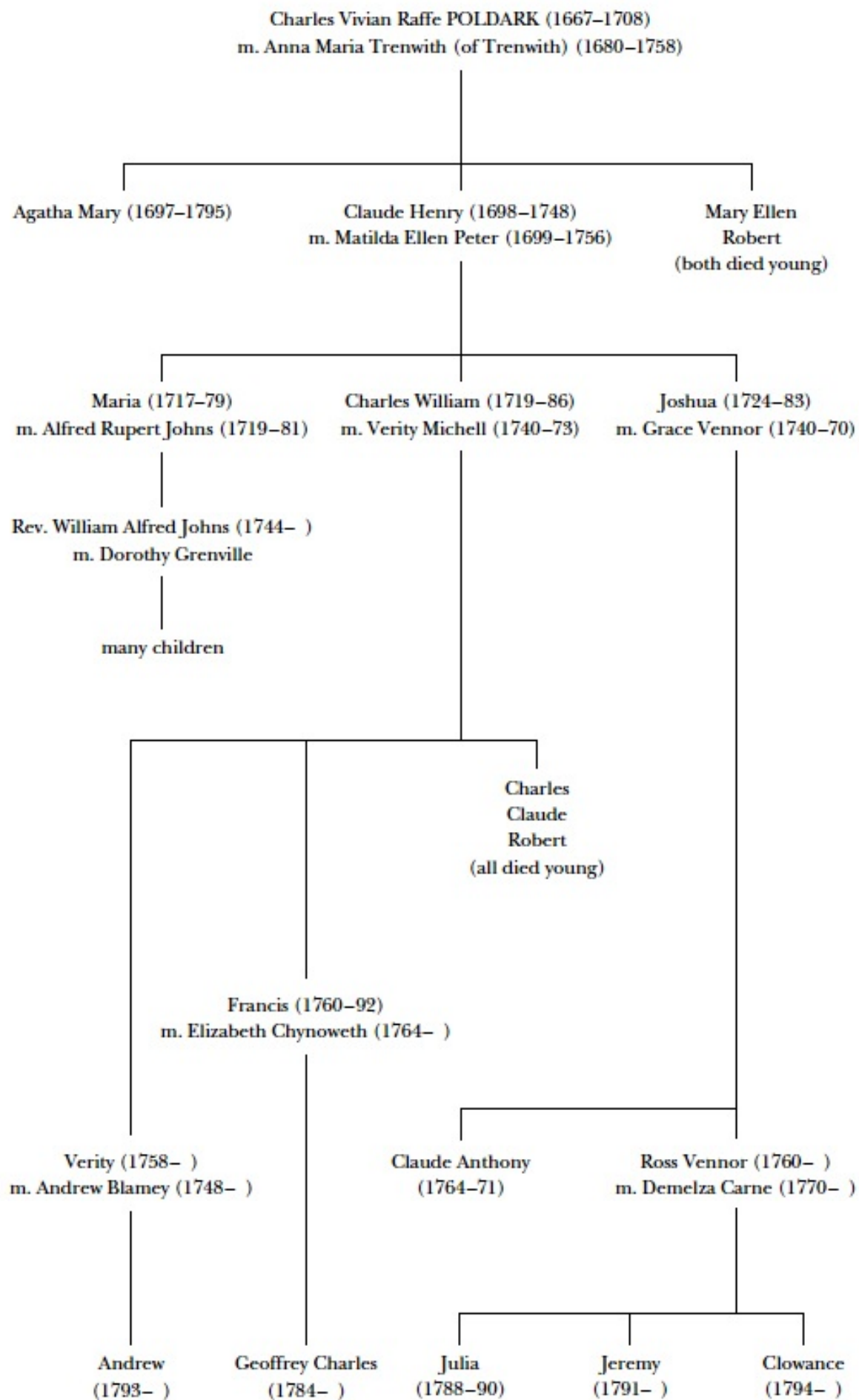
Tom CARNE (1740–94)
m. Demelza Lyon (1752–77)

Luke WARLEGGAN (1715–)
m. Bethia Kemp (1716–44)

Demelza (1770–)
Luke (1771–)
Samuel (1772–)
William (1773–)
John (1774–)
Robert (1775–)
Drake (1776–)

Nicholas (of Cardew) (1735–)
m. Mary Lashbrook (1732–)
George (1759–)
m. Elizabeth Poldark (née Chynoweth)
(1764–)
Valentine (1794–)

Cary Warleggan
(1740–)



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BOOK ONE

Chapter One

Elizabeth Warleggan was delivered of the first child of her new marriage at Trenwith House in the middle of February, 1794. It was an occasion of some tension and anxiety.

Throughout it had been understood and agreed between Elizabeth and her new husband that the confinement should take place at their town house, where the best medical attention was available; but Truro had been pestilential for months, first with summer cholera which had persisted right through to Christmas, and then more lately with influenza and measles. There had seemed no hurry. Dr Behenna, who rode out weekly to see his patient, assured them that there was no hurry.

And so possibly there would not have been, but on the evening of the thirteenth, which was a Thursday, Elizabeth slipped and fell while going to her room. The fine stone staircase leading up from the great hall ran into a typically dark Tudor corridor from which the two main bedrooms of the house were reached by a flight of five more steps. Elizabeth caught her foot in the rough edge of the top step and fell to the bottom. No one saw her, though two of the servants heard her cry out and the noise of her fall; and one of them, hurrying along the corridor with a warming pan, came upon her mistress lying like a broken flower across the bottom step.

Immediately the house was in panic. George, fetched from the winter parlour, came heart in mouth, picked up his fainting wife and carried her to bed. As Dr Dwight Enys was still at sea, the only medical man within easy reach was old Thomas Choake, so he was summoned for lack of a better, while another servant was sent galloping to fetch Dr Behenna.

Except for a bruised elbow and a turned ankle, Elizabeth at first seemed no worse, and after a generous bleeding she was given a warm cordial and settled off to sleep. George disliked almost everything about Choake: his pompous conceit, his boasted prowess in the hunting field, his neck-or-nothing surgery, his simpering wife, and his Whig opinions; but he made the best of it, gave the old man supper and suggested he should stay the night. Choake, who had not been inside the house since Francis Poldark died, stiffly agreed.

It was a grey meal. Mrs Chynoweth, Elizabeth's mother, in spite of her blind eye, lame leg and stumbling tongue, had refused food and insisted on staying in her daughter's room to be there if she woke; so only old Jonathan Chynoweth joined the other two men at the table. Talk was of the war with France, which Choake, following his hero Fox, opposed, of Edward Pellew's exploits at sea, of the Duke of York's inept display in Flanders, of the reign of terror in Lyons, of the scarcity of corn, of the rising price of tin and copper. George despised both the men he sat with and was mainly silent listening to them wrangling, Choake's hoarse growl, Chynoweth's throaty tenor. For a time in his mind the anxiety had passed. Elizabeth had shaken herself, nothing more. But she must not be so abominably careless of herself. Often recently she had done what George considered foolhardy, reckless things, while carrying this precious burden, this first fruit of their marriage. One perhaps expected her to be depressed, temperamental, given to quick tears. One did not expect her to risk her

life attempting to ride a horse which had been long in the stable and was unreliable at the best of times. One did not expect to find her lifting heavy books on to a high shelf. One did not expect . . .

It was a new side to her personality. George was always discovering new sides to her; some fascinated, some, like this, disturbed. From the first moment he set eyes on her so many years ago, he had always wanted her, but perhaps wanted her most as a collector, as a connoisseur wants the most beautiful thing he has ever seen. Since their marriage possession had familiarized but not spoiled the image. On the contrary, he had come to know her for the first time. If real love was in his nature, then he loved his wife.

On these calm reflections, breaking them up like a stone cast in a pool, interrupting the two stupid old men and their ill-informed chatter, came a servant to say that the mistress was awake again and had a bad pain.

Dr Behenna arrived at midnight, having left his Truro patients to the blundering mercies of his assistant. Choake did not offer to leave, and George let him stay. His fee was unimportant.

Daniel Behenna was a youngish man, still the right side of forty, stout, short and authoritative, and had come to Truro only a few years ago. George Warleggan was a fairly shrewd judge, and he perceived that the wide demand for Dr Behenna's services in and around Truro might, at least in part, be a matter of personality and address. Nevertheless, he had had some startling successes with his new methods, and, above all, he had studied midwifery under one of the most distinguished of London physicians. He seemed far to be preferred to any other doctor within a day's ride.

After a short examination of the patient, he came out and told George that Mrs Warleggan's pains were certainly birth pangs. He described these as 'wandering' but otherwise normal. Quite clearly the child was now going to be premature, but it was still alive. Mrs Warleggan was standing the pains well, and, although there would clearly be a greater risk now, he had every reason to be confident of the outcome.

At noon on the following day, in the worst of George's anxiety, his parents turned up, having nearly wrecked their coach traversing the winter tracks. They had been staying in town when the news reached them. Nicholas Warleggan said they felt it their duty to be with him at such a time. Trenwith, apart from its few splendid entertaining rooms, was not a big house by Elizabethan standards, and the secondary bedrooms were small and dark. George was barely polite to his parents and sent them off with a servant to settle in a cold room as best they could.

Elizabeth continued to have severe spasmodic pains, but at lengthy intervals, and the presentation, said Dr Behenna, although normal was far too slow. He took tea with the family at five and quoted from Galen, Hippocrates and Simon of Athens. The third stage of pregnancy had, he said, now begun but if there was no issue shortly he had decided to use forceps since, he said, the mere irritation of these when applied to the child would be likely to stimulate the labour pains and provoke a natural birth.

But providence was on the mother's side and at six the pains became more frequent without stimulation. At a quarter after eight she was delivered of a baby boy, alive and well. There was a total eclipse of the moon at the time.

A little later George was allowed up to see his wife and son. Elizabeth lay in bed like a clipped angel, her fair hair streaming across the pillow, her face limp and linen-pale but her eyes – for the first time for weeks – smiling. Until then George had not realized how long it had been. He bent and kissed her damp forehead and then went across to peer at the wisp of humanity lying red-faced and trussed like

mummy in its cradle. His son. The fortune whose foundations Nicholas Warleggan had laid thirty-five years ago when he began tin-smelting in the Idless valley had developed and multiplied until it included commercial, mining and banking interests which stretched as far as Plymouth and Barnstaple. George in the last ten years had been responsible for much of the later expansion. The child born today, if he survived the hazards of infancy, would inherit it all.

George knew well enough that his marriage to Elizabeth Poldark had been a great disappointment to his parents. Nicholas had married Mary Lashbrook, a miller's daughter with a nest-egg and no education – even today it showed plainly – but they had had very different ambitions for their son. *He* had had the education, *he* had the money, *he* was able to mix in circles completely closed to Nicholas as a young man – not entirely open to Nicholas even now. They had invited rich and eligible girls to their country seat at Cardew; they had risked snubs by holding parties for the titled and the well connected at their town house in Truro. They had asked questions and waited anxiously for the right name to drop from his lips, as they felt sure in the end it must. He had a strong personal eye to social advancement. A title would have been all. Even a small title. 'Mr George and the Hon Mrs Mary Warleggan.' How nice even that would have sounded. Instead, after remaining unmarried until he was thirty, the age of discretion surely for a man who had been discreet even as a youth; now a clever, calculating, able man with his every thought turned towards power and advancement, he had chosen to marry the delicate, impoverished widow of Francis Poldark.

Not, of course, that Elizabeth's pedigree was anything but impeccably ancient and carried a considerable prestige in the county. In the ninth century one, John Trevelizek, had given a third of his land to his younger son, who took the name of Chynoweth, which meant New House. The elder son had died without issue, so that all had come to the younger. This first known Chynoweth had died in ad 889. It was doubtful if the King of England could go back so far. But George knew how his father felt. The stock was *exhausted*: look only at Elizabeth's father to see that. And in spite of their long lineage the Chynoweths had never done much more than survive. They had never attained distinction nor even achieved the only worthwhile alternative available to mediocrity, the wealthy marriage. The nearest to eminence was an ancestor who had been a squire to Piers Gaveston, and that was not altogether a notable recommendation. Although always known to the great families of Cornwall, they had never had any personal or family link with them.

But Elizabeth was beautiful; and she had never seemed more so than now. Visited at discreet intervals by her various relations and friends, she looked as lovely, as frail and as unspotted by life as if she were twenty, not thirty, and as if this were her first marriage and her first confinement, not her second time round.

Among Elizabeth's first visitors was of course her father-in-law, and after he had kissed her and asked after her condition and admired his grandson, Nicholas Warleggan closed the heavy oak door of the bedroom behind him, carefully descended the almost-fatal five stairs, and walked heavily along the floor-creaking corridor to the main staircase and the great windowed hall. Perhaps, he thought, he should not be too unsatisfied. Here at least was the succession he had desired. His daughter-in-law had done all that could be asked of her. And perhaps the Warleggans now no longer needed, and in the future still less would need, powerful family connections. They need not woo the titled families of Cornwall: the families soon enough would be glad to accept them. They were strong enough in their own right. George's marriage to Elizabeth was already proving something of an asset – for she was definitely one of *them* – and a title might come their way by some other means: a seat in Parliament, large monetary gifts to one or other of the borough mongers . . . This war would certainly help. Those middlemen owning and marketing the commodities could not fail to prosper. Banking facilities would be in ever greater demand. The price of tin had risen £5 a ton last week.

As he came to the bottom step Nicholas Warleggan reflected that, as an additional bonus to her

patrician breeding, Elizabeth had brought this house into the family, the Poldark family house, begun in 1509, not completed until 1531, and since then scarcely touched until George undertook his repairs and renovations of last summer.

The turns and twists of life led to some strange results. Nicholas's first visit here eleven years ago had been to the reception and banquet following Elizabeth Chynoweth's marriage to the son of the house. Then the Poldarks, though impoverished enough, had seemed as securely settled here as they had been for the past hundred years, and the Trenwiths for another century and a half before them. Old Charles William had been alive, belching and stertorous but active enough, head of the house, of the district, of the clan, to be succeeded by Francis when the time came, a young and virile twenty-two – who was to guess at his untimely death? – then came daughter Verity, a plain little thing who'd later made a poor marriage and lived now in Falmouth. Besides this there were the cousins: William Alfred, that thin sanctimonious clergyman and his brood, now gone to a living in Devon. And Ross Poldark, who unfortunately was still around, and prospering by all accounts, not yet having fallen down a mineshaft or been imprisoned for debt or transported for inciting to riot, as he so well deserved. Sometimes the wicked and the arrogant flourished, against all reasonable probability.

As Nicholas Warleggan walked across to the splendid window one of George's new footmen came in to snuff the candles which had recently been lighted. The sky was still bright outside, with a frosty look against the butter-yellow of the candles. It had been a mild month, altogether a mild winter – fortunate for the many destitute, though not good for general health. Influenza, they said, was carried by the heavy clouds and spread by the humidity; it needed a cold snap to clear it away.

The fire hissed with new wood thrown on around a massive elm log which had been carried in yesterday. The footman finished his task and went silently out, leaving Nicholas Warleggan alone. That other time, that first time, eleven years ago, this fine hall had been far from silent. He remembered then how envious he had been of this house. Shortly afterwards he had bought one twice its size – Cardew, towards the other coast, in its own deer park, all in Palladian fashion and finished to the most modern style. Compared to it, this place was provincial and old-fashioned. Stonework showed inside everywhere, there was far too much black oak panelling in the bedrooms, many of the floorboards creaked and some of them had worm, the close-stools stank and were out of date compared to the *chaises-perchées* of Cardew, bedroom windows were ill-fitting and let in draughts. But it had style. Apart from the satisfaction that it had always belonged to the Poldarks.

Nicholas remembered too at that wedding how grey-faced and haggard young Ross Poldark had looked. George had known him before, but it was *his* first sight of the fellow, and he had wondered at his sour look, his lidded eyes and high cheek bones, his disfiguring scar – until George told him. They had *all* wanted Elizabeth, it seemed: Ross, Francis and George. Ross had thought himself enfeoffed, but Francis had moved in while his cousin was in America. Three young fools all at loggerheads, all for a pretty face. What else was there about this girl to make her so desirable? Nicholas shrugged and took a poker to stir the fire. The *delicacy*, he supposed, the frailty, the lovely ethereal quality; all men wanted to nurture, to protect, to be the strong man caring for the beautiful helpless woman, potential Launcelots looking for a Guinevere. Strange that his own son, so sane, so logical, in many ways almost too calculating, should have been one of them!

As he pushed at the fire one of the smaller logs fell out with a clatter, brightly burning and smoking at one end, and Nicholas stooped to pick up the tongs. As he did so something moved in the chair beside the fire. He started up sharply and dropped the poker. The chair had been in the half shadow but now he saw someone was sitting in it.

'Who's that?' said a thin voice, sexless in its age. 'Be that you, George? These damned servants . . .'

Agatha Poldark. Aside from young Geoffrey Charles, the child of Elizabeth's first marriage, who

hardly yet counted, Agatha was the only Poldark left in the house. To all the Warleggans she was affrontful, a haggard hunk of gristle and bone, properly long since dead. Nowadays she even smelt of the grave, but in spite of everything an activating spirit moved in her. Nicholas's wife, Mary, who to the family's annoyance was a prey to every superstition, regarded the old lady with real dread as if she were somehow animated by the protesting ghosts of generations of long-dead Poldarks wishing ill upon the interlopers. Agatha in this house was the snag in the silk, the fly in the ointment, the stone over which everyone sooner or later stumbled and fell. It was said that she would be ninety-nine in August. A year or so ago it had looked as if she were taking permanently to her bed, so that at the worst then she could have been quietly ignored by everyone except the maid appointed to look after her; but since Elizabeth's marriage, and especially when she learned that a new child was on the way she had recovered a spark of combative vitality and was apt to be found tottering about the house at the most unsuitable times.

'Oh, 'tis George's father . . .' A tear escaped from one eye, lodged in the nearest furrow and began slowly to work its way down towards the whiskery chin. This was no sign of emotion. 'Been up to see the chibby, have you? Regular little spud, he be. A Chynoweth through an' through.'

A black kitten moved on her lap. This was Smollet, which she had found somewhere a few months ago and made peculiarly her own. Now they were inseparable. Agatha never stirred without the kitter and Smollet, all red tongue and yellow eyes, could hardly ever be persuaded to leave her. Geoffrey Charles, with a small boy's glee, always called the cat 'Smell-it'.

Nicholas knew that Agatha only said what she had said to annoy him, yet was annoyed by it nevertheless. He was further irritated that he could not reply to her in suitable terms, for she was very deaf and, unless one shouted in her ear – and such nearness was offensive – no communication was possible. So she could go on talking, making outrageous remarks, without fear of contradiction. George had told him that the only way of annoying her was to turn one's back and walk away while she was speaking, but Nicholas was damned if he was going to be driven away from the fire by this repulsive old woman.

He put the log back, but inefficiently, so that an end of it sent a thin spiral of smoke up into the room. He would have rung for a servant to correct this, but he let it smoke in the hope that it would irritate Agatha's chest.

'That surgeon,' said Agatha. 'Great numbskull of a fellow, tying up the poor little crim so tight against the convulsions. There's better ways than that to protect against convulsions. I'd have'n freed this eve if I had the ordering of it.'

'You do not have the ordering of it,' said Mr Warleggan.

'Eh, what's that? What's that you say? Speak up!'

He might have shouted something in return, but a door opened then and George came in. At times, perhaps most when not in company and therefore both were relaxed, the similarity between the two men was marked. A little shorter than his tall father, George had the same heavy build, the same strong neck, the same deliberate in-toed walk. They were both good-looking men in their formidable way. George's face was the broader, with the bottom lip drawn up in the middle and jutting to create shadow. There were small lumps on his forehead between the eyebrows. If his hair had been cut in short tight curls he would have looked like the Emperor Vespasian.

'A pretty sight,' he said, as he neared the fire. 'My own father in conversation with the original Witch of Endor. How does it go? "I saw Gods ascending out of the earth. An old man cometh up and he is covered with a mantle."'

Mr Warleggan at last put the poker back. 'You should not let your mother hear you speak in that way. She has no fancy for supernatural talk even in jest.'

'I'm not sure it is in jest,' said George. 'In better days this old twitching decayed carcass would

have been helped on its way by a suitable ducking or a witch's bridle. We should not have to suffer it in a civilized household.'

The kitten, to Agatha's pleasure, had arched its back and spat at the new arrival.

'Well, George,' she said. 'I trust you feel a bigger man now you're father of an eight-month brat. What's he to be called, eh? There's too many Georges about, with all these kings. I mind the time . . . She coughed. 'Fire's smeeching. Mr Warleggan's scat it all asunder.'

'If I were you I should have the creature confined to her room,' Nicholas said. 'She should be guarded there.'

'If I had my way,' George said, 'she would be thrown on the midden tomorrow – and perhaps other with her.'

'Well, whose way do you have?' asked Nicholas, knowing very well.

George looked at him speculatively. 'The way of a man in possession of a fair city. When the citadel has been won the stews can wait awhile.'

'You could name him Robert,' came the thin voice from the armchair. 'Him with the crooked back. First of the name that we know. Or Ross. What'd you say to Ross?' The wheezing which broke out might have been caused by the smoke but more probably it was the result of an old frame trying to accommodate malicious laughter.

George turned his back and strolled to the window and looked out. Although the hall was warm near the fire, cold airs stirred as soon as one moved out of its range. 'I trust,' he said, 'that soon this old creature will swell up into a great tumour and burst.'

'Amen . . . But touching on names, George. I conject that you and Elizabeth will already have some thoughts on the matter. We own some good ones within the family—'

'I have already decided. I decided before he was born.'

'Before he was born? Oh, but how could you do that? If it were a girl—'

'This accident to Elizabeth,' said George. 'It might have been fatal to them both, but now it has not been so I feel some heavy finger of providence in it – as if it were pointing a time and a place and date. Having regard to the date, as soon as I knew the child would be born on that day, I chose the name. If it were a girl, the same.'

Mr Warleggan waited. 'What is it, then?'

'Valentine.'

'Or Joshua,' said Aunt Agatha. 'We've had three in the family to my knowledge, though the last was a bad boy if ever there was one.'

Nicholas hopefully watched the thin smoke from the fire curling round the old woman's chair. 'Valentine. Valentine Warleggan. It matches well, is easy on the tongue. But there is no one in either family of that name.'

'There will be nobody in either family like my son. History does not have to repeat itself.'

'Yes, yes. I will ask your mother how it appeals to her. Is this Elizabeth's choice too?'

'Elizabeth does not know it yet.'

Nicholas raised his eyebrows. 'But you are sure she will like it?'

'I am sure she will agree. We are in accord in so many things, many more than I expected. She will agree that this union of her and me is a rare one – the oldest gentry and the newest – and that the fruit of such a union should not look to the past but to the future. A quite new name is what we must have.'

Nicholas coughed and moved out of range of the smoke. 'You will not get away from the name Warleggan, George.'

'I shall never have the least desire to get away from it Father. Already it is respected – and feared.'

'As you say . . . The respect is what we must build on, the fear is what we must dissipate.'

'Uncle Cary would not agree.'

'You pay too much attention to Cary. What was your business with him last week?'

~~'Routine affairs. But I believe you draw too fine a line, Father, between respect and fear. One merges with the other and back again. You cannot separate two emotions of such similar colour.'~~

'Probity in business induces the first.'

'And improbity the second? Oh, come—'

'Not improbity, perhaps, but the misuse of power. In a moment you will be telling me I read you a lecture. But Cary and I have never seen eye to eye on this. I ask you, whose name do you wish your son to bear?'

'Yours and mine,' said George evenly. 'That is the one he will bear. And where I have walked on your shoulders, he shall walk on mine.'

Nicholas went back to the fire and replaced the smoking log where the smoke could go up the chimney.

'That's better, my son,' said Agatha, waking from a doze. 'You don't want the fire flogged all about the hearth.'

'God alive, I believe that old woman's stench has drifted over here!' In irritation George went over and pulled the tasselled bell. Mr Warleggan continued to cough. The smoke, although now dispersing, had settled on his chest and he could not clear it. Without speaking they waited until the servant came.

'Fetch the Harry brothers,' George said.

'Yes, sir.'

'Take a glass of canary,' George said to his father.

'Thank you, no. It's of no moment . . .'

He spat in the hearth.

'Comfrey and liquorice,' said Aunt Agatha. 'I had a sister died of the lungs, and naught would soothe her but comfrey and liquorice.'

Presently Harry Harry hulked in the doorway, followed by his younger brother Tom. 'Sur?'

George said: 'Remove Miss Poldark to her room. When you are there ring for Miss Pipe and tell her that Miss Poldark is not to come down again today.'

The two big men brought up a smaller chair and lifted Aunt Agatha protesting into it. Clutching the mewling kitten to her breast, she croaked: 'There be one thing amiss with your little son, George. God seldom comes to a child born under a black moon. I only know two and they both came to bad ends!'

Nicholas Warleggan's face was purple. His son went across to the table, poured wine into a glass and brought it impatiently back.

'No . . . it is the . . . Oh, well, a sip will help perhaps.'

'Elizabeth'll hear 'bout this!' said Aunt Agatha. 'Carried out of me own hall like a spar o' driftwood . . . Ninety year I known this hall. Ninety year . . .' Her frail complaints disappeared behind Tom Harry's broad back as she was carried up the stairs.

'We should have had Elizabeth at Cardew for the lying in,' said Mr Warleggan between coughs and sips, 'then we should have been spared these irritations.'

'I think it not inappropriate that our first child should have been born here.'

'But shall you stay? I mean to make it your home?'

A wary look crossed George's face. 'I am not sure. We have not yet decided. This has *been* Elizabeth's home, you understand. I do not fancy selling it. Nor do I fancy maintaining it solely for the convenience of the Chynoweths and the residue of the Poldarks. And I have already spent money, as you can see.'

'Indeed.' Nicholas wiped his eyes and put away his handkerchief. He eyed his son. 'There is one other Poldark to be considered, George.'

'Geoffrey Charles? Yes. I have nothing against him. I have promised to Elizabeth that his education

shall be as expensive as she desires.'

'It is not just that. It is the fact of his being so firmly attached to his mother's apron strings. I hope your son – this new baby – will distract Elizabeth from her preoccupation with him, but it would seem necessary—'

'I know exactly what would seem necessary, Father. Give me leave to manage my own household.'

'I'm sorry. I had thought simply to suggest . . .'

George frowned down at a stain on his cuff. The matter of Geoffrey Charles's future had been one of the few points of difference with Elizabeth these last months.

'Geoffrey Charles is to have a governess.'

'Ah . . . Good . . . But at ten—'

'He would be better with a tutor or to go away. I agree. Some good school near London. Or Bath. That we – have not been able to arrange yet.'

'Ah.'

After a pause, while Nicholas read between the lines, George added, 'For a year or so, at least until he is eleven, he will stay here. We have found a suitable person to look after him.'

'A local person?'

'Bodmin. You will remember the Reverend Hubert Chynoweth, who was the Dean there. He was Jonathan's cousin.'

'Did he die?'

'Last year. Like all the Chynoweths he had no private money, and his family is poorly off. The eldest girl is seventeen. She is genteel – like all the Chynoweths – and has had some education. It will please Elizabeth to receive her.'

Mr Warleggan grunted. 'I would have thought there were enough Chynoweths about the place. But if it suits you . . . You've seen her?'

'Elizabeth knew her as a child. But a dean's daughter as a governess should be no social detriment.'

'Yes, I see that. And she will know how to behave. The question is whether she will be able to make Master Geoffrey Charles behave. He has been greatly spoiled and needs a firm hand.'

'That in due course he shall have,' George said. 'This is an interim measure. An experiment. We must see how it works.'

Mr Warleggan mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. 'My cough has gone now that old woman has gone. D'you know I believe she wished it on me.'

'Oh, nonsense.'

'What was that – what was that she said about the child being born under a black moon?'

'There was an eclipse on Friday, a total eclipse, at the time of his birth. You didn't notice?'

'No. I was too preoccupied.'

'So was I. But the Sherborne paper mentioned it. And I did notice the animals, and some of the servants, were restless.'

'Your mother is coming down for supper?'

'I assume so. We shall go in in ten minutes.'

'Then . . .' Nicholas Warleggan shrugged uncomfortably. 'If I were you, do not mention that old woman's nonsense to her.'

'I had no intention of doing so.'

'Well, you know how she is – a little wayward in matters of superstition. She has always paid too much attention to signs and portents. It is better not to worry her with such things.'

Chapter Two

In the mid morning of a windy March day two young men were tramping along the mule track which led past the engine house and the derelict buildings of Grambler Mine. It was a day of lowering clouds and flurries of rain, the wind westerly, booming and blundering. Glimpses of the sea showed it to be licked white and untidy; where there were rocks a mist of spray drifted.

A dozen or so cottages straggled beside the mine. These were still occupied though in poor repair; the mine buildings themselves – those not built of stone – were already in ruin; but much of the headgear and the three engine houses remained. Grambler – on which the prosperity of the senior Poldarks had depended, to say nothing of three hundred miners and spallers and bal-maidens – had been closed now for six years and the prospects of its ever opening again were remote. It was a depressing sight.

‘’Tis the same all the way, Drake,’ said the elder one. ‘One mine smoking twixt here and Illuggan. It is a dire picture. But we must not sink into the sin of ingratitude. A merciful God has ordained it so for our chastisement.’

‘We’re on the right way?’ asked Drake. ‘I never been afore. Did I come? I don’t mind it.’

‘No, you was too small.’

‘How much farther then?’

‘Three or four mile. I don’t recollect too well.’

They turned and went on, both tall young men not immediately recognizable as brothers. Sam, the elder by four years, looked more than twenty-two. He had big shoulders, an ungainly walk, a thin, deeply furrowed face, which looked sombre as if it bore all the sorrows of the world, until he smiled, when the sorrowful lines broke up into benign and affable creases. Drake was equally tall but of slighter build and notably good-looking, with a fine skin unmarked by the pox; a mischievous face; he looked as if he enjoyed poking fun. It was a propensity he had had to keep on a leash when in the vicinity of his father. They were both poorly but respectably dressed – in dark blue barragan trousers with low quartered shoes, waistcoats and jackets over coarse shirts. Sam wore an old hat, Drake a pin striped neckcloth. Both carried small bundles and sticks.

They crossed the Mellingey stream by a footbridge that nearly gave way under them, then climbed to a coppice of pine trees, with beyond it the next ruined mine, Wheal Maiden, which had been silent half a century and looked it. Stones lay where they had fallen. Anything of use had long since been carried away. The rooks rose and made a commotion at being disturbed.

But now in the shallow valley they were entering they could see smoke. On a quiet day they would have seen it earlier. Both walked a little slower as they neared the end of their journey, as if hesitant to end it. As they went down the high hedged lane they could peer between the ferns and the brambles, the hawthorn and the wild nut trees, and could see the engine house – not a new one, it looked as if it had been rebuilt – but the headgear was all new, the huts that clustered around were new and in

obvious use; the Mellingley stream, which curled back into this valley, had been dammed and they could hear the thump and clatter of the water-driven tin stamps; all the noises had been held back by the wind; a dozen women worked on a washing floor; farther down the water activated a sweep which rotated awkwardly round and round helping to separate the ore. A train of mules with panniers on wheels being driven up the opposite slope of the valley. At the foot of the valley, with a small lawn and a few bushes only separating it from all the industry, was a low granite-built house, part slate roof, part thatch, bigger and grander than a farm house, with its outbuildings, its squat chimneys, its straggling wing and its mullioned windows, yet hardly of the distinction to be called a gentleman's residence. Behind the house the land rose again in a ploughed field running up to a headland; beyond scrubland to the right was a beach with a scarf of slaty sea.

'Twasn't no lie,' said Drake.

'Reckon you're right. It look different from when I came afore.'

'This work is all new?'

'S I reckon. Nanfan said it had not been started more'n two year.'

Drake ran a hand through his shock of black hair. 'Tis a handsome house. Though not near so great as Tehidy.'

'The Poldarks is small gentry, not big.'

'Big enough for we,' said Drake with a nervous laugh.

'All men are alike in the sight of the eternal Jehovah,' said Sam.

'Mebbe so, but it isn't Jehovah we got to deal with.'

'No, brother. But all people are set at liberty by the blood of Christ.'

They went on and recrossed the stream and came up to the house. Disturbed, some seagulls blew up from the lawn like white clothes flapping in the wind.

The two young men were saved the necessity of knocking because the front door opened and a small plump brown-haired middle-aged woman came out carrying a basket. When she saw them she stopped and rubbed her free hand down her apron.

'Yes?'

'If ye please, ma'am,' said Sam. 'We'd like to see your mistress.'

'Just tell her two friends has called.'

'Friends?' Jane Gimlett eyed them and hesitated, but she was not sufficiently the well-trained servant to stare them down. 'Wait here,' she said, and turned back into the house. She found her mistress in the kitchen bathing one of Jeremy's knees where he had scuffed it climbing a wall. A large hairy dog of anonymous breed lay at her feet. 'There's two young men at the door, ma'am, want to see. Miners or the like, I'd say.'

'Miners? From our mine?'

'Nay. Strangers. From a distance, I'd say.'

Demelza looped up a curl of hair and straightened. 'Stay there, my handsome,' she said to Jeremy, and walked along the passage to the front door, frowning in the brighter light. At first she did not recognize either of them.

'We came to see ye, sister,' said Sam. 'Tis six years since we met. D'you recall me? I'm Sam, the second one. I mind you well. This is Drake, the youngest. He were seven when you left home.'

'Judas!' said Demelza. 'How you've both grown!'

Ross had been up at Wheal Grace with Captain Henshawe and the two engineers who had built the engine. They had been over to check a fault which had developed in the pump rod, and the engine had been stopped for half a day until they came; so the opportunity had been taken to carry out the

monthly cleaning of the boiler.

It was in a thoughtful but cheerful mood that Ross started back to the house. The mine, he thought, had now reached the limits of its foreseeable expansion. It employed thirty tributers, twenty-five tute-men, six binders and timbermen, and about forty workers of one sort and another above ground. The engine was now working at near its comfortable capacity, and the water it pumped up from sixty fathoms was ingeniously channelled into a wooden trough which worked a small water-wheel at surface which itself worked a secondary and much smaller pump. The water then flowed down a ten-fathom adit until it worked a second water-wheel built sixty feet below the level of the first wheel and about thirty feet below the level of the sloping ground, where it ran on down the adit to come out at the washing floor built just above Demelza's garden. A fair amount of the mined ore was still sent to be crushed and washed at the tin stamps of Sawle Combe, for there was not enough room for more stamps in this valley without destroying it as a place to live.

Further extension of the mine looked uneconomic. To build another engine or to attempt to work this one harder would be self-defeating. Coal cost 18s a ton free on board, and even the war had not yet raised the price of tin to a level where a fair return was assured. One of the contributing causes of this was a swing in fashion away from the use of pewter to the use of cloam and china. It was a nationwide change of habit and had come at just the wrong time.

Nevertheless, because the lodes were so rich and, in spite of their depth, so accessible, this mine was paying where so many others were failing or had failed. Great concerns like United Mines had been losing £11,000 a year before they closed. Wheal Grace, small as it was, was rich beyond his hopes and in six months had eaten up his many debts like a benevolent Lucullus. Two months' profit had paid off the whole of his £1,400 debt to Caroline Penvenen; in another two months he had discharged his debts to Pascoe's Bank and swept away all his lesser dues; by May he could repay the twenty-year-old mortgage which Harris Pascoe personally held. Soon there would be money on deposit in the bank, or to invest in five per cents, or to keep in bags under the bed, or to spend on whatever they wanted most.

It was a heady brew. Neither he nor Demelza had become acclimatized yet; they behaved as if the last ton of ore might be raised – this afternoon. A week ago he had taken Demelza down the mine and shown her the two rich and expanding floors; supposedly it had been to convince her; in fact, though he saw them daily, it was as much to convince himself. He felt he needed the reassurance of her conviction too.

With the mine being so close to the house he went home most days for dinner, which was usually about 2 p.m. It was now barely 1, but he had some mine figures he would work out in the library. Since the reconciliation of Christmas he had spent as much time at home as possible; it was another form of reassurance. They had all but lost each other – she had been prepared to go, had been on her way out of the house. Now it seemed incredible that they had been so near to parting. The warmth of their reconciliation had been full of passion, had brought them closer in some ways than they had ever been before, all defences down. Yet it had been a slightly feverish warmth – and still was – as if their relationship were recovering from a near-mortal wound and they were trying to reassure themselves. The quieter levels of absolute trust which had existed before had not yet been regained.

And tempering their delight and relief at the success of the mine was the knowledge of the alien presence at Trenwith House only four miles away. Often they would forget it; then it would recur like an undulant pain, so that temporarily they were at a distance from each other again. The birth and christening of Valentine Warleggan was the latest thorn in the flesh. Neither said what was uppermost in their minds; it could never be uttered by anyone. But Caroline Penvenen had written to Demelza:

'Such disappointment not to see you there, though to tell the truth I had hardly expected it, knowing

the deep and abiding love Ross and George have for each other. I do not remember ever having been inside Trenwith before; it's a fine house. The brat is dark, but I think favours Elizabeth; a well formed and quite handsome child, as children go. (I never really care for them until they are about three years old. Dwight will have to arrange it for me somehow!) A big assemblage for the Christening – I did not know there were so many Warleggans, and one or two of the older ones a small matter unsavoury. Also as much of the near-by county as would turn out on a cold day.' She had gone into details of those present.

'Uncle Ray not able to go with me, alas too weak. He misses Dwight's ministrations. The last letter from Dwight was two weeks gone, aboard the *Travail*; but that itself was two weeks old when received, so in knowledge of his whereabouts I am already a month out of date. I fume at this like a love-lorn maiden in a tower, feeling it the worse for the knowledge that but for me he would not be in the Navy at all. I wish someone would *stop* this war . . .'

Although the letter had been written in all friendship, Ross would have been glad not to have received it. It lit the scene and revived memories of the house and the people he knew so well. The one person Caroline did not mention in the letter was Elizabeth herself. She did not of course know half the story, but clearly she knew enough to exercise tact in a letter to Demelza. He could not and would not have gone to the christening had they been invited; but it irked him more than he had ever thought probable that he was debarred from the family home, from calling on old Agatha, from seeing his nephew, from viewing the renovations and repairs that were taking place. He had seen enough when he made his last uninvited call at Christmas to know that the house was already changing its character, was taking on an alien personality.

As he passed the window of the parlour he glanced in and saw his wife seated in conversation with two strange young men.

He turned at once and went into them.

Jeremy wriggled off her knee and ran to him crying: 'Papa! Papa!' He picked him up and hugged him and set him down while the two young men stood awkwardly, not quite sure what to do with their hands. Demelza was wearing the bodice of fine white poplin she had made out of two of Ross's shirts and decorated with lace from an old shawl; a cream linen skirt, a green apron; a bunch of keys dangled from her waist. They had not yet found the opportunity to replenish her wardrobe.

'Do you remember my brothers, Ross?' Demelza said. 'This is Samuel, the second oldest, and Drake, the youngest. They have walked over from Illuggan to see us.'

A hesitation. 'Well,' said Ross. 'It has been a long time.' They shook hands, but guardedly, without warmth.

'Six year,' said Sam. 'Or thereabout. Since I were here, that is. Drake hasn't been afore. Drake was too young to come then.'

'Tis a tidy stroll for a little one even now,' said Drake.

Demelza said: 'I believe your legs are longer than Sam's.'

'We've all got long legs, sister,' said Sam soberly. 'Tis something our mother give us. And you the same, no doubt, if the truth be seen.'

Ross said: 'Have you been offered something to drink? Geneva? Or a cordial?'

'Thank ye. Sister did ask. But later maybe, a glass of milk. We don't touch spirits.'

'Ah,' said Ross. 'Well, sit down.' He glanced at Demelza and hesitated whether to leave them, but her lifted eyebrow invited him to stay. So he sat too.

'Tis not that we mind drink in others,' Drake explained, lightening his brother's tone. 'But we better prefer not to take it ourselves.'

'How is your father?' Ross asked, with a natural association of ideas.

‘The most high God was pleased to take’n to Himself last month,’ Sam said. ‘Father died well prepared for his meeting wi’ his blessed Saviour. We come to tell sister. That and other things.’

‘Oh,’ said Ross. ‘I’m sorry.’ He looked again at Demelza to see how this news had affected her, and he saw not at all. ‘How – what was amiss?’

‘He died of the pox. He hadn’t never had it, and it came sudden and he was buried within the week.’

Ross decided that the elder brother’s voice, though fervent was not charged with emotion. Filial love had been a duty, not a choice.

‘We all had it when we was young,’ said Drake. ‘It marked us but little. Did you have it, sister?’

‘Nay,’ said Demelza, ‘but I nursed you through it. Three of you at one time, and Father stone drunk every night.’

There was a pause. Sam sighed. ‘Well, give him his due, those days has been past these purty many year. Not since he wed again did he ever touch liquor.’

‘And Step-Mother Nellie?’ said Demelza. ‘She is well?’

‘Bravish. Luke is wed and from home. William and John and Bobby have followed father and would be down mine, but the mine is closed. There’s rare poverty in Illuggan.’

‘Not merely in Illuggan,’ said Ross.

‘True ’nough, brother,’ agreed Sam. ‘Round Illuggan and Camborne way, when I were a little tacker there was upwards of five-and-forty engines working. Day and night. Day and night. Now there’s four. Dolcoath’s gone, and North Downs, Wheal Towan, Poldice, Wheal Damsel, Wheal Unity. I could reckon ye a list so long as my arm!’

‘And what do you do?’ asked Ross.

‘I’m a tributer like the rest,’ said Sam. ‘When I can lease a pitch. But the Lord in his great mercy have seen fit to afflict me too. Drake here were apprenticed to a wheelwright for seven year. He d’work on and off, but most lately there has been naught for he neither.’

Ross began to suspect the purpose of their visit but refrained from saying so. ‘You are both – of the Methodist connexion?’ he asked.

Sam nodded his head. ‘We both have a new spirit and walk in the path of Christ, following his statutes.’

‘I thought you were the one that *hadn’t* seen the light,’ Demelza said. ‘Yes ago, when Father came once asking me to go home, he said all were converted but you, Samuel.’

Sam looked embarrassed, ran a hand over his lined young face. ‘That is so, sister. You’ve a rare memory. I lived without God amidst innumerable sins and provocations for upwards of twenty year. I existed in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. But at last God pardoned all my sins and set my soul at liberty.’

‘And now,’ said Drake, ‘Sam has found salvation more stronger than the rest of us.’

Ross glanced at the other boy. There was a suggestion of irony in the tone but none in the pale composed face. This one had a look of Demelza; the colouring, the eyes, the clarity of skin. Perhaps too in a sense of humour. ‘You’re not so sure for yourself?’ he asked.

Drake smiled. ‘Upon times I d’fall from grace.’

‘Don’t we all,’ said Ross.

‘You’re of the connexion too, brother?’ Sam said eagerly.

‘No, no,’ Ross said. ‘It was meant as a general comment on life, no more.’

Jeremy ran back and pulled at his mother’s skirt. ‘Can I go now, Mama?’ he asked. ‘Can I g’n play with Garrick?’

‘Yes. But mind for yourself. No more walls till that has healed.’

When he had gone Sam said: ‘You ’ave others, sister?’

‘No, the only one. We lost a girl.’ Demelza smoothed her skirt. ‘And Father and the widow? They

have others, I recollect?’

~~‘A little cheeil rising five, named Flotina. Three others was all called to God.’~~

‘God has a lot to answer for,’ said Ross.

There was an embarrassed silence. In the end neither boy rose to the bait, as their father would certainly have done.

Demelza said: ‘What time did you leave home this morning?’

‘Left home? Soon after cocklight. We took but one wrong turn and was sent back by gamekeepers. was in the error for I thought twas the way we had come last time.’

‘You possibly had,’ Ross said. ‘But there are new owners at Trenwith who are blocking paths that have been rights of way for generations.’

‘It is too far to walk back today,’ Demelza said. ‘You must stay over.’

‘Well, thank ye, sister.’ Samuel cleared his throat. ‘I’ fact, sister – and brother too – we was come to ask a favour of ye. In Illuggan there’s many as has not tasted flesh meat in three months. We d’live on barley bread and weak tea – and pilchards when they can be got. That’s not to complain, mind. Merciful Jesus saves us from any hunger of the soul. We are refreshed by the clear fount of His etern love. But many die of want and disease, and have fallen asleep in their sins.’

He dried up and grimaced. ‘Go on,’ Ross said quietly.

‘Well, here, brother, we hear tell there’s work. Word reached us last month that your mine was doing bravely. It was said as you’d took on twenty new hands last month and twenty the month afore. Me and Drake. I’m so good a tributer as you’ll find, though I says it myself. Drake’s a handy man, handy at all manner of things, aside from the turning of a wheel. We come to see if there’s work for u here.’

Jeremy had just taken Garrick into the garden, and Garrick was bouncing around him and barking. Jeremy was the only one now who could make Garrick behave like a puppy. Ross bit at his finger and looked across at Demelza. She had her hands folded in her lap, her eyes demurely down. This did not at all disguise from him the fact that a lot would be going on in her head and that she would have a number of precise and coherent views on the subject of this request. But she was giving him no inclination of what they were. This presumably meant that she wanted him to make up his mind.

All very well, but it directly concerned her. This was a difficult request for him to refuse: relationship, need on their part, prosperity on his. But Demelza had had to fight to get away from her family – chiefly her father. She was still remembered everywhere, no doubt, as a miner’s daughter; but as his wife she had been accepted in most society over these last four years. Now that they had money they could progress further. Good clothes, some jewellery, a renovated home. They could entertain and be entertained. She would not be human if, after years of near poverty, she did not now have ambition. Did she at this stage want to be trammelled with two brothers living nearby, working men, poorly spoken, claiming relationship and privileges which would embarrass her and everyone else? Not merely would this raise contacts with the people who worked for them: the miners, the engine men, the streamers, the blowers, the bal-boys and bal-maidens, the farm labourers, the cottagers, the house servants. At the moment, although it was known she was one of them, it was accepted that she was Mistress Poldark. The present relationship with everyone was a singularly good one; there was real liking and friendship but also real respect. How might it be altered by the arrival of the two Carnes? And these two might be followed by three or four others. What if they married round here? Would it suit Demelza to have a brood of mining in-laws, necessarily poor, necessarily ill-found, naturally claiming something different from the rest? Particularly the women. Women didn’t have the same tact and sense of position as men.

He said: ‘This is a small mine. We do not employ above a hundred, counting all both above and below grass. Our prosperity is of very recent growth. Nine months ago I was in Truro arranging for the

sale of the engine and headgear of our mine to the venturers of Wheal Radiant. Now we have found tin in such quantity that, even at the uneconomic price of tin today, we are making a substantial profit. And the signs are that the two lodes are widening and deepening as we advance. There is at least two years' work ahead for all. Beyond that I cannot say. But with the price of tin so low, with the margins of profit so narrow, it is common sense not to expand more. First, because the more tin there is on the market the less it will fetch. Second, because the longer the war lasts the more likely there is to be a need of metals, and the more chance then of a rise in price. So we have had to turn many people away when they came to seek for work.'

He paused and looked at the two young men. He wasn't sure how much they would grasp of this, but they seemed to be following well enough.

Sam said: 'We would not wish for to take other men's work.'

'I think,' said Ross, 'it is something on which I shall have to consult Captain Henshawe. This I can best do in the morning. Therefore I'd suggest that you spend the night here. I think we can put you up either in the house or in the barn.'

'Thank you, brother.'

'Captain Henshawe has all the hiring of the workmen, and I shall know better when I have spoken to him. And in the meantime we will give you dinner.'

'Thank you, brother.'

Demelza stirred to push her hair from her brow. 'I think,' she said, 'Samuel and Drake, that it is proper for you to call me sister. But I think it is proper that you should call my husband Captain Poldark.'

Sam's face broke up into its smile. 'That, sister, we'll gladly do. I ask your pardon, but tis more in the way of the Methodist connexion to call all men brother. Tis a manner o' speaking.'

Ross pursed his lips. 'So be it,' he said at length. 'I will see Captain Henshawe in the morning. But you understand it is not a promise of work, only a promise to consult with him.'

'Thank ye,' said Sam.

'Thank you, cap'n,' said Drake.

Demelza got up. 'I will tell Jane we shall be two more to dinner.'

'Thank ye, sister,' said Sam. 'But d'ye follow twas not for that that we come.'

'I understand.'

Ross told the young men to sit down again and then followed Demelza out. As he caught her up in the passage he pinched her bottom and she gave a muffled squeak.

'No indication,' he said. 'I have no idea whether you want me to give them work or not.'

'It is your mine, Ross.'

'But it is your choice.'

'Then the answer is, yes, of course I do.'

That night in bed Ross said: 'I have had word with Henshawe and we can fix them up. That's if they are willing to take what we give them. I don't want to increase the number of tributers, and I can't take men off their pitches; but there's room for one extra tut-worker, and Drake can be employed in the engine house if he so chooses.'

'Thank you, Ross.'

'But you realize that these young men may possibly prove an embarrassment to you.'

'In what way?'

Ross explained some of the ways.

'Well, yes, that may be so,' she said. 'So I shall have to suffer it, shan't I. And so will you.'

‘Not to the same extent. Anyway it is your decision. I must say you gave me as much idea of your feelings this afternoon as when we are playing whist and you forget what is trumps.’

‘When have I done that? Ever only once!’ She sat up against the pillow, leaning her elbow on it, and looked at him. ‘Seriously, Ross, although I’m your wife and share everything, this is still *your* property, *your* mine, *your* people. So if you say you do not want these young men, well, send them off without thinking of the relationship! It is your *right* to be able to do so, and if you do I’ll not complain of it.’

‘But for your choice they will stay?’

‘Yes, for my choice they will stay.’

‘Enough. No more need be said.’

‘A little more need be said, Ross; for you cannot expect me to maintain my dignity in the house if you pinch me the way you did this afternoon when we were scarcely out of their sight!’

‘All ladies of quality must learn to suffer this,’ Ross said. ‘But they show this quality by suffering in silence.’

A ribald reply came to Demelza’s lips but she suppressed it. It was in the quick thrust and counter-thrust of joking that the chasms could still appear. Probably Ross sensed this, for he knew that with men holds barred it was practically impossible to get the better of his wife. He put his hand on her knee under her night-shift and let it close quietly there.

‘Where shall you lodge them?’ Demelza asked.

‘I was thinking of Mellin. Now that old Joe Triggs has gone Aunt Betsy has a room. It would help her too.’

She said ruminatively: ‘I think I might’ve recognized Sam, but d’you know I should never have thought it was Drake.’

‘He’s somewhat like you, isn’t he?’ Ross said.

‘What?’

‘Well, the colouring. The shape of face. And a look in his eye.’

‘What sort of a look?’

‘You ought to know . . . Difficult. Hard to handle.’

Demelza withdrew her knee. ‘I knew there was some ill word coming.’

Ross put his hand on her other knee. ‘I prefer this one.

This one has the scar on it where you fell out of the elm tree when you were fifteen.’

‘No. I only scratched my legs then. This was when I pulled the cupboard on top of myself.’

‘You see. Exactly what I meant. Difficult. Hard to handle.’

‘And getting battered an’ worn.’

‘Not to notice. Blemishes on the beauty of a person one loves are like grace notes adding something to a piece of music.’

‘Judas,’ said Demelza. ‘What a pretty speech. You’d best go to sleep or I shall begin to think you’re serious.’

‘Pretty speeches,’ said Ross, ‘should always be taken serious.’

‘That I will do, Ross. And thank you. And I promise not to remind you of it in the harsh light of day.’

They lay quiet for a time. Ross was feeling sleepy and he allowed his mind to drift away over the comfortable, satisfactory things in his life – not the exacerbations of their Warleggan neighbours, nor thoughts of Elizabeth and her child, nor apprehensions about the progress of the war; but the success of the mine, the freedom from the load of debt, the warmth of his affection for his wife and child. So far they had done little to add to their house servants; and in the excitement of the mining success the farm had been neglected. Ross began to think of the hay prospects and of ploughing the Long Field, and

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