

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

WINSTON GRAHAM



THE TWISTED SWORD



THE
TWISTED
SWORD

A Novel of Cornwall, 1815

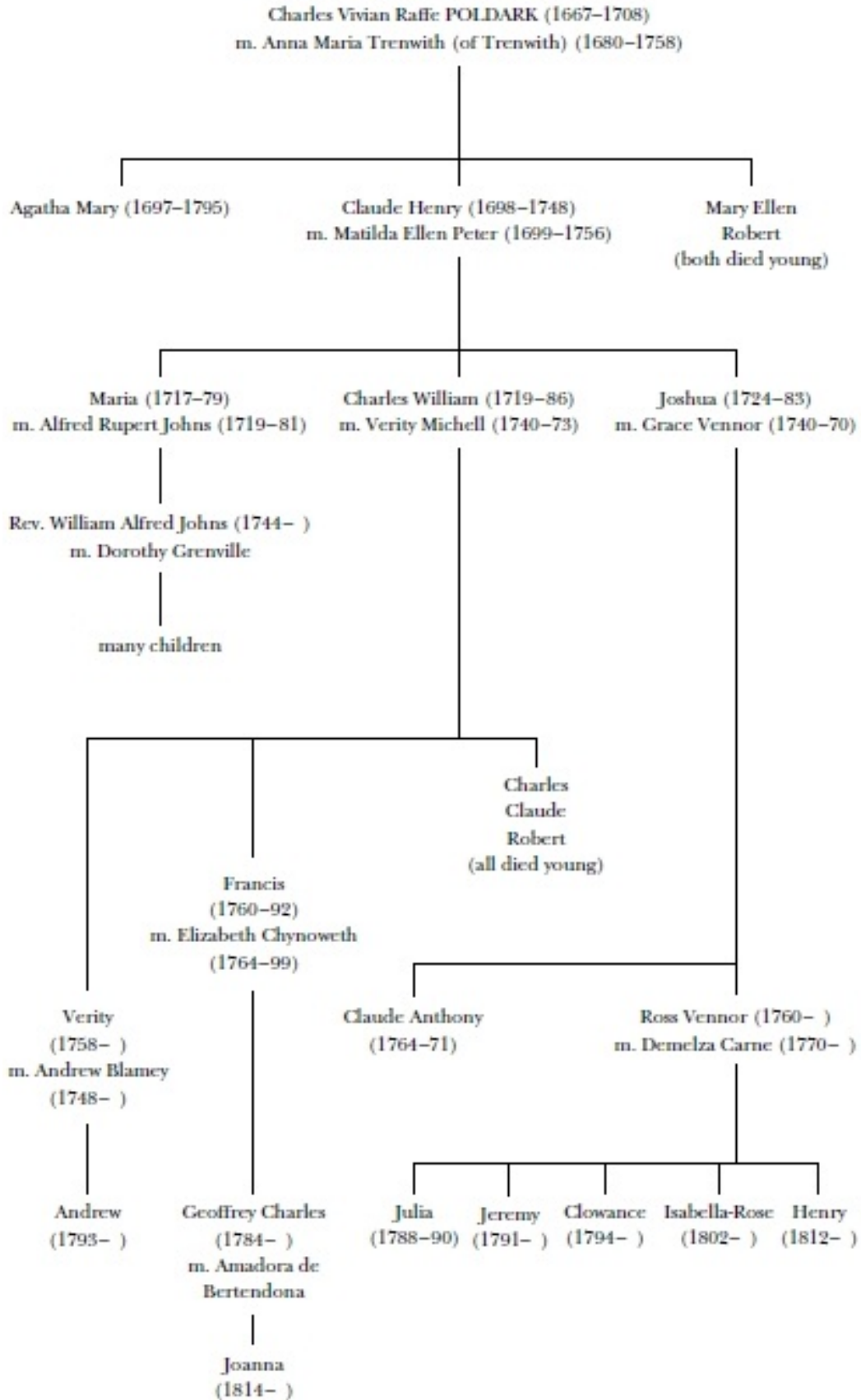
WINSTON GRAHAM

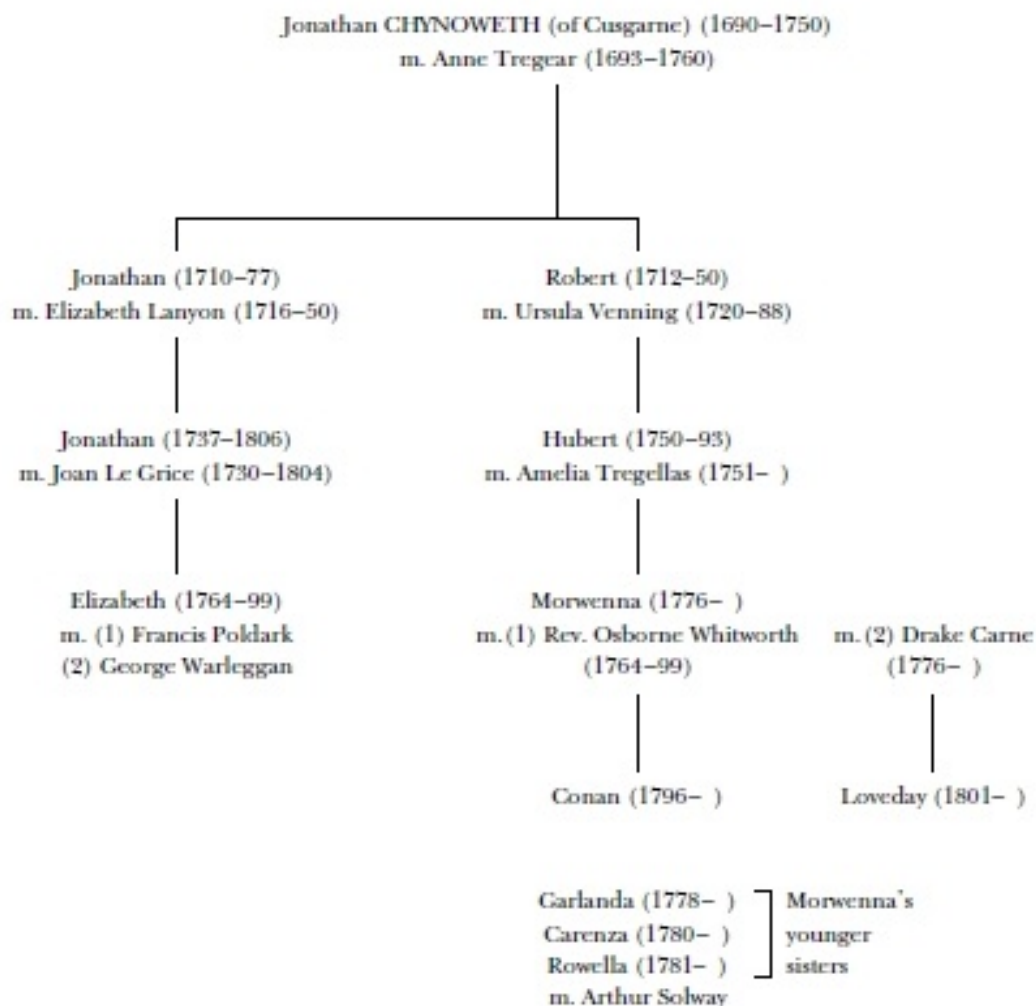
PAN BOOKS

For May

Deliver my soul from the Sword;
my darling from the power of the dog.

PSALM 22: VERSE 20





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

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

Luke WARLEGGAN (1715–1800)
m. Bethia Kemp (1716–44)

Nicholas (of Cardew) (1735–1805) Cary Warleggan
m. Mary Lashbrook (1732–1812) (1740–)

George (1759–)

m. (1) Elizabeth Poldark (née Chynoweth) (1764–99) m. (2) Lady Harriet Carter (1781–)

Valentine (1794–)
Ursula (1799–)

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BOOK ONE

Chapter One

I

It had been raining without a stop for four days when Demelza Poldark saw a horseman riding down the valley.

Curtains of fine rain had fallen across the land, pushed – though not driven – by a south-westerly wind, bringing the clouds down to the level of the land, masking the sulky sea, converting the narrow lanes into chasms of flatulent mud. Demelza liked the rain when it was this sort of rain, so soft for late January after the storms of December. It didn't matter much for the mines anyway, since most of the work was done underground and the surface workers were used to being wet; but it was bad for the farm. Small though the cultivated area was, its living centre was Nampara House.

Since it was not possible to go out at all without getting wet, one lived in a condition of partial dampness even indoors and in spite of the roaring fires. The stain on the ceiling in the library – which was always going to be looked at but never was – spread some inches more; ill-fitting windows leaked, carpets were damp here and there; but it was not the minor building flaws that mattered so much as the constant procession and presence of human beings: muddy boots standing by doors, dripping stockings hung up to dry, coats and cloaks smelling warmly of damp fur and damp cloth and damp people; you couldn't keep the weather out. You didn't have to worry or fret about the house looking shabby and unkempt. One day soon it would be fine again.

And out of doors it was so mild that primroses were already showing dabs of yellow in the hedges. The rain had a saltiness as it fell on your cheeks stealthily like a moist caress. It was deceitful because you didn't realize you were getting soaked. You drew it into your lungs and it felt good, cleansing, salty and pure.

Deprived of her eldest children – Jeremy being in Brussels with his new wife, still in the army but mercifully out of danger because all the wars had come to an end; and Clowance, married to Stephen Carrington whom she dearly loved – though perhaps no one else loved him quite as much as she did – and living in Devon – Demelza had spent much time with Isabella Ross, shortly to be

Fenny – Demelza had spent much time with Isabella-Rose, shortly to be thirteen, and Henry, only just two. Ross had always been at her to take things more easily – ‘You’re the mistress, let others do the hard work’ – but she had found it difficult, partly because of her humble birth, which she still could not forget and which still stood in the way of her telling other people to do something she could do more quickly, and better, herself; and partly because of her abounding energy. But the abounding energy had been intermittent of late, so in some ways she was now obeying orders.

This did not prevent her being constantly active, but in occupations of a relatively unarduous nature. Such as going to see Jud and Prudie Paynter twice a week. Such as going for long walks across the beach or over the cliffs with Isabella-Rose, who chirruped and bubbled with pleasure at most things – of all the children she was the nearest to Demelza in natural ebullience, though sometimes there was a harshness about her that her mother had never shown. Such as walking up to the mine with Ross and meeting him on his way home. Such as picking about in her beloved garden where not much stirred yet but where the soil was too sandy ever to become sticky or to turn to mud. Such as supervising the thrashing and the winnowing of the oats. Such as dosing her black pony, Hollyhock, with an inflammation drench of her own making for a severe cough and cold. Such as visiting Caroline Enys – who refused resolutely to go out of doors when it was raining – and taking tea with her and discussing life in general.

It was a good time with Ross newly home and throwing himself into affairs of the mines and the farm with renewed interest. It would have been a better time without one ugly fact and one momentous decision that hung over her, creating tension in her, especially when waking in the dark of the dawn, listening to the drip of the rain and to Ross’s steady breathing beside her.

Before he left London Ross had seen the Prime Minister and they had discussed the possibility of his being sent to Paris as a liaison officer at the British Embassy, with particular regard to the disposition and sentiment of the French armed forces. The matter had been left in abeyance, Lord Liverpool awaiting events before deciding to send him, Ross hesitating whether he was willing to be sent. It had been agreed between them that they should make contact again sometime in late February.

Since then much had happened. America and England had made peace, and the Duke of Wellington would be likely to remain in Paris as British Ambassador, however unpopular he had made himself – or events had made him – in that city. The likelihood of Captain Poldark being *persona grata* with the Duke was fairly remote, for the Duke had objected to his sudden appearance as

an observer in Portugal before the battle of Bussaco. The word 'spy' had not actually been mentioned, but the Duke had written to his brother the Foreign Secretary, complaining of the presence of 'a detached observer' who had been sent, he felt, by members of the Cabinet unfriendly to him. It was not known whether Wellington had ever read Pol dark's admirable and admiring account of the Duke's dispositions when he returned to England, but Ross himself certainly had no intention of going on any mission where he would be greeted with suspicion rather than co-operation; so the prospect of a summons to London and then to Paris had receded as the new year broke. And so had receded the dawn apprehensions.

But here was this strange man, formally dressed, clattering across the bridge. In a moment he would have dismounted and, dripping with rain, would be appearing at their front door.

You didn't have to fret about the house looking shabby or unkempt in such weather provided the people who called to see you knew you and understood the circumstances of a small manor-house that was also a working farm. With strangers it was different. In the four minutes since she had spotted him Demelza had flown about, gathering up boots and stockings and coats and kerchiefs and scarves, shovelling them into convenient cupboards; had shaken hearthrugs and carpet mats and cleared the table in the parlour by converting the cloth which covered it into a handy holdall for everything unnecessary and untidy and stuffed it into yet another cupboard containing Ross's mining books. By this time the faithful Jane Gimlett had appeared at the door of the parlour.

'If ee please, ma'am, there's a gentleman come see Captain Poldark. Name of Phillips. Mr Phillips.'

'Ask him in, will you. And send someone to fetch Captain Poldark. I b'lieve he's still at Grace.'

In fact Ross was not at Wheal Grace, though he had been. Yesterday he had ridden to Redruth shopping with Matthew Mark Martin and Cal Trevail. They could have done it all without him, but like Demelza he had a sense of impermanence, of uncertainty, of half-waiting, a feeling that time was not indefinite; and it induced him to take a more personal part in the farm as well as in the mine. Among other things, they had come back with three hundredweight of king potatoes to replenish their dwindling stores, a bag of guano and a bag of nitrate of soda. This last was for a field of early cabbages, and he stopped now to talk to the two men, Ern Lobb and Sephus Billing, who were scattering it and raking it in.

He saw John Gimlett leave the house and make for Wheal Grace, then catch sight of him and veer over in his direction. Messages were exchanged and they

walked back to the house together, master and old servant-half friend.

Demelza was in the parlour making conversation with a slight young man in a dark suit of clothes which was even darker, with rain, at cuff and knee. It was not a uniform but Ross guessed his profession by his military stance when he got up.

‘Hubert Phillips is my name, sir. Forgive my left hand, I am a little short of equipment in the right.’

Ross saw he had only half a hand, ending in a finger and thumb.

‘*Mr Phillips?*’ he said.

‘Lieutenant to be precise, sir. Lost a few bits at Salamanca, so they won’t have me now.’

‘What regiment?’

‘The 74th. It was a glorious victory.’

‘I had a cousin in the 43rd Light Division. And have a son at present in Brussels – in the 52nd.’

Conversation about the late war continued for the space of some three minutes while Demelza moistened her lips and fumbled with her hair and wondered when they would get to the point.

Phillips took out a pouch, and from it a letter.

‘I bring you, sir, a despatch from the Prime Minister. There was, he said, a greater degree of urgency about it than could be entrusted to the common delivery, but in faith it has taken me all of three days by post-chaise and latterly by post-horse to reach you!’

Ross took the letter and slid a finger under the seal. ‘If you came overland in three days you have driven yourself hard. Some of the roads are bone-shaking. I am glad to see you have a glass. Pray sit down again. Dinner will be in half an hour. You’ll join us, I hope.’

‘Thank you, sir. In fact. . .’ He stopped.

Ross smiled. ‘In fact what?’

‘I was instructed to wait your reply, which I believe his lordship has requested you to give to me within twenty-four hours.’ He turned to Demelza. ‘So, ma’am, since this is rather a – an isolated district, it may be that I shall need somewhere to lay my head tonight. As a soldier I am used to simple expedients, so I trust you will not put yourself out on my behalf.’

‘I shall not need to do that,’ said Demelza. You may lie here and gladly. Our house does not lack comforts and I’m only sorry you should see it in such a – such a *damp* condition. ’Tis not always so.’

‘Oh, I’m sure, ma’am. It must be beautiful in the summer.’

She continued polite conversation scarcely aware of what she was saying. At

least it was a relief that the visitor's arrival was not in any way connected with Jeremy. Although her elder and most beloved son was no longer in any physical danger from the war, she could not rid herself of ugly apprehensions of another sort on his behalf. From one day to the next you never really knew, you could never be sure.

For she had the suspicion, a suspicion now amounting to certainty, that Jeremy, a couple of years ago, in company with two friends and operating in some magical fashion no one quite understood, had robbed a stage-coach and – so far – got away with it.

The thought processes by which Demelza's sensitive perceptions, working on clues and little crumbs of information, had come to the conclusion that her son was one of the culprits, had led eventually to a perilous excursion on her part in the early autumn down an old mine shaft called Kellow's Ladder, where in a side tunnel she had found what seemed to be conclusive evidence of what she was seeking but dreading to find. Three sacks bearing initials painted on in black lead: 'J' and 'S' and 'P' or 'B'. And papers. And a Warleggan seal. And a lady's ring. And a little silver loving cup, with *Amor Gignit Amorem* engraved on the side. This loving cup now stood on the sideboard of the dining-room of Nampara. Jeremy in his last letter had asked her to put it away in a drawer in his room, and she must remember to do that.

Ross of course knew nothing of all this, and never would know if she could help it. For Demelza the discovery had been a profound and dastardly shock. Raised on strong Wesleyan principles – in spite of a drunken bully of a father – she had quickly learned from Ross to treat religion lightly – a visit to Sawle Church twice a year was about his limit. Indeed she had taken to his creed – or lack of it – like a duck to water; it had been no problem to her at all; and brother Sam's pleas to her to consider her Salvation had been politely and kindly set aside.

Well and good. She wanted no different. But when it came to playing the footpad . . . Caught and convicted you hung from a gibbet at Bargus Cross Roads, and when cut down your bones were thrown into an unconsecrated grave. And this was *Jeremy*, her first-born son, inheritor when the time came of Ross's estate: a hundred-odd acres of farmland, two mines, and a distinguished name. Ross was by far the best-known Poldark there had ever been, but those before him, although a fairly randy lot, had been landowners, magistrates, masters of the hunt, patrons of the church, small but fairly worthy notables in the county of Cornwall for over three hundred years.

She so very badly wanted to talk it over with Ross but knew she could not. Instinctively she knew he must never know. But she wanted to say to him: is it

something we have done wrong? Have we not taught our children properly? Did they never learn the ten commandments or understand that they must be treated serious? Has it all been too easy for them, too easy-going, come-as-you-please, go-as-you-please, a philosophy of kindly liberty leading to licence? She herself had been dragged up anyhow, strapped whenever he could catch her by her drunken father. According to Ross, *his* father had been insensitive towards his only son, cold and rough most of the time. Compared to his parents, Jeremy had been reared in a hothouse of kindly comfort and gentle caring. And he had seemed a typical product of such an upbringing: artistic, amusing, roused only to anger by cruelty to animals, absenting himself when a pig was to be killed, highly talented in engineering – indeed something more than talented . . . tall, gangling, listless at times but good-tempered, witty, kind. How did such a young man step so utterly out of character?

II

Ross had finished the letter. She brought her mind back to the present, to the lesser apprehensions. He half folded the letter, turned it over, then handed it to her, at which Lieutenant Phillips raised his eyebrows.

She read:

Dear Captain Poldark,

You will remember the conversation of 24th November last when the matter was discussed of your going to Paris on a special mission. It was left between us that you let me know not later than late February whether you would wish to accept this mission, should His Majesty's Government still feel that some proper purpose might be served by it.

Since then events have moved rapidly forward. Peace with America has brought, and will continue to bring, lasting benefits to both countries. But the situation in France has become still more confused.

These are matters on which as you may imagine I am well briefed, but it seems to me that it could be of value to have a detached observer reporting his own personal impressions directly to me. France is her own mistress again – there are no foreign troops anywhere within her frontiers – but how she solves her problems is of the utmost importance to the rest of Europe.

The Duke of Wellington has been appointed to take Viscount Castlereagh's place at the Congress of Vienna, and will stay there as long as the Congress lasts, which may well be a further three months. The Duchess will remain in

Paris. Therefore everything will be at the Embassy as it was expected to be when I first put this proposal to you. Our Minister Plenipotentiary will be Wellington's relative and aide-de-camp at Bussaco, Lord Fitzroy Somerset, whom you know and who will welcome you.

Your duties – should you accept them – will be strictly informal. It would help if your wife and family were with you to give the appearance of your taking a three-month holiday – but guided by the advice you receive on the spot you will visit various sections of the French army – suitable excuses can easily be found – and will report directly to me whatever sentiments you feel reflect the prevailing mood. Ample funds will, of course, be supplied for this purpose and for the board and sustenance of yourself and your family in comfortable style.

It may well be that your stay in Paris would not have to be so long – again one can only be guided by results – but I do feel the value of these inquiries lies in their beginning as soon as possible; so I would want you to be in Paris not later than the second week of February.

To this end I am sending this by special messenger, and he has instructions to wait twenty-four hours for your answer. I realize it is shorter notice than was envisaged in November but I trust that in the weeks since you returned home you will have been able to consider the appointment and already have come to some decision.

Believe me to be etc.,
Liverpool
Fife House, 26th January 1815

Chapter Two

I

If necessary for a few months the farm would run itself. John Gimlett, though no farmer, knew enough to give the orders and to keep things running on an even keel. And since his drunken bout following Clowance's marriage, Ben Carter had been working to prove himself and was becoming a competent mine manager. Grace was gently fading out; but the yield from Leisure had become regular and of pretty good quality, and the lodes, if unpredictable, were widespread and kindly, particularly in the old Trevorgic workings. Mr Horace Treneglos, long since dead, had said many years ago that he had 'a great respect for the ancients – they knew what they was about'. A mine that had been worked in Roman times, and lost track of altogether more than once since, could still yield its red copper, its zinc and its silver lead.

At least for the next few years it did not look as if the Poldarks would want for a loaf of bread. Nor the miners either; Ross would see to that. In a county – indeed in a country – where there was as yet nothing to see of the expected post-war boom, Nampara and its surrounding villages were a small enclave living a notch or two above the poverty line.

On the 30th January Demelza waited early upon her closest and dearest friend. The years had not dealt quite so kindly with Caroline Enys as with Demelza, who Lieutenant Phillips had already concluded must be Ross's second wife. Always thin, Caroline had become somewhat gaunt, but the sharp acerbic intelligence of her face compensated for the loss of bloom.

'Oh,' she said, 'so that explains it. I thought from the hectic flush that Hugh Bodrugan had risen from his bed and was pursuing you with lecherous suggestions. And what have you decided?'

'Nothing yet,' said Demelza. 'Or almost nothing. We shall give him the answer at noon.'

'Oh, come. I think it's yes, is it not? Who'd turn down such an offer? The freedom of Paris, at England's expense! A splendid three or four months living in the most sophisticated and brilliant city in the world!'

in the most sophisticated and brilliant city in the world:

‘That’s what I’m afraid of,’ said Demelza. ‘I do not speak a single word of the language. I should be lost!’

‘I’ve yet to see you lost anywhere, my dear. These apprehensions do you no credit. What does Ross feel?’

‘He says he will not go without me.’

‘Very proper. So your answer will come soon.’

Demelza moistened her lips. ‘Supposing I said I should not go without you.’

There was a pause. Caroline laughed. ‘That would be very *improper*. But spoken like a true friend. I fancy Dwight would have a word or two to say about it!’

‘Well, last year we talked – you know we did – you *know* we did! – of all going to Paris together when the war was over. Why should you not both come now to keep us company? Dwight has all these scientific friends he wishes to see and while the men were busy we – we could see something of Paris together. It would be lovely!’

Caroline wrinkled her eyebrows at the window panes, which were still glistening with rain. ‘I’ll not deny it’s an enticing prospect. But do you not say you will have to leave very shortly?’

‘If we are going – yes . . .’

There was a footstep and the door opened and Dwight came in.

‘Demelza!’ he said, ‘I have just seen Ross and know you are all well, so this is not a call for help. So early in the morning it’s a wonder my wife is dressed to receive you.’

Twenty-five years of ministering to sick people had given his always serious face a sombre look, but it lit up in the company of friends. His own health had never been reliable since the ordeal of his internment in France and, as Caroline said tetchily, he was never above catching an infection from the vulgars he attended. He drove himself hard but had long ago in the prison camp become convinced that the mind and the will could overcome many of the weaknesses of the body. Although he had made his life contentedly in this remote corner of the south-west and seldom left it, his reputation had grown, and he corresponded with many of the advanced thinkers of the day.

‘Well, it’s not a call for help in the normal sense,’ said his wife.

He kissed Demelza. She said: ‘You have seen . . .?’

‘Ross, yes. I was coming back from Mongoose where Agneta was in an epilepsy. Yes, he told me.’

‘What?’

‘Of your invitation. And that you must reply to it by noon.’

Caroline said: ‘They are going, of course! They could not possibly turn down

Caroline said. 'They are going, of course: they could not possibly turn down such an opportunity! But Demelza wants us to go too.'

'So does Ross.'

'Dwight!' said Demelza, beaming. 'So you will come? So you will both come?'

Dwight put down his bag, touched his wife's shoulder affectionately as he walked past.

'You're wet,' said Caroline accusingly.

He warmed his hands at the fire. 'It's what we have discussed, isn't it? Promised ourselves . . . But for me it can't be just so immediate. For an absence of perhaps six weeks – two months? – I must find someone more clever than Clotworthy to see to my flock. There is a young man from Exeter who I think might come down, but it cannot be arranged on the instant. I said to Ross we would come at Easter. That is quite early; Good Friday is March the 24th.'

'Easter!' Demelza said in disappointment.

'I know it is not as agreeable as it would be if we all travelled together. But I understand from Ross that if he accepts you must leave next week. That would be impossible for us. Also, Ross will have time to come to terms with his work in Paris and by Easter will probably be much freer of his leisure. And we shall be travelling as private citizens; you will be there in a semi-official capacity. When we come we shall see what we can of you – every moment that we can of you! – and then, for once perhaps, Demelza will be able to show Caroline round!'

There was silence except for the sound of Horace the Third chewing on a bone.

'It is not what I wanted,' said Demelza.

Caroline leaned forward and patted her hand. 'It is not what *I* wanted; but for once – just for once – I think Dwight may be right. Easter will be a lovely time for us all!'

Demelza pulled at a twist of dark hair which was still damp from the rain.

'Dwight, is it safe in Paris for children?'

He turned from the window, exchanged a glance with Caroline. 'How am I to answer that? There are hazards everywhere. I do not suppose that Paris is less law-abiding than London.'

'It was not of those hazards that I was most particularly thinking.'

Nor was Dwight but he had been hoping to avoid the thrust of the question. At that moment Mrs Myners came in with the hot chocolate Caroline had ordered, so there was a further breathing space.

When Mrs Myners had gone he said: 'D'you mean as to health? Well, there are hazards everywhere. There has been an outbreak of cholera in Plymouth this

the islands every where. There has been an outbreak of cholera in Plymouth this month.'

'But not in Nampara,' said Demelza.

There was an uncomfortable silence. It was all very long ago, but Dwight had once attended Demelza and her first daughter for the morbid sore throat which had then been raging through the county, and Julia had died.

'I can't advise you on this, my dear,' he said gently. 'Many thousands of children live and grow up in towns and come to no hurt. Have you discussed it with Ross?'

'No. Nor never could I.' When Caroline looked at her inquiringly Demelza pulled at her drying curl again. 'Tis not for me to shift the responsibility. Or to put a fear in his mind.'

Caroline handed a cup of chocolate to Dwight, who carried it to Demelza.

Caroline said brightly: 'Shall we be taking Sophie and Meliora?'

Caroline too had lost her first child. But it was like her to rush this fence while Demelza was present. It was a measure of her friendship.

Dwight said: 'Of course.'

II

Ross said: 'My reply to the Earl of Liverpool is confidential, of course, and I do not know how far you are privy to the message you brought me.'

'Nothing as to the content of the message, sir,' said Hubert Phillips. 'I know I must carry back your answer with all speed. I hope to deliver it late on the 3rd.'

'It will be a hard and disagreeable journey for you. The sea passage is usually far more comfortable and just as fast, but contrary winds can sometimes embay a vessel a week and then all the advantage is lost.'

Phillips buckled on his belt. 'This is my first visit to Cornwall. It must be surpassing lovely in the summer.'

'It is nice in the winter,' said Demelza, 'when it is not raining.'

'I had an uncle who had been in these parts as a young man. He talked often of the mines. It is good to see two working. Both on your land, sir?'

'One. But they both belong to me.'

'They are always called Wheal, aren't they? What does it mean?'

'Not always, but usually. It is from the Cornish, *huel*, meaning a hole.'

Phillips bowed over Demelza's hand. 'I'm greatly obliged, ma'am, for your hospitality. And for everything. Even my cloak is beautifully dry.'

'Fraid it won't stay so very long,' she said. 'Though the wind has shifted and there is a break in the cloud. In an hour or two—'

Phillips smiled. 'Alas, I must not wait. But it has been a pleasure and an honour meeting you both. And your two beautiful children.'

One of their two beautiful children was leaning against the panelling near the door, hands behind back, one toe raised so that her heel was on the floor, staring at Hubert Phillips with considerable interest and admiration. During his brief stay Isabella-Rose had been less noisy and boisterous than usual. Now she followed the trio out to the front door and the waiting horse.

Phillips took the reins from Matthew Mark Martin and mounted. He took off his hat, and they raised their hands in farewell as he moved slowly away up the valley.

Demelza had been right. A streak of washed blue sky, almost indistinguishable from cloud, was making its appearance over the sea. Smoke from the newly coaled Wheal Leisure was drifting before the wind, hiding the good news.

They went back into the parlour, leaving Bella still gazing after the horseman as he grew smaller in the distance. Ross crouched, poking up the fire. The new blaze flickered over his strong bony features. Demelza stood beside him, for a moment saying nothing. When he straightened up she was looking at him with her most serious, darkest gaze.

'Well,' he said, 'it is done.'

'It is done.'

He took her hand, which came into his easily. 'In the next week we shall be busy.'

'Have you said a week?'

'I promised I'd wait on him on the 11th or 12th.'

'Oh, there will be that much to arrange! Could I come later with the children?'

'I'd prefer not. I'd be happier if we travelled through France together.'

'So would I! . . . But do you not think you will be several days in London?'

'There was some sense of urgency in Liverpool's message. I'm at a loss to know why.'

She said: 'I am at a loss to know why they will not leave us in peace! Must it not have cost a lot to come from London, post all the way?'

'A shilling a mile. One and threepence, perhaps. At two hundred and eighty miles it adds up, I agree.'

'All the same,' Demelza said after a moment, 'I am proud for you that they would not.'

'Would not what?'

'Leave you in peace.'

'And not at all happy for yourself? Do I take an unwilling woman to Paris?'

‘I think when it comes I will enjoy it. It is just the coming that fills me with the mulligrubs. But anyway, is there not that in the Bible: “Whither thou goest I will go”?’

‘A dutiful wife, eh?’

‘Did you say dutiful or beautiful?’

‘Lieutenant Phillips clearly thought the latter. Incidentally, I believe Bella was taken with him too.’

‘I was not taken with him,’ Demelza said. ‘His eyes were too close together.’

He put his arm round her. ‘Well, we talked around it long enough last night . . . I could have wished we could have left Jeremy here or that Ben could have had longer to prove himself.’

‘Well, Zacky’s in better health.’

‘Yes, Zacky’s in better health. And I don’t think Ben will go overboard again. We must send word to Clowance. And Verity.’

‘I think if I had time I would better prefer to ride over and see them.’

‘You saw them both at Christmas . . .’

‘But did not mention this possibility to them, as you know. If I am going to France for maybe three months I would like to see Clowance again before I left.’

‘I think she should come here. You’ll have all your work cut out to pack and be ready for next Monday and for all the preparations and arrangements that will have to be made, without going off for a day visiting Clowance in Penryn.’

‘Well, if she can manage it, ’twould certainly be better. My dear life, my heart is beating already!’

‘I hope so, or I shall be sending for Dr Enys.’

‘Ross, isn’t it a pity that *they* cannot come at the same time!’

Ross saw Isabella-Rose in the doorway of the room and smiled at her. ‘Bella, come in. We have plans for your future.’

‘Ooh? Goody! What’s on? Tell me quick.’

‘Mrs Hemple’s Academy for Young Ladies. You know of course that it has been arranged that you should start there on the 17th of this month.’

Bella curled her lip. ‘Oh yes. A pack of girls . . . But what is changed? I can see by your face that *something* is changed!’

‘Something is changed,’ said Ross.

His face was so sombre that Bella giggled at it. ‘Well, Papa, now I know it is good.’

‘Only time will tell. But you will not now be going to Mrs Hemple’s until September.’

Bella uttered a squeak of joy. For a girl with her powerful vocal chords it showed some deep emotion. ‘Pa-pa-a-a! What! Ma-ma! How *delicious!* Do you

mean I don't go to a school at *all* – not until September. Glory, glory be!

'On that we've not yet decided,' said Demelza, 'but it so turns out that your father has been invited to spend the next three months in Paris, and it seems probable that we shall be going with him.'

Isabella-Rose jumped a foot in the air. 'Paris! In France, you mean? Where they have the guillotine! Papa, Mama, how wonderful you both are!'

Half strangled in a wild hug, Demelza looked at Ross and began to laugh. Ross laughed. They all laughed. Teasing her daughter, Demelza flung her arms round Ross's neck and hugged him in the same way. Somehow in Bella's enthusiasm all apprehensions seemed to be dissolved.

'Will you take me to see the guillotine, Ross?' Demelza asked; 'Tis something I've always wished to see!'

'I believe it is still there,' said Ross, 'but has not been so busy of late.'

Bella said: 'Oh, and there will be theatres and exhibitions and dances and balls. And no schooling! I already have a little grounding in French. Think how much better I shall speak it by September!'

Attracted by the noise, little Henry had toddled out of the kitchen, with Mrs Kemp in tow. Seeing their laughing faces, he too began to laugh. Disentangling herself from the others Demelza picked him up and kissed him.

'Harry,' she said; 'Harry, will you come too?'

Mrs Kemp had not advanced beyond the door, but stood wiping her hands on her apron.

'Come too,' said Henry cheerfully. 'Come too. Kempie come too.'

Demelza exchanged a glance with Ross.

Henrietta Kemp – though no one ever dared to call her by her Christian name – was a woman in her mid-sixties. She had originally been with the Teagues as a nursemaid and had first come to Nampara as a casual piano teacher for Demelza who, being still in her teens, had thought of Mrs Kemp even then as an old woman. She had moved in to live in Nampara during Clowance's childhood and had stayed on, with only a few absences, as a sort of general handywoman who could look after the children when necessary, teach them their letters, watch over them in their rare illnesses, and stand in for Demelza when she was not there. She was a tight, ageless, dour little woman, Cornish to the backbone though genteelly educated. She came from Mount Ambrose, near Redruth. No one had ever seen or heard of Mr Kemp, but it was rumoured that at a very early stage in their married life he had been 'lost at sea'. She looked and behaved like a natural spinster, was a practising Wesleyan, but did not allow her disapproval for the casual lack of discipline in the Poldark household to sour her love for the children – or for her first pupil.

Her first pupil was thinking ‘out of the mouths of babes and sucklings’. She thought, I cannot say anything yet without a private word with Ross first. I cannot saddle him with another person to pay for – and yet, is not the country paying? Is it not natural that the wife of a British envoy should bring a governess to look after the children?

‘Yes, my lover,’ she said to Henry, who, having enjoyed the embrace, was now wriggling to get down. ‘You’re coming with us, aren’t you? We’re going across the sea.’

‘The sea!’ chanted Isabella-Rose. ‘The sea, the glorious sea. Mrs Kemp, we’re going to France, to France, to France! *Je suis, tu es, il est. Nous sommes, vous êtes, ils ont!*’

‘*Ils sont,*’ Mrs Kemp corrected. ‘Bella, please do not shout so. Shall I leave Henry with you, Mrs Poldark?’

‘Yes, I think so,’ said Demelza. ‘Ross—’

Ross held up his hand. ‘Mrs Kemp,’ he said, ‘I have been invited to go to Paris for three months. I am taking my wife and children. I feel – we all feel – that it would be most suitable if you came with us.’

Mrs Kemp fumbled with her apron. Although she seldom sullied them with housework, she had gnarled hands which might have spent years scrubbing floors.

‘My goodness gracious! *Where?* Paris, did you say?’

‘Paris.’

‘My blessed life. In France, you mean? That wicked place?’

‘That wicked place. Yes. We shall be leaving a week today. Would you kindly think it over? Mrs Poldark will be able to answer your queries. I can give you – we can give you – twenty-four hours to make up your mind.’

Chapter Three

I

On the same day in late January that Demelza perceived the young man riding down the rainy valley to disturb her peace of mind, Clowance Carrington, her elder daughter, had a young and disturbing visitor of a different sort.

She had been out for a solitary ride on Nero. Stephen was home – not at sea, that is – but was off on some business of his own. Not that he was secretive about much; he talked to his wife incessantly about his hopes and his plans, so she bore this temporary withdrawal of confidence without any sense of injustice.

She often went riding in the morning. It was not of course the same as Nampara: there was no great beach here edged with grumbling waves; the best you could do was to thread your way through the uphill narrow lanes until you got to the moors above Falmouth. Then you could canter along and occasionally gallop with lovely distant views of the cliffs and the sea. Even so – and even if it were the same water and only just round the corner, as it were, from Land's End, facing the English Channel instead of the Atlantic Ocean – it did not look quite like the same sea. There were no beaches here to compare with the north coast beaches; the expanses of sand were shorter and often softer because the runs of the tide were not so great; and the cliffs, though jagged and formidable, were half the height. She missed the suck and sigh of the swell as it moved over the rocks behind Nampara, the hissing roar of the blow-hole when the tide was right, the smell of the sea-wrack, the misty spray, the taste of salt on the lips.

Not that she minded. She was happily married to the man she loved; and this winter they had had splendid times together, hunting at least once a week, sometimes twice. They hunted often with Lady Harriet Warleggan. Since Stephen had put his affairs in the hands of Warleggan's Bank he had prospered greatly.

They had spent a good deal of money. Hunting was not cheap, and usually once a week after the hunt they supped at Cardew with Harriet Warleggan and played cards and diced afterwards. George's estrangement from his son Valentine had robbed Harriet of the young company he usually gathered round

Valentine had robbed Harriet of the young company he usually garnered round him when he was home, so she had taken to inviting a number of Valentine's friends, such as Anthony Trefusis and Ben Sampson and Percy and Angela Hill and Ruth Smith, to stay on after the hunt and sup and gamble until the early hours. Clowance and Stephen were of this party. George himself sometimes supped with them, but more often than not had a quiet meal in his study, or ate before them with his daughter Ursula. He never stayed for the cards. Gambling for pleasure was something he totally failed to understand.

But he was always reasonably pleasant to Stephen and to Clowance, even though Clowance sensed a steely reserve at the back of it. Stephen was not aware of any such reservations. He believed he was on good terms with one of the most important men in Cornwall, in a small way was becoming a valuable customer of the bank and as such could look forward to a future of continuing prosperity. He acted on this assumption.

Penryn, where Stephen and Clowance lived, was an ancient free borough at the head of the Penryn Creek; a clustering hilly town of about a thousand people. It considered itself far more dignified and mature than its larger upstart neighbour, Falmouth. A charter of privileges had been granted to its burgesses in 1236, four hundred years before Falmouth became a town at all. A fierce rivalry existed between the two, for Falmouth with its deeper harbours and its larger docks had stolen much of Penryn's trade.

Clowance had never lived in a town before, and she found it a strange, secretive little port. Everybody she met was, on the surface, extremely polite, some ingratiating. But she was a stranger – they were both strangers – and didn't belong. Clowance had been too busy for twenty years enjoying life, and taking circumstances and people as they came, to bother about the oddities of class distinction. One of the reasons for her success at Bowood, the Lansdowne seat in Wiltshire, had been her unawareness of having any position in the world to maintain, her absence of pretence, her natural unaffected manner. At Nampara too she treated everyone she met as her equal, and, because everyone there knew who she was, no one had presumed on it.

Penryn was different. They liked their people in recognizable categories, and she didn't quite fit in anywhere. The Poldark name was hardly known as far as this, but she was obviously a lady, and her father, apart from being a mine owner, was a *Member of Parliament*. Stephen, they reckoned, was not quite up to her snuff – and he wasn't even Cornish – but he was jolly, outgoing, generous and prospering. They rented this small house, one of the few overlooking the creek, stabled their horses at the Cambrons', who ran the Pig & Tinker, and they were related to the Blameys of Flushing. They also rode to hounds, which put

them on a different footing from their neighbours.

During this winter she had thought often about her beloved brother Jeremy and wondered how he was faring in Brussels with his new and pretty wife, who had been so hard to get and had indeed been willing to reject him and fit in with her family's plans in a most mercenary way that Clowance would not forget. Perhaps it was going to be all right now, but Clowance more than anyone knew something of Jeremy's infatuation for this girl, his moods of utter depression, his vain attempts to seem cheerful and natural when his passion for Cuby was driving him to despair. It had been a kind of madness. Clowance hoped it was over. She thought Cuby might be a difficult person to live with, once the first excitement was past. Certainly Jeremy's letters gave an impression, a real impression of happiness. But not until she saw him again was she prepared to be sure.

It was raining when she clattered into the stables and the nice stable boy, Kimber, came out to take Nero. It had been raining for the best part of a week, but this morning there had been a break and the sun had slanted across the creek. The tide had been in, and the water glistened like an inserted knife among the jetties and the moored ships. Now all that was gone again, the river lost in a damp mist which cut visibility to a hundred yards. Everything seemed mysterious in it, even the familiar cobbles of this now familiar town.

It was a short walk along the terrace to the end house. Next to the Pig & Tinker was a ship's chandler; next to him was Mudd's, a sailors' resthouse of not very good repute; then a house belonging to an anchor smith; then a customs officer; then a genteel lady called Curnow who did dressmaking, and then the Carringtons.

As Clowance reached her house Miss Curnow came out. 'Oh, Mrs Carrington, a young man called to see you about an hour gone. I did not know when you would be home.'

'Did he give his name?' Clowance asked.

'No, I didn't think t'ask. But he said he would come back.'

Miss Curnow had very small screwed-up eyes. Whether it was from doing too much sewing in a poor light or whether they evidenced some specially penetrating talent of inquisitiveness was hard to tell. Clowance favoured the second explanation.

She thanked her neighbour and went in. Theirs was a house with a more than pleasant view, but it was very small. There were four rooms downstairs and four rooms up, but they were all tiny. Nor was there any space at the front of the houses, but each house had a little back garden and earth privy. In the Carrington garden was a pump, which was the only water supply for the seven houses, so it

meant that there was not much privacy in the back garden. Clowance had spent most of her time on the interior of the house, utilizing her half-forgotten training in sewing and millinery to make brilliant orange curtains for all the windows to frame the lace.

She felt certain that her neighbours thought them outrageously bright; however, Stephen loved them and that was the important point.

He had said not to wait dinner for him so she had made a pasty for herself. She heated it up in the little cloam oven which was still warm from the early morning cooking, and then, having taken off her riding jacket and boots, sat down to eat it on her own in the front room, cutting the pasty in half and pouring milk into the half she was eating.

She had just finished when she saw a young man walking down the cobbled street. She felt instinctively that he was the young man Miss Curnow had referred to, and now understood the extra quizzicality in the woman's eyes – the sort of look that anticipates discomfiture – because the visitor was almost in rags, and was lightly bearded, which in these days did not so much imply a matter of choice as having no money to pay the barber.

Sure enough the young man stopped in front of their door and knocked. Clowance picked up the remains of her dinner, bore it away, dug her feet into a pair of pattens and opened the door.

He was probably not more than twenty – tall, broad-shouldered, blond-haired with strong features and vividly clear blue eyes. His body looked lean but not over-thin; it was his clothes which were so shabby: a faded shirt which had once probably been royal blue, with a rent at the shoulder and one sleeve short by four inches, a good blue woollen jerkin, newer than the rest, slate-blue coarse drill trousers, much patched with sailcloth and tied at the ankles; and down-at-heel canvas shoes that showed his bare feet.

'Excuse me,' he said, 'be Mr Stephen Carrington in?' A hoarse voice; West Country accent, but not badly spoken.

'I'm sorry, he's not. I am expecting him shortly.'

A pause. 'Are you Mrs Cajrrington, ma'am?'

'Yes.'

He turned and glanced up and down the street as if looking for the man he'd called to see.

Clowance said: 'Is it about one of his vessels?'

'Well . . . only in a manner of speaking . . .' The young man bit at his thumbnail and eyed Clowance. 'I've just come ashore, y'see. We berthed at dawn. *Annabelle*. Ye see her over there, the brig.'

'Oh yes, I see.'

‘From Liverpool. Though she’s Bristol owned. We’re carr’ing candles, soap and brushes, rope and twine.’

Clowance looked past him farther down the hill. This way a precipitous cobbled alley led to the harbour.

‘I think my husband’s just coming,’ she said. ‘I can see his head.’ And then: ‘From Bristol you say? Did you know him when he was living there?’

The young man flushed as he turned to stare the way she was pointing. ‘Well yes, ma’am, in a manner of speaking – though not for some years, like. You see, I’m his son.’

II

Stephen said: ‘Dear heart, I told you I should not have come to you unshriven. I tried hard just before we was wed, and then again after, but you said leave the past to bury itself; and I was a coward and let it lie. A coward. I make no bones about it now. But just think how I was fixed. I had lost you once already. I’d been without you for more’n the twelvemonth. I was dringed up, not knowing what to do. If I told you that I had been married before, however long ago it all was, and however it had happened, I might well have lost you again. Wouldn’t I?’

They were lying together in their bed that night, two candles guttering in the air from an inch-open window. Clowance did not reply to his question. She found it hard to assess her feelings and impossible to convey them to him.

‘Or if you did not turn me down . . . If you had the mind to be forgiving, your parents would not have been. Your father asked me once if I had a wife in every port, and I lied to him. He would not have excused that, not ever.’

After a moment she said: ‘So you had to deceive me, too.’

‘Yes, and I’ve said why. D’you think if I’d told you about Marion before, you wouldn’t have felt compelled to tell your father and mother? Ye are so open and honest. Truly, truly honest. That’s the sort of family you’ve always lived with; I’ve always admired your family for that and wished I’d been brought up similar. But I wasn’t. Life isn’t like that where I come from, m’dear.’

Clowance stared up at the low ceiling. ‘And after we were married?’

‘I was too happy. I reckon I was too happy. And once it was done, I thought, it was done. If I’d done wrong, there was no way of putting it right then. By telling you I might ease me conscience – but at what cost! Making you unhappy. Spoiling our time together. Making a sort of stain where there’d been no stain. So I let sleeping dogs lie . . .’

‘STAY!’

‘UNTIL NOW. . .’

‘Yes, dear heart, until now.’

He would have liked to touch her, try to caress her as she lay quietly beside him, her breast rising and falling only just perceptibly. He knew what she was like; he knew every inch of her; he knew what she was like naked; and he knew his ability to rouse her. But with a restraint that he was only just learning he made no move at all.

She said: ‘Tell me about Marion.’

He was silent and then let out a long sigh. ‘We were both seventeen. She was the daughter of a farrier. ’Twas a boy and girl thing, light and easy, laughing and joking as a boy and girl will; but there was no more laughing when I got her with child. D’you know about the bastardy laws?’

‘A bit.’

‘If a girl conceives a child and accuses a young man of being the father and he won’t marry her they put him in prison. There’s many a good man languishing in prison because of such a law. Well I’d been in prison once and that was enough. We were married. Jason was born the following year. We never properly lived together. Her father was mad at me for spoiling his daughter’s chances. She went on living at home. Jason lived with them. I’d visit from time to time, but after the child was born Marion turned against me so I saw little of them indeed. Then I left the district and went into service with Sir Edward Hope. Course I was bound to make the payments and that kept me desperate short of money. Then . . .’

‘Then?’

‘When Jason was about ten his mother caught the smallpox and died. I left Sir Edward Hope’s service and went to sea. I – didn’t keep up any more payments. I never saw Jason since he was five until he turned up like a – like . . .’

‘A bad penny?’

‘Today. God, I was taken aback! I couldn’t believe ’twas him. Look you, m’dear, it has been almost as much a shock to me as it has been to you. Holy Mary, I was dumbstruck!’

‘I left you alone,’ Clowance said. ‘I thought you’d better prefer it. So I don’t know what he wants. Is it just to meet you again?’

‘No. Some b—, somebody told him I was doing well in Cornwall, so he wants to become a part of it. Somehow. He wants some sort of a job. He’s already been to sea, so with your permission I’ll take him on one of my ships; push him up the ladder a bit, get him better paid. I don’t know yet how much he knows of sailing. He’s only eighteen . . . I know, I know, he looks older – that beard – but he’s only eighteen and he can’t expect too much yet awhile. But at least he might be better paid . . .’

better paid . . .

‘With my permission?’ Clowance said.

‘Yes, m’dear. It is up to you. You may not wish, to have a – a – my son round and about. ’Twould be only natural never to wish to set eyes on him again. So you must tell me how you feel.’

Clowance considered the matter. ‘I do not think I feel very happy about it *at all*, Stephen. Though perhaps not for just the reasons you suppose. But I do not believe we should take my sadness – my disappointment out on your son. Surely nothing that has happened is his fault, is it?’

‘No,’ said Stephen uneasily. ‘No.’

‘I think,’ she said, ‘you are right in supposing that I do not wish to see a great deal of him, each day and every day; for he will remind me of unhappy things. But surely you owe him something, do you not? You have not been exactly an attentive father, so you can surely do no more than he asks and help him now.’

‘Very well,’ said Stephen. ‘Just so. I’m glad you feel that way, m’dear.’

‘Indeed,’ said Clowance, ‘I was rather surprised when you came into the kitchen and told me he was gone. Was it necessary that he should be sent to spend the night at Mudd’s, which we all know is ill-kept and of doubtful repute? He could well have lain here.’

‘There again I thought you might not like it. But I’m sure he is well able to see for himself. I gave him money for a bed, and will take care tomorrow that he has better clothes. But I assure you, m’dear, that you need hardly set eyes on him again.’

‘But he will exist,’ said Clowance.

‘Yes . . . he will exist. He will be a constant reminder in my eyes that I have done you wrong.’

It was very quiet outside. A light from somewhere, like a bonfire, reflected briefly flickering on the curtains. Then a gull cried in the night.

Clowance thought, he still doesn’t quite understand *what* he has done wrong. If you love someone you love them as they are, totally, virtues and blemishes the same; that’s what I learned during my twelve months’ separation from him. So if he had told me he had once been married and had a son, would that have been so bad? Would I not have taken it, just as I know he once stabbed a man to death at Plymouth Dock, just as I know that he lied to get himself out of that situation when Andrew Blamey recognized him, just as I know he had girls in Sawle or Grambler before we married, just as I suspect he had an affair with poor Violet Kellow. Being married, as a very young man, hardly more than a boy, was that worse, or even as bad?

What was bad was not telling her, lying by omission, reasoning that with luck

it would never come to light. What was bad was the lack of confidence in her, the lack of confidentiality. When people were in love they should tell *everything* to each other. And about other things he had talked so much.

Stephen said: 'Are you still awake?'

'Yes.'

'This has come – him coming – has come on a special bad day.'

'Why?'

'Because I had a surprise for ye. A nice surprise. Something that I reckon should make you very happy. Now . . . Well, now I don't think anything will make you very happy. Not tonight. Not tomorrow neither, I expect. Yet I feel I must tell ye. For it is something I have been busy about all day. For you. Chiefly for you.'

Clowance said: 'I don't know, Stephen. Happiness – is not in this. I can't pretend it is. But if there's something good to say—'

'I think there's something good to say. D'ye know Farmer Chudleigh?'

'Only by name. He has the fields above the town, doesn't he?'

'Aye. Well I went to see him this morning and we spent three hours together, and the upshot is that I have been able to buy me a field of three acres where his land abuts upon the bridle path leading to St Gluvias. And there I propose to build us a house!'

She was silent a few moments. 'Stephen, that does surprise me.'

'And please you?'

'It pleases me very much. You told me nothing of this!'

'I wanted it to be a big surprise. I have also been to the mason's yard at Gluvias – Jago's. He tells me he can begin to lay the foundations next month!'

'Have you – decided on the house, what size, what rooms and so on? Because —'

'Of course I have not. That is for *you* to decide, for us to decide together.'

The excitement of this news was eating at her sickness, but the sickness did not go away.

'There must be room for half a dozen servants,' said Stephen. 'And there must be stables, ample stabling. Of course we shall not have many servants or many horses to begin, but it is right that we should have the room available for later.'

'And who is to pay for this? Can we afford it?'

'My accommodation at Warleggan's Bank was first fixed for two thousand but has recently been increased to three. The *Adolphus* was knocked down to me for 1750 guineas, and repaint and refit will not cost above two hundred. The *Chasse Marée* and the *Clowance* should turn over a modest profit in the next quarter, so I have money to spend on giving my bride a home – a home not

worthy of her, for none could be worthy of her, but a home she'll not be ashamed to call her own!

Go away sickness, rejoice in a loving husband who will do so much for you, lavishing not only pretty words but loving care. A proud husband and a husband to be proud of. A loving husband and a lying husband. Why did the second matter as much as the first?

'Stephen,' she said, 'this is very good of you. I am – *delighted. Really.* I – can't say more. This – this strange thing that has happened today. I can't just – just swallow it down like some – some dose of snailwater for the anaemia. It has happened and I am sorry.'

'Me also.'

'But I hope in a day or two it will all look different. As it is, I'll come tomorrow – or whenever you want – to look at plans for the new house. I'll be *happy* to do that - *delighted.*'

They lay there again in silence for a space while the candles burned down. The light from outside was reflecting on the curtains again. Stephen got up and looked out.

'What is it?' she asked.

'Only a bonfire on the quay. Wonder anything'll burn this weather.'

He got into bed and blew out the candles.

'Sleep now?'

'How old are you, Stephen?' she asked.

'Thirty-seven.'

'I see.'

He said: 'I just knocked three years off. I felt too old – always I've felt too old for you.'

There was a longer silence.

He said: 'Are you asleep?'

'No.'

He said: 'It has all come about, y'know, from wanting you too much. Since I first thought you loved me I've been scared of losing it, of losing you. I'd have done anything to get you. I'd do anything to keep you.'

'Well you've got me,' she said. 'For better or worse. There's no way out now.'

'Do you wish there might be?'

'No.'

'That makes me the happiest man in the world.'

'Stephen, I'm not the happiest woman, but I can't exactly find the words to say why. Perhaps we should leave it tonight and try to get some sleep.'

‘The trouble is’, he said, ‘that I’m not good enough for you. I’ve known it since the day we met.’

‘You mustn’t say that too often.’

‘Why not?’

‘I might come to believe you.’

He chuckled. ‘Now you’re like your mother.’

‘In what way?’

‘Witty. Joking. Even when you don’t like me very much.’

Like? Love? Yes, there was a difference. By chance or by perception he had chosen the right word.

‘Good-night, Stephen,’ she said.

‘Good-night, dear heart.’

III

The following afternoon Cal Trevail came with a letter from her mother saying they were all leaving Nampara for Paris on the following Monday. Because of the pressure of time and the many arrangements to be made, it was not possible for any of them to come over to say goodbye. Could she possibly come to Nampara, perhaps Wednesday or Thursday, stay the night so she could be told all their plans? Naturally if Stephen were free they would be delighted to see him too. Cal was delivering a similar note to Aunt Verity and would call back for his answer in an hour.

Clowance said there was no need for Cal to call back, a scribbled note of acceptance was all that was necessary. A hasty word with Stephen confirmed that he would be unable to come.

She left on the Wednesday morning, and by that time had seen no more of Jason Carrington.

Chapter Four

I

Belgium was under snow. It had been foul weather ever since Lieutenant Poldark of the 52nd Oxfordshires had brought his young bride from Gravesend to Antwerp and thence to Brussels. The crossing had been none too bad; the sea had been overawed by the chill density of the grey sky; but there had been, it seemed, light snow ever since.

They had gone to Jeremy's old quarters, but as soon as possible had moved to a small but pleasant apartment on the rue Namur. Jeremy's duties in time of peace were nominal: a few parades, a few attendances at classes dealing with military strategy, a few duty visits, waiting on senior officers. For the rest they did themselves well, attending the not infrequent balls and soirées, getting to know some of the many other English families which were there because some member of the family was in uniform, riding in the Forest of Soignes a few miles to the south of the city, reading and talking and shopping and making love.

They made love with all the ardour of newly weds – with something added. From the moment Jeremy found himself hiding from the gaugers and being sheltered by this imperious young girl nearly four years ago there had been only one woman in the world for him. Unwaveringly he had been devoted to her, like a man possessed, wanting never any other. There is a kind of love so destructive in its preoccupation that it can hardly be borne, and he had borne it, suffered it unrequited for more than four years. Then, lost to all real hope, he had accepted his father's eccentric advice and gone to her for the last time, climbed into the castle where she lived, like a thief in the night, and had persuaded her somehow – by what alchemy he still had no real idea – to come away with him. And she had come away with him. They had run away together, as if in some medieval romance, and she had given herself to him wantonly, even before they were married. To him it was a realized dream; sometimes he still stole a look at her to reassure himself that, in a cold and cynical world, it really was true.

As for Cuby, who after the defection of Valentine had reconciled herself readily enough to the prospect of a long period of maidenhood, had even

really enough to the prospect of a long period of maidenhood, had even considered that she might be happiest remaining unmarried permanently, living with her mother and sister and brother and his two young children in the fine castle that was still in process of being completed, and who, suddenly confronted with this tall soldier, abruptly grown older and more authoritative, had found herself driven forward by a rush of strong feeling and sexual emotion which she had never felt before and which she scarcely recognized or had time to give a name to . . . as for Cuby, she had so far suffered no second thoughts, no sense of anti-climax, no rational awakening. She sometimes thought about her family left behind in Caerhays, but only as if they belonged to a former life.

It was as if in her character there had been a log-jam of feeling, of emotion, held up, held back, quite unconsciously, by a cool and rational brain, so that she had remained unstirred at the prospect of marrying Valentine, a charming young man who did not love her – and only marginally stirred by the concentrated devotion of Jeremy who wanted her and no other woman in the world.

The jam had been broken, luckily for Jeremy, by Jeremy, just in time. And it was truly broken; once given way, she had given way with it. She had a beautiful body and she seemed to delight in offering it to her husband whenever he had the fancy, chastely, provocatively, wildly, however her mood took her. They made love together until exhaustion overtook them. But there was no satiety.

They agreed together too, almost too eagerly, happily, without reserve. Nothing she did was wrong in his eyes, nothing he did in hers. Even the appearance twice of Lisa Dupont, his former mistress, cast no cloud. It was an affair that had taken place when he had given up all hope of Cuby. He had no eyes for Lisa now, and after the second meeting she shrugged her shoulders and drifted away. Cuby said: ‘A pretty girl, but I think she will get plump. I’m happy that you prefer me.’

They lived well. Jeremy had money in the bank in Brussels – product of an escapade he preferred not to think about – and when that was gone he borrowed more. Cuby, reared on a spendthrift brother, was for making economies, but Jeremy said there was money coming to him at home from the profits of Wheel Leisure, and they could run up bills here in the expectation of settling them when he left the army.

When would that be? Fairly soon, he thought. With all Europe at peace the regiment was likely soon to be disbanded; though he had heard rumours that the Allies were not agreeing well at the Congress in Vienna, and it was likely that the British Government would choose to keep some troops in Europe for the time being. For preference he would like to stay on until October, which would mean he would have served two years. Then, if all went well, he might be able to sell his commission, though it was not a fashionable regiment, and return home

sell his commission, though it was not a fashionable regiment, and return home to Cornwall for Christmas.

In the meantime, life in Brussels was very good.

In spite of the little thought she gave to what she had left behind, a slight shadow on Cuby's life was that she had heard nothing from Caerhays at all – not a word – so when a letter did eventually come she broke the seal nervously and took the letter to the window to read. It was from her mother.

My dearest daughter,

I do not know what senses you took leave of to induce you to run away in the deceitful and secretive way you did. Your brother and I – not to mention Clemency – were deeply upset, indeed deeply grieved at the circumstances of your Elopement. The letter you left behind really explained nothing – indeed you have expressly said you cannot explain it yourself. And your later letters, though more detailed, have really added little to the first.

I do not believe by anything we did or said that we might suppose we had forfeited your confidence. You gave us all the impression that you were happy at home and contented at the prospect of marriage to Valentine Warleggan. When that fell through, through no fault of ours, it seemed that you were quite content – as we were – until some other equally suitable match presented itself.

Instead you have chosen Mr Jeremy Poldark. A pleasant young man and a Gentleman. He has made himself very agreeable on his visits here, and Clemency, I know, speaks highly of him.

I cannot – we cannot any of us – wish you anything but the utmost Happiness. Shall you make your home in Brussels? We have, as you know, sad memories of Walcheren, where your brother was lost. It is a great cause for relief that the war is over at last, and so long as the Victors do not fall out we may look forward to a period of prolonged Peace.

Augustus is in London still at the Treasury, and I have written to tell him of your marriage. I believe John is to go to London this month, as there are trusts and other business matters to attend to. It has been very wet here almost since Christmas, mild and gloomy with the primroses out and some camellias too.

Your loving Mother,
Frances Bettesworth

After she had read it twice Cuby passed it to Jeremy. He pored over it for a couple of minutes and then handed it back with a smile.

'I think you are already half-way to forgiveness.'

'This came also,' said Cuby, handing him a thin slip of paper.

It read:

Dearest darling Cuby, Sweet Jeremy, how I envy you both.
Love, Clemency

II

Henrietta Kemp had apparently overcome her lifelong distrust of the French and her disapproval of the degeneracy of their capital city, for she accepted Ross's invitation within the twenty-four hours, and at dawn on the following Monday they left as a family of five and made the disagreeable muddy jolting journey to London. They put up at Ross's usual lodgings in George Street in the Adelphi. Ross sent word to the Prime Minister that he had arrived, and was invited to call on him at Fife House on Saturday morning at ten o'clock. On the Friday evening Ross took Demelza and Isabella-Rose through a light sprinkling of snow to the theatre in Drury Lane.

They saw Morton's comedy *Town and Country*, with Mr Kean playing Reuben, and after it a musical piece called *Rubies and Diamonds*. Ross privately thought it all rather poor stuff but Demelza enjoyed it, and they were both diverted by Isabella-Rose's enchantment. Her eyes sparkled like the diamonds in the title. She sat rapt, with clasped hands, and came out flushed with a rare joy. She might, like Joan of Arc, have seen a vision, but it was not a holy vision, it was an artificial tinsel-deep theatrical interpretation of life. It served for her. She was lost in the glitter, the candle-lit glamour, the powder, the paint, the perfume, the lines declaimed in unnatural voices, the sheer glorious make-believe of it all.

Just at the end, as they were leaving, a man said: 'Captain Poldark.'

A sturdily built well-dressed young man with a craggy face. Smiling. Then looking at Demelza.

'Mrs Poldark. What an unexpected pleasure. Edward Fitzmaurice. You'll remember . . .'

'Of course,' said Demelza. 'How are you, Lord Edward? I think you don't know our younger daughter, Isabella-Rose?'

They moved talking through the crowd towards the entrance. As she had not seen him since the morning after Clowance had turned him down, Demelza half expected there might be some constraint – as there certainly was that morning when they left Bowood – but clearly Edward had long since got over his disappointment. Perhaps he had realized, Demelza thought with a pang, that it was all for the best, and the unrestrained, untamed blonde girl from Cornwall

would never have settled into the brilliant but restricted social life he was offering her. (So now she was the wife of a young entrepreneurial seaman living in a small terraced house in Penryn and looking, Demelza thought on her last visit to Nampara, dark under the eyes and less buoyant than usual.)

Of course the question soon came up. Eyeing the crush of carriages for his own Edward Fitzmaurice asked how was their elder daughter? She was married? Well, that was hardly surprising, was it? And happy? Good, good. Well, it had been a delightful week they had all spent together in Bowood. A pity you were not there, sir. And another pretty daughter! How old would she be? Fifteen?

Demelza smiled at Bella, who beamed at Edward, and then smiled at her mother for not giving the game away.

How was Lady Isobel? And Lord and Lady Lansdowne? His brother and sister-in-law were very well. They had two sons now, you know. Aunt Isobel had been ill with a gouty infection but was now quite recovered. She had a new ear trumpet which it was claimed magnified the sound more than her previous one, though he had to admit he had not been able to notice the difference. No, he was still unmarried but was much taken up with Parliament and other public affairs.

‘Perhaps next week you would come to tea at Lansdowne House with myself and my aunt. Henry and Louisa are in the country but—’

‘That’s very kind,’ said Ross. ‘But we are on our way to Paris. We shall expect to leave, I think, on Monday.’

‘Paris? I was there in October. A delightful idea. A holiday, I presume?’

‘. . . Yes, a holiday.’

‘Where are you to stay?’

‘It is being arranged for us.’

Fitzmaurice had been aware of Ross’s hesitation when answering the earlier question, so he glanced with a half smile at the tall Cornishman and lifted an eyebrow and asked no more.

‘You will find it a city of the strangest contrasts, Mrs Poldark. In some ways it is old-fashioned compared to London – as if the long years of war have kept its development back. It is a very rough city, but there are many delightful people there. If you have time on your hands, Captain Poldark, do let me give you the names of one or two of my friends who will, I know, be delighted to meet you and to show you anything in Paris that you wish to see.’

‘Thank you. I am greatly obliged.’

‘And do not forget to take knives and forks for the journey. They are at a premium in France because of the shortage of steel and other metals.’

After a few minutes they separated, and as soon as they were out of earshot

Bella exclaimed: 'What a lovely man!'

Ross said: 'I think Bella is developing a habit of finding all men lovely.'

'Oh, Papa, how beastly you can be! But he *is* a nice man, isn't he?'

'A very nice man,' said Ross. 'I wish there were more like him.'

'So do I,' said Demelza.

III

Ross had seen the Earl of Liverpool in Downing Street last time, but today he went to Fife House, Liverpool's personal residence, which had been built a century or so before in the old private gardens of Whitehall Palace. Punctually as the clock in the hall was striking he was shown in to the Prime Minister's study.

Lord Liverpool, seated before the fire, got up to greet him and said: 'Good of you to come, Poldark. Let me see, you will, of course, know Robert Melville.'

Ross shook hands with a man a bit younger than himself, a tall man, with tight lips and receding hair.

'Yes, of course. How are you, Melville?'

Robert Dundas had been a friend of Pitt's and a firm supporter of Lord Liverpool. In 1811 he had succeeded to his father's title and the following year when Liverpool, following the assassination of Spencer Perceval, had formed his first government, he had appointed Melville First Lord of the Admiralty. As far as Ross knew he still occupied this position. One could only speculate why he was here . . .

'In case you suppose there is an admiralty interest,' said Liverpool, putting an end to speculation, 'that is not so. But Robert Melville has been assisting me in various ways to do with the situation in France and as an old friend I have called him in to meet you and to hear what we have to say together. This is not, as no doubt you will guess, a Cabinet matter; I am sending you as a personal envoy; but if there should come some situation when you wished to report to me and I was not available, Lord Melville will be able to act as my deputy.'

'I should be happier, my lord,' said Ross, 'if I were more sure of the sort of situation you would wish me to report.'

Liverpool pulled the bell. 'You'll take a glass of brandy to keep out the cold?'

'Thank you.'

'Have you snow in Cornwall?' asked Lord Melville.

'No, just rain – rather a deal of it.'

'Must be a long and wearying journey. Three days?'

'All of that. But it was in my mind to return to London shortly anyhow. The Commons have reassembled, haven't they?'

Commons have reassembled, haven't they:

'Last Thursday,' said Liverpool. 'Not everybody is as assiduous as you are, Poldark.'

'I often am not,' said Ross, 'but I learned there was a Corn Bill in the drafting and I wished to oppose it.'

There was a pause as the servant came in, carrying a tray which he set on a side-table. Ross occupied a few moments admiring the Gobelin tapestries for which this house, and the owner, were celebrated.

Lord Liverpool said: 'No doubt we could discuss the proposed Corn Bill at length sometime. Perhaps this is not the time. I know, of course, that your political sympathies lie in favour of reform . . . Did you know, by the way, that Canning had reached Lisbon safely?'

'Yes, I heard from him two weeks ago. When he wrote he was confined to his bed with gout and had not yet presented his credentials.' Ross eased his aching ankle. 'As for reform, my lord, this, as you say, is perhaps not the time to discuss it, but I have to confess I am disappointed and depressed that since the declaration of peace there has been no improvement in conditions in England.'

Melville said: 'We are proceeding, but slowly.'

'Quite a number of us who supported this administration,' said Ross, 'felt, as I did, that reform in any important degree must wait until the defeat of Bonaparte. It was Wyndham, wasn't it, who said: "Who would repair his house in a typhoon?" And Pitt, of course, stopped his reforms because of the war. But now . . . but now surely they should be resumed. The labourer, whether in the field or in the factory, should be able to live a decent, honest life. Instead one sees starvation in the midst of plenty.'

They sipped their brandy. Ross was aware that his comments were not going down well.

'Believe me,' said Liverpool drily, 'I am not unaware of conditions in the country, and, if later in the session you feel you wish to make your contribution to the House, it might be possible for you to come home for a spell. You can be kept informed. Certainly no Corn Bill will be presented until late March, though I am sure it will figure largely in debate up and down the country. In the meantime, as far as foreign affairs are to be measured, we face another problem.'

'Which means my going to Paris in some haste?'

The Earl of Liverpool blinked his weak eye. 'Not haste. But I think I need you there now.'

'May I ask why, my lord?'

'As I believe I mentioned when we last met, there has recently – that is over the last ten months – returned to France upwards of a hundred and fifty thousand prisoners of war, coming from their camps in Russia, Prussia and England, many

prisoners of war, coming from their camps in Russia, Prussia and England, many of them retaining the most unamiable memories of their captors and eager for any opportunity for revenge. At the same time the arrival of so many aristocratic émigrés has resulted in the enervation, the watering down, of Bonaparte's splendid army by the reinstatement of young men and old men to positions of command which they could never justify except in terms of birth and privilege. All this leads to resentment and unrest.'

Ross inclined his head. 'Yes indeed.'

'What I did not tell you,' said Lord Liverpool, 'is that last October I sent my brother, Colonel Jenkinson, on a mission which might be considered similar to yours, and he attached himself to the 2nd Infantry Corps under Lieutenant-General Count Reille at Valenciennes. His despatches have reported a disturbing degree of disaffection in the French army.'

'Does he describe the disaffection?'

'The army is riddled with secret societies, he says. Many of them are Bonapartist and aim to overthrow Louis – not necessarily to restore Napoleon but to put his son on the throne. Others want the Due d'Orléans. Many of the higher officers are royalist, he says, but the rank and file cannot abide Louis and what they regard as his corrupt court.'

'In what way do you believe I can be of use?'

'My brother's reports are gloomy in the extreme, and differ noticeably from those of our new minister, Lord Fitzroy Somerset, who speaks more favourably of feeling about the Bourbons. Somerset of course is very young, and, while a brave soldier, may not be versed in the world of foreign secretaries and diplomacy.'

'Nor am I,' said Ross.

'Once Bonaparte went,' said Liverpool, 'we did, I think, everything possible to bring France back into the comity of nations. One of the most important aims of our foreign policy is to see France stable and strong. Without her, the balance is weighted heavily in favour of the Russians and the Prussians, and at Vienna Talleyrand is negotiating on her behalf to achieve an honourable settlement of the outstanding problems such as the independence of Belgium, and France's frontier on the Rhine. If, while the Congress is in progress, France should collapse into anarchy or civil war it would be a major setback, not merely for him and for our policy but for the future peace of Europe.'

Ross was helped to a second brandy. Melville smiled at him. 'No longer run, Poldark,' he said, holding his own glass towards the light; 'properly imported from Armagnac and all duties paid.'

Ross said: 'I believe you think all Cornishmen are smugglers at heart.'

'Are they not? I was only ever once down there myself and they gave me the

impression of a society that admires – unorthodoxy.’

‘Is that why you send for me to embark on this – this unorthodox mission?’

‘I sent for you,’ said Lord Liverpool, ‘because of your record of service to the Crown – especially perhaps your last mission to Portugal when you were able to serve your country in more ways than one.’

Ross sipped his duty-paid Armagnac. It looked as if Canning had been talking.

‘Do you wish me’, he said, ‘to link up with your brother, my lord?’

‘No. I have sent him south, to sound the feeling in Marseilles and possibly then to go on to Bordeaux. Almost certainly sentiment is more favourable to the King there than in Paris. But I need a second opinion and I need one on a different level. I want someone less obviously related to me and therefore less official. Someone of rank who is on holiday in Paris and can mix with officers in a casual way. The fact that you do not speak French fluently should be an asset. And that you are there with your family will disarm suspicion.’

‘It’s a wide brief,’ said Ross.

‘Indeed.’

‘And an uneasy one.’

‘Do you think so?’

‘You will remember, my lord, that General Wellington did not appreciate my presence at Bussaco, saying he felt I had been sent as an observer by certain members of the Cabinet who were unfavourably disposed towards him.’

‘I remember it, but you proved the opposite.’

‘Nevertheless he has never regarded me with the greatest favour. I should very much regret it if Fitzroy Somerset should feel I was being sent out as an observer of *his* conduct of affairs!’

Lord Melville stretched his legs towards the fire. He was beginning to put on weight. ‘Robert tells me you’re a friend of Fitzroy Somerset’s.’

‘Friend would be too much. We have met three times. I think he has friendly feelings towards me – as I have for him.’

‘Well, I don’t think . . . I hope I’m right in saying this – I don’t think you are being in any way asked to report on the judgement of our minister. You are being asked to form your own judgement on the state of affairs in France. We have conflicting reports and we should like another opinion. That is all. Am I right, Robert?’

‘Yes,’ said the second Robert. ‘That is precisely what I want.’

‘In fact,’ said Melville, ‘you are being asked to take a holiday in Paris, like many another rich and titled Englishman at this time. Form your opinion and let us know. That is all. I would have thought it a beguiling prospect.’

‘It is,’ agreed Ross. ‘Before I go, my lord, could you provide me with some of the arguments in *favour* of a Corn Bill. I know – and feel – only those against it, and perhaps it is good to keep an open mind.’

‘Gladly,’ said Liverpool. ‘I can promise you a list of the contentions before you leave. Chiefly, perhaps, you should realize that if other countries did not protect their farming interests we should not attempt to do so either.’

‘It is not so much the owners of farms I am concerned for but the labourers, both in the fields and in the towns.’

‘Quite so. Quite so. There are of course many things to be said on both sides . . .’

The clock outside chimed the half-hour, and was almost immediately joined by a smaller, silver one on the mantelpiece. His lordship clearly kept good time.

Ross said: ‘When do you wish us to leave?’

Liverpool blinked his eye again. ‘Tomorrow evening, I think. The Prince Regent is returning from Brighton in the morning, and I would like you to see him before you go.’

Ross looked his surprise. ‘Is he a party to this mission?’

There was silence. Melville again refilled Ross’s glass.

‘Not exactly a party to it,’ said Liverpool. ‘But I have asked him to confer a baronetcy on you. I consider it a necessary part of the enterprise.’

IV

‘What!’ shouted Demelza. ‘What, Ross?’ Fortunately the children were out with Mrs Kemp, for they would have been startled at their mother’s tone. You . . . They . . . They want you to . . . Oh, Ross. Oh, Ross.’ She gripped his arms and reached up and kissed him. ‘But you said *no*! You said you *wouldn’t*! In Nampara, that night in Nampara when you first told me about it. You said you had *refused*—’

‘I remember very well what I said!’ Ross answered in irritation. ‘What I said to you and what I said to him! Of course I refused then and of course I refused now! I want no title that I have not earned! He has some damned fool notion that it is of great importance that I shall take it. Melville was the same. They say, they argue, that a mere captain in a Paris which abounds in titles would rate too unimportant for their purpose. Melville had a list of the officers in the French army. Practically everyone is a count or a baron. Even those rating from Bonapartist days had some title to their name – those, that is to say, who had not been created dukes or princes! My God, if I had known this . . .’

She kissed him on the side of the mouth. 'You would have refused to come?'

'Yes!'

'But now?'

He disengaged himself roughly from her clasp and went to the window, stared out at a street scene still mantled with light snow, at a woman selling oranges, at another with a wheelbarrow packed with cabbages. For a time he said nothing, but thought of a conversation he had had with Caroline Enys just after Christmas. Caroline had said: 'They tell me you were offered a title.'

'Yes.'

'And refused it?'

'Yes.'

'May I know the reasons why?'

Ross told her. Caroline had listened to him with that loving attention she reserved specially for him, with a glint of humour lurking somewhere in her eye.

'My dear Ross, do you not think you may have been mistaken?'

'If you think my reasons mistaken, then you may think the same of my decision.'

'You live in an ideal world, Ross, and in an ideal world titles would be abolished. But we do not and they are not. And sometimes they are useful. This one, since it is hereditary, could in time to come be very useful to Jeremy, even if you did not want it for yourself.'

'Let him make his own way. People should stand on their own feet.'

'Of course. But shall you not, when you die, bequeath him and the other children the mines, the house, the farm? I do not suppose any money you leave will be distributed to the poor. In what, then, is it distasteful to leave a title behind?'

He grunted. 'You argue like a lawyer.'

'No I don't, because I argue out of love. And think how delighted Demelza would have been.'

'Demelza? What rubbish! She would detest the idea! She has said so.'

'No doubt she said so after she knew you had refused it. But she would adore it – perhaps not being called Lady Poldark, but at least that you should be Sir Ross! Ask any woman, anywhere. *Any* woman. I mean it. I assure you.'

He had thought of that conversation this morning, in Lord Liverpool's study, while hovering on the brink. If he had refused again, would it have meant the cancellation of his mission? He hardly thought so. They implied it, but were they bluffing? In the end he had chosen not to call their bluff.

As he came back from the window he touched Demelza's arm.

'What I have said was not meant in irritation.'

'What if it were?' she said. 'No matter. You have reason to be irritated, Ross.'
'Not with you.'

She pushed a curl out of her eye. 'Why not with me? Yes, you should be irritated with me, for I see small harm in you having this little title. And sir is only a little title, isn't it? Do we need to use it when we go back to Cornwall?'

'I think you may have to,' he said. 'Lady Poldark.'

She put her hands up to her face. 'Judas God! Yes!'

'Those are the first words I ever heard you utter. It must be thirty years ago, isn't it?'

'What words?'

'Judas God. You were complaining that those drunken louts had cut a piece off Garrick's tail!'

'My dear life, and they had! Ross . . .'

She stopped.

'Yes, my dear?'

'I have come a long way.'

'We have both come a long way. When I met you I was an inebriate, half bankrupt squireen. You didn't know what a catch you were making!'

'I didn't know I was making *any* catch,' said Demelza.

Ross rubbed his nose. 'I didn't know what sort of a catch *I* was making either. Dear Heaven, that was the luckiest day of my life.'

There was silence again while he watched the cabbage girl. When he turned from the window again he was surprised to see his wife standing there with tears running down her cheeks.

'Demelza, what is it?'

'You don't often pay me compliments, Ross.'

'Good God, of course I do! I do it all the time, but you forget!'

'I don't forget! Perhaps it's not that sort?'

With a sudden tenderness overlaying his frustration and vexation he put his arms around her, fished a handkerchief from her sleeve and wiped the tears away.

'It's all Canning's damned doing,' he said. 'He and Liverpool were at Oxford together and have been thick ever since. When he left to take up the Lisbon appointment George made some sort of a bargain with Liverpool that his supporters in the House of Commons should be rewarded for their loyalty to him. Liverpool told me as much in November! Boringdon was made an earl, Huskisson became Commissioner of Woods and Forests, Leveson-Gower was made a viscount. And they've hung this upon me!'

'Does – does it m-matter?' said Demelza.

'Come on, come on,' he said, as the tears kept falling. 'This will never do.

what if the children return?

'They won't be home yet,' she said. 'They've gone to the Tower.'

'How long will they be?'

'Oh, another hour, I should think.'

'Let me have you.'

She stared at him through big but watery eyes. 'What *can* you mean?'

'What d'you think? I like you when you're crying.'

'Dear love, it isn't *done*, it isn't proper, it isn't decent. In the middle of the day! When we have all night!'

'You sound like Jud.'

'Now don't make me laugh.' She tried not to hiccup.

'Stopped crying now?'

'Yes.'

'Tears of sorrow, no doubt.'

'I know what it is,' she said; 'now you've got this title it has gone to your head and you think to touse a serving wench. But there's none handy, so you reckon your wife will do.'

'Just so,' said Ross. 'Just so.'

'In fact,' she said, 'I don't care a button for your title. But I still care a little for you.'

'Tell me upstairs,' Ross said.

'Oh,' she said, 'so it's going to be upstairs, is it?'

Chapter Five

I

They travelled to Dover on the Sunday afternoon and caught the 10 a.m. packet for Calais. The sea was choppy, the winds contrary and the crossing took six hours. Demelza felt sick, Bella and Mrs Kemp *were* sick, but the newly created baronet and his younger son suffered no ill.

The Prince Regent had said: ‘So, Captain Poldark, it is about five years, isn’t it?’

‘Five exactly, sir, to the month.’

‘When you sought to instruct me on the excellence of my military commander in Portugal, and my duties to England.’

‘I only answered your questions, sir.’

‘That was not the way I remember it. Not the way I remember it at all. Anyway, whether you instructed me or not, you will have observed that England and her Regent Prince kept faith with her mission to deliver Europe from the tyrant!’

‘Indeed, sir. And all England was grateful.’

‘Except the Whigs, eh? Except the Whigs.’

The five years, Ross thought, had not dealt too badly with the putative George the Fourth. When he had last seen him he had been stertorous, wobbly on his feet, his face and body swollen with an excess of high living, a gross Hanoverian dedicated to pleasure and self-indulgence. Only once or twice had it been possible to detect a keen brain somewhere surfacing through the blubber. Now he looked no worse – if anything slightly better. Perhaps his later mistresses, with their emphasis on a more restrained way of life, had done him some good – or at least prevented further rapid deterioration. The old man, his father, they said, was now so far gone that he had to be lifted everywhere and was only conscious of touch and smell.

‘And now I am told you are off to Paris on some new mission. What is it to be?’

Confronted with the direct question, Ross hesitated and then said: ‘I believe I

Confronted with the direct question, Ross hesitated and then said: 'I believe I am invited to be an observer, sir.'

'As you were in Portugal, eh? Well, there it is. My government – or some group within my government – has its own ideas. I trust your mission of observance will prosper.'

'Thank you, sir.'

The Prince's fingers fumbled with the hilt of his sword.

'It's true, is it not, Poldark, that you have a partiality for duelling.'

Who had been telling tales now? 'Very far from it, Your Highness. I have only been involved in one duel in my life, and I derived no satisfaction from the outcome.'

'Well, let me tell you, my friend, let me give you a word of warning. All Parisians at present are duelling mad. Whether it is because they can no longer fight a war and have to express their spirits in some other way I know not. They look for an insult anywhere, and if they detect one you will be out on some draughty heath at six o'clock of the morning with pistols and seconds and the rest of the paraphernalia before you can say knife. Are you a good shot?'

'Fair, I suppose. Not more.'

'Well, step lightly and avoid corns. I have no patience with the custom meself and neither does the law of England, but those Frenchies please themselves.'

'I appreciate your warning, Your Highness.'

The Prince grunted. 'French are a strange race, eh? No sense of moderation, no sense of humour. Remember the Gordon riots?'

'I think I was abroad at the time.'

'Maybe. 'Twould be thirty-five years ago, I suppose, give or take a year. A good nine years before the Bastille nonsense. Can't remember what started it now.'

The Prince seemed so lost in thought that Ross wondered if he had forgotten what the purpose of the meeting was.

'Must have been something to do with a man called Gordon, I suppose. Anyway all London ran amok. Populace went mad. All the prisons were broke open: the Fleet, the Marshalsea, the King's Bench. Prisoners were freed, just like at the Bastille. Some distillery – Langdale's, I think – was set afire and gin was handed out to everyone. They say folk lay in the gutters drinking it as it flowed away. Then looting and burning everywhere. My father – you know he is no tyrant – nor no milksop neither – finally he ordered out the Horse Guards. They charged the crowds with swords and bayonets. Some two hundred and eighty-odd people killed. About thirty hanged. All over in no time. Dead weren't found – their bodies were dumped in the Fleet. Scarred houses were plastered up before dawn – blood-splashed walls of the Bank of England even whitewashed too

gawn – blood-splashed walls of the Dark of England even whitewashed too. Next morning all peaceful. No inquiry called for, not by MPs, not by the mob. An incident – much more bloody than the Bastille. But did it lead to twenty years of revolution and a war-thirsty dictator? It did not. 'Twas over and done with in a single night. I suppose the English have more sense.'

'It seems so,' said Ross.

The Prince weighed the sword in his hands again and yawned.

'Well, I suppose you'd best kneel, sir. That's the custom, y'know. That's if your back is not too stiff . . . Have no fear, I do not intend to decapitate you.'

II

When the crowded packet reached Calais all was confusion and bustle. The Poldarks had accommodation reserved at the best-known and largest inn, M Dessein's famous hostelry, which claimed to have a hundred and thirty beds and sixty servants, and presently, though so late, they assembled in their sitting-room and ate a breakfast of fresh mackerel, roast veal and gulls' eggs and drank between them a flagon of red wine. Then everyone tumbled into bed and slept heavily but fitfully amid the shouts and the tramp of feet and the movements of other travellers coming and going.

The next morning it was necessary to apply for fresh passports, and by the time this was done and the bill paid it was ten o'clock and the diligence was waiting for them. Two shabby moth-eaten coaches were drawn in tandem by three great carthorses which proceeded at a walking pace over the broken rutted streets. The driver was a dark little man in a ragged army-blue uniform wearing brass earrings and a heavy moustache; the postilion, in a long blue blouse, sheepskin apron and enormous muddy boots, looked as if he had been wading in the harbour. At a lumbering crawl they moved out into the open country with a thin snow still falling. There was no proper stop for several hours except to change horses, and they passed through Boulogne, Samer, Cormont and reached Montreuil where they spent a second night and where both Bella and Henry were bitten by bed bugs.

Henry – or Harry as he was more frequently called – was the most placid of children, and, to Demelza, most nearly resembled Clowance in babyhood. He had none of the nervous tensions of Jeremy, nor the constant rebellious self-assertion of Bella. But he didn't like itchy red spots and whimpered through most of the next day's journey, which began at six in the morning and ended at five in the afternoon at Amiens. Here the hostelry was cleaner and the host offered them some lotion which helped to soothe their wounds.

checked them some touch which helped to secure their wounds.

Demelza had stayed awake throughout all the bumpy lurching journeys, staring out of the window beside Ross, watching and listening, and occasionally, hands under armpits, shivering with excitement.

She said: 'I can't follow a *word*, Ross. 'Tis worse than double Dutch. And they are all so shabby! The war must have cost them dear. But the country! It is just like England, is it not! Little difference at all!'

'Did you expect one?'

'Oh yes! This is France. You have been here before and you know what it looks like. But I expected the countryside to be *different* – like a foreign country.'

'It is a foreign country.'

'But you could close your ears and think this is England – except it is a poor part of England, a shabby part. The trees look the same, except thinner, the cows look the same, except thinner, the dogs look the same.'

'Except thinner?'

'Well yes, I suppose that too. And everywhere more dirt. When shall we reach Paris?'

'About four, I think.'

They were in Chantilly, a pleasanter village, with tall trees lining the roadside and châteaux visible here and there among the massive darkness of winter woodland. As they rattled and rumbled on they passed between acreages of small stunted shrubs, no more than two feet high, which Ross said were vineyards, came to St Denis and stopped for refreshments and just before dark sighted the formidable gates of Paris.

Tall wooden palisades flanked the gates, which were guarded by soldiers; urchins and ragged hangers-on stared inquisitively at the newcomers, and dirty women stood and shouted in the doorways of mud huts and wooden shanties.

Here passports were scrutinized, and they had to change to a smaller private carriage as the diligence was going on to Notre-Dame. So off again and through narrow crowded streets that made London almost spacious by comparison. Traffic confusion and noise and struggling crowds all pressed between crumbling medieval houses which shut out the darkening sky. Children ran begging beside the coach, and horses reared and slithered on the melting snow, and upturned carts and fighting, brawling men and crowded taverns, open sewers and villainous soldiery and beggars, beggars everywhere, until quite suddenly their coach was through the worst of the old town and rattling out into a great open space which was the Place de la Concorde.

'Bella,' said Ross, 'this is where the guillotine was. See that railing, surrounding that small square. That is where the King died – the former king –

and all the aristocrats, and Danton and Robespierre in their turn and many thousand more. I am sorry it has been removed, but that at least is one good thing Napoleon did.'

'Oh what a shame!' said Bella. 'I'd've loved to've seen it working.'

'And by God he has done more than one good thing,' added Ross, looking around him after twelve years. 'This is almost a new city! All this part. Dwight will be surprised when he sees it.'

III

The British Embassy was in the rue du Faubourg St Honoré. A huge handsome building originally belonging to the Princess Pauline Borghese, it had only recently come into British hands, Wellington having taken it on himself to buy the mansion on behalf of the British Government. It was said he had paid nearly a million old francs for it.

They turned in through high open portals, the driver spoke to a guard, then they clattered into the courtyard, with stables on the right, and what looked like kitchens on the left, drew up in front of a handsome curved stone staircase leading to the front door.

Travel-stained and tired, with a maid and two children in attendance, feeling shabby and dirty and uncouth, greeted by a smartly dressed secretary called McKenzie, and with two liveried footmen in scarlet cloaks and white wigs to escort them upstairs to their rooms and to carry their baggage, Demelza felt as out of place as at any time in her life. On the other hand Mrs Kemp, having clearly wished for the last three days that she had never taken a single step beyond the Tamar, was impressed and encouraged by the magnificence. This was what she had hoped for, and perhaps some of the discomforts and fatigues of the last two weeks would eventually be forgotten. Two large rooms had been put at their disposal on the second floor, with an extra dressing-room if needed, and while they were going about the first motions of unpacking valises and boxes and another footman was making up the fires, a slim pretty girl of about twenty-one came in and greeted them. This was Fitzroy's wife, Emily, who had been a Wellesley-Pole and therefore a niece of the Duke. On her heels came the acting British Ambassador himself. Fitzroy Somerset was young, handsome, fresh-complexioned, with penetrating eyes and the high-beaked nose of his Boscawen mother.

Later they supped together and met the Duchess of Wellington, a plain, grey-faced, spinster-like lady who was probably no older than Demelza but looked a

generation away. It seemed that only yesterday she had received news of the death of her favourite brother in the unnecessary battle for New Orleans, fought after peace had been agreed, and this was reason enough for her to take little part in the conversation. The Minister's second man, a Mr Charles Bagot, was also at the table.

Fitzroy Somerset exchanged pleasantries with his guests about Tregothnan and the Falmouths, assured Ross he was quite recovered from his wound at Bussaco, told them he was giving a reception on the following night, at which there would be various people present whom it would be useful to meet; while Lady Fitzroy Somerset advised Demelza that they had taken an apartment for them on the rue de la Ville l'Evêque, which was not very far from the Embassy, but suggested they should spend a second night at the Embassy to give themselves time to settle in.

The ladies soon left, and the three men took to the port.

After a few moments Somerset abruptly said: 'I know roughly the purpose of your visit, Poldark, and I will help in any way I can.'

'Thank you. I'm relieved to know it.'

'Relieved?'

'Yes. If the Government sends over a special envoy to report personally, it might be taken by some ambassadors as a sign of a lack of confidence in their own despatches.' He thought it better to clear the air.

Somerset smiled, but rather thinly. 'Jenky is an old woman and sees bogies round every corner. He does in England, let alone here. Hence his unnecessarily repressive measures where discontent has shown.'

'Oh, agreed. And as for France?'

'As for France, of course the Bourbons rule uneasily. How could it be otherwise? For a country as dynamic as this has been, it must seem a come-down to be ruled by a gouty old man who has been imposed upon them from outside. But my feeling is that the solid middle classes of France, particularly in the provinces, have had enough of war and bloodshed and welcome the peace and the return to a peaceful commerce in which they can settle down to live their lives. It is barely a year yet! Give them time!'

'Was that the Duke's opinion too?'

'The Duke became very unpopular before he left, and I think his leaving has done nothing but good. Not that much of the unpopularity was his fault – except a certain arrogance, dare I say? – but as the military representative of the victorious powers he was the suitable target for any complaints, any discontent that could be laid, however unreasonably, at his door. I know my own tenure is temporary, but I rather hope he does not return when the Congress is over. I

believe someone quite new, without the trappings of being an eminent and victorious general, would be a far more tactful appointment.'

Ross said: 'And do you feel the army – the French army – is loyal to the King?'

Somerset reached over for the port.

'Allow me, sir,' said Charles Bagot, getting up.

'You will know', said Somerset, 'that Liverpool has never relied on Embassy despatches for his information. He has developed an army of informants who add to the confidential reports sent from here. I do not know if one should criticize this. Jenky looks on it as a necessary arm of government; but as a result I have no doubt he already receives too many reports on what the French are thinking. It could not be other, because there are almost as many French opinions as there are Frenchmen! Late last year a Colonel Jenkinson – a brother of the Earl – came to the capital and has visited various parts of France; and, although I have not seen his reports, I believe they have been alarmist.'

'Unduly so?'

'In my opinion, yes. And in the Duke's opinion too. There is much talk of Bonapartism. But really it is a word used as an instrument of opposition. Many people who use it would not have Napoleon back for the world. But Lord Liverpool, as I have said, sees a revolutionary behind every bush, and I suspect his brother is of the same persuasion.'

Ross reflected that in London he had drunk brandy from France and in Paris he was drinking port from Portugal. What, he wondered, was Canning drinking in Lisbon?

'This reception you are giving tomorrow night . . .'

'Ah, yes. I would tell you, my friend, in Paris there is nothing but receptions, dances, operas, theatres, one long round of entertainment, ignoring the poverty that sprawls all around. And this reception tomorrow night is just one of many. But I am holding it chiefly so that you and Lady Poldark may meet a number of people who will be valuable to you socially or for your other objective of seeing and understanding something of the stirrings in the political undergrowth.'

Bagot said: 'There is one man who says he knows you, a Colonel de la Blache, who wishes to see you again.'

Ross looked blank. 'I don't think I recollect—'

'I'm not sure if he knows you but I believe you knew his sister – or his sister's fiancé, the Comte de Sombreuil.'

'Oh yes indeed! I shall be happy to meet him. When I was in Paris last, twelve years ago, I tried to find Mlle de la Blache but could not.'

'What happened to de Sombreuil?' Fitzroy Somerset asked. 'I suffer from the

disadvantage of being young.’

‘De Sombreuil and I and many others took part in an Anglo-French landing on the Brittany coast – near Quiberon – that was in ’95. It was a big affair with a strong escort of British warships and was intended to rouse the Chouans, who had been carrying on a desultory war against the Jacobins for years. A large party of Frenchmen was landed and the King’s flag raised, but the invasion fell apart from lack of direction and organization. General Lazare Hoche led a Republican army against us and gained a victory. Hoche gave his word that the lives of all those who surrendered should be spared, but the Revolutionary Convention overruled him and about seven hundred men, most of them gentlemen, were shot to death. The leaders, like Charles de Sombreuil, were executed later.’

There was a brief silence.

Ross added: ‘It was really the very last hope the Bourbons ever had, until Napoleon abdicated last year. If the invasion had succeeded . . . Instead we have had to slog it out.’

Bagot said: ‘I often wonder how the French have the face to speak of “*Perfide Albion*”. No one could be more perfidious than the French, especially when dealing with each other!’

IV

Demelza was not asleep when Ross came in, and they lay a time in bed in desultory talk.

He told her what had passed downstairs.

Demelza said: ‘Lady Fitzroy Somerset is a nice, easy person, isn’t she. The Duchess I’m not so sure about. Very tight. She adores the Duke. But of course the loss of her brother . . . Did you think Harry was a thought feverish this evening?’

‘I’d not be surprised after all this travelling. Have you a draught you can give him?’

‘I have given him one. Mrs Kemp thinks it may still be his teeth.’

‘Bella was very good at supper.’

‘Ross, I did not know whether it was proper to bring her in, but she is so grown-up looking – that is when she restrains her high spirits. Lady Fitzroy Somerset thought she was sixteen!’

‘So did Edward Fitzmaurice.’

Demelza yawned and stretched. ‘Well, we are in Paris at last! Amid all these

lords and ladies I am quite overcome.'

'You are one yourself now.'

'Do you know,' she said, pushing her hand up through the hair curling on her forehead. 'Do you know, I cannot at all begin to see myself as such; but here – in Paris – it does not matter! Here we live in a world of make-believe. I can easily pretend to be Lady Poldark; 'twill be great fun! I shall put on airs if I like to and pretend I am used to the high life. But it will be when we go *home* . . .'

'What then?'

'Then – there – I will always be – will always be Demelza Poldark – Mrs Ross Poldark, same as I have always been. I want nothing more.'

'You'll find in the end it will be just the same thing.'

'Hope so.'

Outside a clock was striking midnight.

After they had counted together Ross said: 'I wonder if I am here on a fool's errand.'

'Why should you be?'

'Fitzroy Somerset is astute enough, though so young. Although he is very gracious about it – and friendly towards us because we were already his friends – I think he feels exasperated that Liverpool should keep adding to his reporters and advisers. And I don't blame him. Anyway, he thinks that fears of an insurrection in France are overdone. So apparently did Wellington, who has only been gone a month. His reassuring reports to Liverpool failed to convince; but Liverpool, I know, is full of apprehensions about Jacobins, whether in England or in France. I feel I should have made something more than a token protest about conditions in England before I came on this mission. For it is much more conditions than principles that make the revolutionary. Do you know, for instance, that the Treasonable Practices Act is still in force in England? This forbids public meetings and makes writing, printing and speaking against the Government a punishable offence.'

She looked at him gravely for a moment. 'I am not sure as to your meaning, Ross.'

'Of course I know that Liverpool would say the Act, though still in force, is seldom used. But its existence is a constant threat to the expression of free opinion. And now comes the Corn Bill! What I am asking you is what I am doing receiving a title and a handsomely paid holiday in Paris just to inquire into the Jacobin and Bonapartist tendencies of the French army? If I were more important . . .'

'Yes?'

'If I were more important I would think I might be being bought off. Since that is ridiculous – the amount my influence would carry inside

that is ridiculous – the amount my influence would sway opinion inside Parliament or out is so small as to be ludicrous – I can only suppose that he was sincere in inviting me to make this excursion. But God knows whether there will be a worthwhile outcome.’

‘This is the first day,’ said Demelza. ‘We have only been here a few hours. Let us wait and see.’

Chapter Six

They slept late and were not wakened. They breakfasted in their rooms, with views over wide lawns to a large boulevard full of traffic, and then a servant took them across to their apartment in the rue de la Ville l'Evêque. It was on the third floor of four, spacious, light, with shutters to keep out the absent sun; sparsely furnished and draughty, though fires burned in the grates and two menservants went with the apartment to stoke them. Fitzroy Somerset had warned Demelza the night before that 'the French do not quite understand the idea of an English fireside'.

The silken hangings needed washing and there was dust and an occasional web in a corner, also there were far too many gilt mirrors. But the kitchen looked clean, the beds were fairly clean and certainly there was ample room for all. Bella went dancing round the apartment, hopping from rugs to tiled parquet and back again and singing 'Ripe Sparrergras', but fortunately only at half power. Henry kept slipping on the rugs and ended up banging his head on a massive stool which he henceforward claimed as his own.

They dined at the Embassy and changed there for the reception, which began at five.

Demelza was glad that she had spent so much money on new gowns for her stay at Bowood a few years ago. What she was wearing might not be the height of fashion, but it reflected the big change there had been in general styles at that time and had not become so outmoded in the last three years.

By the time the reception was in full swing it was a glittering company. Ross early on met a youngish officer of artillery called Brigadier Gaston Rougiet, whom he took a liking to. He was a buoyant, frank, engaging man with a duelling scar that made Ross's old cicatrice look like a pin scratch. He was stationed at Auxerre, and he invited Ross to visit his unit 'any day next week when I am back' to sup with his fellow officers and to spend a couple of nights. He had been very much a Napoleon man until the last grim battles of last year, when he had sided with Ney and the other generals. However, from one or two half-laughing asides he gave the impression that he found the Bourbon régime

half-laughing asides, he gave the impression that he found the Bourbon regime not easy to accept. He told Ross that his father had been a tradesman and that he had begun life as clerk to an attorney. He had gone into the army at nineteen and at thirty-eight was the hardened veteran of fifty battles.

He seemed exactly the sort of man Ross, in his dubious capacity as an agent for the Earl of Liverpool, should get to know, so he accepted the invitation. Rougiet asked him if they were going to the opera tomorrow evening; if so he hoped that they would share his box.

Demelza had stood near her husband for a time in the *chambre de parade*, listening as far as she could and admiring, without appearing to admire, the lavish decorations and ornaments of these reception rooms, one leading out of another. It was indeed a palace, not as great a mansion as Bowood, but excelling it in magnificence. Dozens of candles already burned in sconces – though it was not yet dark – illuminating the carvings, the statues, the gilded chairs, the paintings; and the bare shoulders and elegant gowns of the women, the brilliant uniforms of the men.

But presently the precocious Bella urged her to take her into the *grand salon* where ice-creams were being served. Demelza had been exercised of mind whether to allow Isabella-Rose to accompany them tonight; she was just at that awkward age, half child, half woman, when there seemed no sure dividing line. It was Emily Fitzroy Somerset who had suggested she should come – there would be other young people there – and indeed Bella was already tall and well grown, tremendously vivacious and, when she could keep her vivacity within bounds, a very attractive girl. She had behaved herself so well at supper last night and at dinner today that she deserved the favour.

But it was awful to find oneself an island in a sea of French speakers. True, most of them, when they found Demelza uncomprehending, could produce a few words of English and smiled and nodded and were very gracious. Before she was pulled away by Bella she had heard Ross speaking his halting French to Brigadier Rougiet and had resolved that somehow she must make head and tail of the language or perish. Tomorrow morning first thing a teacher should be engaged to teach both her and Isabella-Rose, and if this did not please Mrs Kemp (who had a smattering and thought she had more) it was just too bad.

She had been at the party for quite a time and was wondering how soon she should escape when someone behind her said: ‘Lady Poldark?’

She turned and saw a slim young man with long fair hair down to his shoulders and a drooping moustache. He was dressed in a brilliant royal-blue velvet coat, a green embroidered waistcoat, yellow nankeen trousers and was smiling at her as if she ought to know him. She was sure she’d never seen him before in her life.

She swallowed the lump that always came in her throat when anyone called her by her new title.

‘Yes?’

‘My name is Havergal. Christopher Havergal. Emily told me you were here, and I felt sure – it is such an unusual name – that you must be related to Major Geoffrey Poldark of the 43rd Monmouthshires. If I am wrong pray forgive me.’ He looked at Isabella-Rose and smiled.

‘Geoffrey Charles is my cousin’s son,’ said Demelza. ‘My husband’s cousin’s son. He’s in the next room. My husband, I mean. You are – *Mr* Havergal?’

‘Lieutenant Havergal, ma’am. I had the honour of serving under Major Geoffrey Poldark at the Battle of Toulouse – the last battle of the war. Soon afterwards, alas, Msyor Poldark resigned his commission.’

Isabella-Rose looked at Lieutenant Havergal and smiled.

‘Are you still in the army?’ Demelza asked.

‘I transferred out of the 43rd before they left for America, and am now in the 95th Rifles. On leave, of course. And since there is no war at present, enjoying an extended vacation in Paris. Is this young lady your daughter, ma’am, may I ask?’

‘Yes. This is Isabella-Rose, our second – third daughter.’

Lieutenant Havergal bowed. ‘What a beautiful girl!’

‘Thank you,’ said Demelza, while Bella glinted back at him, not at all embarrassed.

‘But of course,’ said Havergal, ‘what else could one expect? If you will pardon the familiarity.’ He looked as if he expected the familiarity to be pardoned.

Demelza decided if he didn’t have so much hair he would look very young. Perhaps that excused the familiarity. She said: ‘I’m sure Ross will wish to meet you.’

‘Thank you, ma’am. I believe Major Poldark married a Spanish lady, didn’t he? Is he in Paris, do you know?’

‘I do not think so. The last I heard, he was in Spain. They have a child, a daughter, born late last year.’

‘How delightful. Are you staying long, Lady Poldark? In Paris, I mean?’

‘Well, yes, we’ve only just arrived. We have an apartment on the rue – rue, what is it, Bella?’

‘Rue de la Ville l’Evêque,’ said Bella, already getting the accent right.

‘I shall be here another two weeks.’ Havergal twisted the end of his moustache, which was smooth and silky. ‘Perhaps I may be permitted to call on you? It would be a great honour.’

Demelza's attention had been temporarily diverted by the arrival of two extraordinary men, just walking in from the *antichambre*.

'Of course,' said Bella, deputizing for her absent mother.

Both newcomers were of medium height and of middle age. The first was dressed in a silk coat and breeches of clerical black; the white stock cut low added to the impression that he might be of the church; but no recognizable brand of Christianity was observable on his face, which was thin and of a ruddy complexion and simian in expression. He was clean-shaven, wore his own greying hair, which had a reddish tinge; his eyes were small and of a deep bloodshot brown.

The second man was in a pale-blue coat and breeches with a white fur waistcoat. He had a long pendulous nose and sensuous lips. His skin was the colour of a man who has had yellow fever, and he wore an eye-patch. He seemed to be attendant upon the first, not as a servant but as a lesser light of the same order. Both were looking about the room to see who was there.

A flow of French conversation washed over Demelza. She said: 'Where is your regiment stationed?'

'Outside Brussels, ma'am.'

'My son is in the army,' she said. 'Jeremy Poldark. He too is in Brussels. Perhaps you know him?'

'What regiment?'

'The 52nd Oxfordshires.'

'I shall make a point of seeking his acquaintance when I return.'

Brigadier Rougiet was introducing Ross to three other French officers, brilliant in their greens and golds, and for a while Ross was content to join in the conversation and listen. Sometimes his knowledge of French failed and the sentences slipped by before he could catch them, but he realized that all these high-ranking officers had been in Napoleon's army until last year. One had been at the occupation of Moscow and the disastrous retreat; another called Marchand had been at Bussaco under Massena. But that was all over and past. They showed no signs of bitterness or resentment at their defeat – Liverpool had said this was a rampant sentiment – but perhaps it was their natural good manners which did not allow them to betray their feelings to an Englishman.

Some ten minutes later he glanced through the big open doors and saw two strange middle-aged men talking to Demelza, one in black silk, the other in blue, with an eye-patch. She was smiling at them and answering back but clearly not at all comfortable in their presence.

In a gap in the conversation Ross said in an aside to Rougiet: 'Who are the two men talking to my wife?'

A sardonic expression crossed Rougiet's scarred face. 'The one in black is the Duke of Otranto; the other is M Tallien.' After a moment he added: 'Both survivals of the revolutionary days.'

'Indeed.'

'M Tallien was responsible for sending Robespierre to the guillotine. The Duke of Otranto has been all things to all men for so long that one does not know *what* he believes in, except himself.'

'It is hard to remember that the worst excesses of the revolution were not so long ago. What is it – twenty-three years since Robespierre's death?'

'Twenty-one.'

'But surely – a duke in a revolutionary council?'

'He was Joseph Fouché. You may know his name. For many years he was Minister of Police under Bonaparte. Indeed, was so until last year.'

'And how is it that he – that they – are welcome guests at this reception?'

Rougiet smiled. 'Perhaps not welcome but accepted. It is impossible for a simple soldier such as myself to understand all the ramifications of French politics. So perhaps even less so for you, sir, as an Englishman. Fouché was one of the signatories of the death warrant of Louis the Sixteenth, yet when his brother ascends the throne Otranto is forgiven and allowed his freedom and his influence. Influence, I suppose, is the word. He always seems to have influence, and the King has made use of him. In any devil's brew, in any cauldron of muddy political intrigue, Fouché can be relied on to swim to the top.'

Ross stared across the room. 'I wonder who introduced them to my wife.'

'I do not suppose they waited for an introduction. Tallien is a great ladies' man. Indeed, all his life he has been a great lecher. And your wife, sir, if I may say so, is a beautiful woman.'

'I have often thought so,' said Ross, nevertheless looking across at Demelza with new eyes.

'She has such freshness, such a lack of artificiality, of pretence. I mean, of course, as to her physical appearance, for I hardly know her; but I would suppose she is equally untrammelled by affectation in her personal life.'

'You are entirely correct, sir,' said Ross.

Lady Poldark being much preoccupied with her two middle-aged revolutionaries, Lieutenant Havergal had been able to draw Isabella-Rose aside.

'I hope, Miss Poldark, your mother will permit me to show you something of Paris while you are here.'

'Curse me,' said Bella, who had never been called Miss Poldark before. 'That would be enjoyable, but I do not think my mother would allow it! For is not Paris a very wicked place?'

‘Wicked, yes. But also exciting and beautiful. Perhaps your mother would consent to come with us and then we could go to the Tivoli Gardens together? There is great entertainment to be had there.’

‘It would be enjoyable,’ said Bella again, looking at his moustache and wondering if it tickled. ‘You must ask Mama, for if *you* asked she would be far more likely to agree than if I did.’

There was a silence between them for a moment.

‘Have you seen the *boudoir rose*?’ asked Havergal. ‘See, it is just through here . . .’ He led her off, a finger on her arm. ‘That is the Princess Borghese’s bed. She was Napoleon’s sister, you know. She used to recline on this bed all morning, entertaining visitors.’

Bella stared round the room, with its elegant draperies, and at the blue silk and satin bed. Then she glanced up at Havergal, who was regarding her with frank admiration. She looked back at him for a few seconds with equal frankness and then dimpled at him and had the grace to lower her eyes.

They walked back slowly into the *grand salon*.

‘I was damn near involved in a duel this morning,’ said Havergal. ‘There’s always duels about in this town. But it was Charlie Cranfield – Lord Cranfield, that is – who provoked it. We’d been out together, the four of us . . .’ He paused. ‘Perhaps this is not a suitable story for a young lady’s ears.’

‘You must tell me at once,’ said Bella, ‘or I shall explode with frustration.’

He laughed. ‘Well, ’twas all a storm in a teacup, believe me. You see we had all been dining at Very’s, which is a famous restaurant near the Palais Royal, and had been looking upon the wine when it was red, if you follow. In coming out there were some mendicants trying to sell us a variety of nasty trinkets, and Cranfield kicked their merchandise into the gutter. A Frenchman stopped to protest, and Cranfield pushed *him* into the gutter. Alas, the Frenchman was a captain in the 3rd Chasseurs, so after an angry scene cards were exchanged for a meeting this morning.’

‘Oh,’ said Bella.

‘Well, d’ye know, my dear Miss Poldark, when I got to my lodgings last night it was very late and they were all bolted and barred, so Charlie Cranfield says come home with us, Christopher, he says. So home I go with them and bed down on a sofa in front of a crackling fire. Next thing I know it is early in the morning and a hammering on the door and who should be there but our chasseur and his two friends all anxious to proceed with the duel! Now out of the bedroom appears Charlie Cranfield himself wearing nothing but a baggy pair of trousers and a nightcap full of holes. Ye see, he is so particular to have it aired that it has got many times singed in the process. And following him comes Captain

Merriman of the Leicestershires wrapped in a huge blanket and wearing his army trousers and no more; and then the other chap whose name escapes me, rubbing his eyes and whistling through the hole in his teeth that he has had bored to imitate the coachmen, and not one of the three can understand a word of what the chasseur and his seconds are saying!’

‘Oh,’ said Bella, clasping her hands.

‘Well, you may imagine I was much in demand as an interpreter, since I was the only one in the room with any pretensions to be bi-lingual, and I am none too fluent. But I was able to convey to Charlie Cranfield that M le Chasseur wished him to choose his weapons. Now Charlie has quite forgotten all about the quarrel and what offence he gave, but he is ever ready for a bit of a fight so he says *fusils*. He thinks it means a duel with pistols, my dear, dear Miss Poldark, but *fusil* means a musket or a fowling piece, which at twenty paces would be certain Kingdom Come for the one who was slowest at pulling the trigger. Our French friends are much taken aback, but I believe are about to agree when Merriman, standing with his back to the fire, which is still glowing hot, lets go his hand upon his belt, whereupon his trousers slip down over his ankles!’

‘Oh,’ said Bella, giggling.

‘That is exactly what happened! Everyone bursts out laughing at such a frightful sight, even the Frenchmen, and in next to no time everyone has forgiven everyone else and we all sit down with a bottle of wine that by some fortunate chance has been overlooked last night! But this is what can happen in Paris all the time! Do allow me to fetch you another ice.’

Jean-Lambert Tallien said: ‘Madame, I was in your country in 1801, as a *prisonnier*, but a much-honoured one. I was returning from Egypt, where I had been editor of the newspaper *official*, and my vessel was captured by a British cruiser and I was taken to England.’

‘I’m glad you were well treated, sir,’ said Demelza.

‘But indeed. I was, of course, a non-combatant, you understand. But as a former President of the Convention I was entertained most generously by Mr Charles James Fox and members of his famous circle.’

In spite of his eye-patch he was not without attraction. Yet it was a disagreeable attraction. His one eye was dark brown and bright and twinkling. His long red nose was sensitive and fastidious. He had a full sensuous bottom lip with a deep cleft in it. Although probably about fifty years of age, he was still on the hunt. He smelt of lavender.

‘I gather that you are visiting Paris with your husband, madame. He is here tonight?’

‘Yes, in the other room. Captain – I mean Sir Ross Poldark.’

‘The Poldark? The English? Frenchman?’

‘Lady Poldark. It could be a French name, eh? Are you part French?’

‘No, Cornish.’

‘Ah, *Cornouailles*. There I have never been to visit. It is like our Brittany, eh? I know Brittany ver’ well. And how long do you stay in Paris?’

‘Some weeks.’

‘It is all *vacances*? Holiday?’

‘Er – yes. I have never been before. My husband came in 1803.’

‘Then I trust we shall meet again, madame. Many times. Paris is very big, but Paris is very small. You understand?’

‘I am afraid not.’

‘It has a larger populace of – of *les vins ordinaires*. A small populace of those who are important in the life of the state. So this smaller group meets again and again – meeting, dissolving, re-meeting in other surroundings, the *mélange* not always the same but similar.’

During this exchange the Duke of Otranto had been eyeing her and then glancing round the assembled company with the same chilly, assessing gaze as he would no doubt have looked out upon a hard-working guillotine. Demelza thought that her hesitation when asked if they were here on holiday had been carefully noted and filed away in a cold, calculating mind. She had no idea who the Duke of Otranto was or where his interests lay; all she knew was that she didn’t like him or trust him. Indeed, if circumstances ever ran against her, she would be scared of him.

Ross, intent on rescuing her from the attentions of her two strange men, was stopped half-way across the room by John McKenzie, the under-secretary, and told that Colonel de la Blache wished to meet him. A dapper youngish man was standing beside McKenzie and he came forward and grasped Ross’s hand.

‘My dear friend,’ he said, ‘if it is not too much to call you that on first acquaintance; but I believe you met my sister Jodie in Cornwall many years ago.’

‘Oh,’ said Ross. ‘Yes, I did. She was engaged to marry Charles de Sombreuil, and we met at a house called Trelissick overlooking the River Fal. That was many years ago. Twenty, I think? I believe it was the summer of ’95.’

‘Alas, poor Charles. I was only eleven at the time . . . A noble and kindly man. He was the last de Sombreuil. The restored estates have now gone to a cousin of another name. Did I not hear you were involved in the tragic landing at Quiberon?’

‘Yes. I was with him until nearly the end.’

‘Mlle de la Blache heard that you were here and would very much like to meet you both again. Perhaps we can arrange something?’

‘Willingly. Your sister never married, then?’

willingly. Your sister never married, then?

‘Yes, she married an Austrian but is now a widow. When the King returned she reverted to her original name. She is now head of the family. Both our parents, of course, went to the guillotine. But she will tell you all about it when you meet. Is your wife here?’

‘Yes. Come with me. I will take you to meet her.’

Chapter Seven

I

Late in February Clowance went to spend the night with the Enyses. Easter was early this year so they would soon be making preparations to join their friends in Paris.

After the storms of December the winter had been mild and wet in Cornwall, the endless days of drifting rain interspersed with springlike hours of sudden sunshine. But in late February a cold spell set in and as she rode up to Killewarren flakes of snow were drifting in the wind. The shabby old house, which in twenty years had received only marginal improvements – since both Enyses preferred it as it was – looked speckled and damp in the shifting morning light.

To her surprise Music Thomas was there to take her horse and lead it away, and when Dwight opened the door he explained that Myners had sprained his ankle and Bone was a-bed with influenza so they had borrowed Thomas from Place House. Since Valentine Warleggan and Selina were in Cambridge, it seemed he could easily be spared; in fact Saul Grieves, who was in charge of the house while they were away, had given Dwight to understand he would not be upset if Music never came back.

They went upstairs into the drawing-room and Caroline embraced her and gave her a glass of canary to whet her appetite for dinner. After they had talked in a jolly way for a few minutes Dwight handed her a cutting from *The Times*, wondering if she had seen it.

Clowance squealed with utter surprise.

‘Heavens *above!* My dear, dear life and body! Mama told me he had been offered it before Christmas but she said he had definitely and absolutely *refused!*’

‘So he did. I cannot imagine what can have persuaded him to think better of it – some sort of extra pressure *must* have been applied. He would never take it willingly.’

‘And why ever not?’ demanded Caroline. ‘He has done so much in one way

And why ever not?' demanded Caroline. 'He has done so much in one way and another for the Government, for the country, over the last ten years – entirely without reward. He's been a Member of Parliament for much longer than that. Sometimes he has neglected his own affairs – think of the tin scandal; that was when you were very young, darling – but there have been other, lesser things. So it's only right – very meet, right and proper – that he should get some recognition now!'

'It's very meet and right,' Dwight agreed. 'I'm delighted that he's accepted, but still astounded.'

'A baronetcy,' said Clowance, staring at the cutting. 'That means, doesn't it, that it will go on? Golly! So one day there will be a Sir Jeremy. Crikey – what fun! And *Mama!* That I cannot believe. *Lady Poldark!* I do not suppose it will make one whit of difference to her. Oh, I am so delighted!'

'You must not ever tease her about it,' said Caroline. 'When she comes home among her own people it will be troublesome for a few months, but then everyone will accept it and forget it has ever been any different.'

'I have been expecting a letter,' said Clowance, 'but I suppose they will have been travelling all the time. I wonder if they are in Paris by now.'

At dinner Clowance chatted brightly about herself and about Stephen and the way he was prospering in his coastal trade, and the new house he was proposing to build and the furniture they intended to buy when they could afford it, and their occasional evening at Cardew and Stephen's ambition to find himself a good hunter to partner Nero instead of hiring a hack or depending on Lady Harriet for a loan; and what a pity Caroline rode with the Forbra for it would be lovely if they were able all to go together.

Last week, Clowance said, an American privateer had come in to Falmouth for a refit and repairs; the rules of the sea were strange that he was given this facility even though he might afterward prey on our ships in the open Channel. And another frigate had just come in with news of the casualties of the last battle of the American war – at New Orleans – and those who had seen the lists had said they were frightful. What news of Jeremy? Caroline asked.

'I had a letter only last week. Being in the army for him has been not at all unagreeable. He seems to spend little or no time soldiering and most of his time taking Cuby to balls and soirées and tea parties. They do seem so happy, so very, very happy.'

Caroline thought Clowance was talking too much and too brightly; it was not in her nature to chatter. What impression was she making an effort to give? What was she trying *not* to say? Was she already missing her parents? Or was it because she was not having a baby? Or was her marriage to Stephen less of a

success than she had romantically pictured it would be?

Caroline put these questions to Dwight when they retired that night.

Dwight said: 'The trouble with Clowance is that she doesn't know how to dissemble, so when she tries she makes a hash of it . . . But we are only guessing. Perhaps she is well enough and married life is just effecting a change.'

Next morning in a fine spell Clowance went over to see Jud and Prudie, but about midday the snowflakes fell thicker, black spots drifting down from the pewter sky, and she decided to leave for home.

Having failed to persuade her to spend another night with them, Caroline said: 'You shall not go alone. In any case it is not safe to be a solitary lady with so much distress about.'

'You can hardly lecture me,' Clowance said, 'since you ride so much alone yourself. I'm well able to look after myself.'

'On the contrary, I scarcely ever ride alone since the end of the war. With so many discharged and destitute soldiers about it is no longer safe.'

'Music will go with you,' said Dwight.

Clowance laughed. 'Would I not be safer on my own?'

'Oh, he rides very well. And he is much underrated. Having once been dubbed the village butt, people laugh at his attempts to escape from that derogatory pigeon-hole.'

'Dwight has been trying to help him for long enough,' said Caroline, wrinkling her nose.

'Because he came to me for help in the first place! In some respects he is very slow – almost half-witted, I agree – but in others he is quite quick and able and willing to learn. And he has learned. I have a mind to offer him permanent work here – we could do with another man. But I know he would be likely to refuse.'

'Why?'

'Because he has this hopeless passion for Katie Carter, who is now head housemaid at Place House.'

'Katie Carter? Ben's sister? I didn't know. I thought I knew everything that went on in Grambler and Sawle!' Clowance spoke with slight embarrassment, because of Ben's hopeless passion for her. It was Ben who, by his fight with Stephen, had been instrumental in delaying their wedding by more than a year.

'And why is it hopeless?'

'Katie tends to the general view, that he is a simpleton. Also, there is a rumour that she is taking up with Saul Grieves. After all, it is a more natural union.'

'Dwight doesn't care for Saul Grieves,' said Caroline, picking Horace the Third up from the rug and rubbing his little pug nose.

'Oh, it's no more than a feeling,' said Dwight, as always anxious to be fair.

‘I’ve never attended him. But he has two faces, one, ingratiating, which he turns on to the gentry, another, intimidating, which he turns on those he considers less important than himself.’

‘And Valentine and Selina are likely to be absent for some time?’

‘They should be back for the Easter holidays.’

II

Clowance and her tall gangling smiling escort left at 12.30. Music rode one of Dwight’s older horses, and had difficulty at first in keeping up with Nero who was full of spirit after a night in strange stables. But after Nero had exhausted his first energies Music caught up. Then he remained, respectfully, a horse’s length behind, following at a steady pace, adjusting himself to Clowance’s.

The snow was lying, which was unusual for Cornwall. Often a fall of snow was followed by brilliant sunshine which melted it away. Today there was a thick misty pall of cloud, low lying, steamy, cold. After leaving the wooded area around Killewarren they climbed to the moorland where the bleakness of the day was accentuated by the bleakness of the scene. The few mining cottages crouched more closely among the ruined mine houses and the working mines. Piles of dead stuff stood like hills everywhere. A mule train threaded its way among the excavations and the pits and the rubble. Children, grey-faced and ragged, were still at work stirring the water round and round with their bare feet. Clowance shivered and urged Nero into a trot.

Once they were past the worst she slowed again, and when Music slowed she stopped and beckoned him to catch up.

‘Have you ever been this way before, Music?’

‘Nay, ma’am, I not been gwan this way afore. ’Tis all stra-ange, you.’

Clowance noticed that his voice had deepened from the reedy alto she remembered. He’d filled out too, was not so gangling and stooping as she remembered; and on a horse his peculiar prancing walk did not show.

‘I hope you will be able to find your way back.’

Music turned and looked behind him as if to reassure himself. ‘Oh, ais. I d’reckon I can always find me way ’ome.’

‘Well, I’m quite safe now. It is only a few miles further, down among these woods. The snow is getting worse. You can safely leave me here.’

His face showed doubt, almost dismay, as it always did when confused by new directions. Then it cleared. ‘Oh, no, ma’am. Surgeon telled me. I always d’do what Surgeon tell me. I see ee right ’ome to yer door. That’s what Surgeon

d'say.'

'Do you like working for Dr Enys?'

'Oh, ais, ma'am. He done a lot for me. See ee right 'ome to yer door. That's what he d'say.'

They proceeded downhill. Now they were out of the mining district it was very quiet, the world an empty bowl of silence; there was just the click and creak of harness, the scrape of a hoof on a stone, breath rising like steam from horses and riders, distantly now and then the desolate squawk of a bird.

Music still tried to keep a respectful distance behind, but Clowance kept waiting for him and some talk resulted. She could see what Dwight meant. Somewhere at the back of the stupidity there was a reasoning brain.

He was reluctantly telling her a little about his work at Place House when he broke off and half checked his horse.

'What be that?'

'What? I didn't hear anything.'

'Hark! Wait now! Hark!'

They both stopped. The sighing wind blew the snow dove-soft against her face.

'Hark!' he said again. 'There!'

She heard it now. It was a wail, a howl, over to their left, a distance over to their left. It was still rough ground here but improving: gorse and hawthorn and bramble, but coppices of elm and mixed wood not far away.

'It sounds like a dog.'

'Ais. Or a caow. Go see, shall I?'

'I'll come with you.'

They broke away from the track they were on and made a diagonal approach to the woods.

'Wait,' she said. 'It's someone's property. This fencing is new. Where would we be? The back of Lord Devoran's? No, he'd be farther down the valley. It might be the Hills' place. Can you see any house, Music?'

'Nay, ma'am.'

A small gate with a loop of wire over the post to fasten it. The howl came again, much nearer this time. She slid down off Nero and opened the gate.

'We'll leave the horses here,' she said. 'It's too rough for them.'

'Leave me go see, ma'am. Tedn't right for ee neither. Leave me go see.'

She took no notice of this, and pursued the overgrown path, which was scarcely two feet wide, leading from the gate. The snow was sticky, heavy on the branches, cascaded over them when they disturbed it. Her fur hat was soon white, the hem of her skirt embroidered with it.

ALTHOUGH STILL early afternoon the woods winnowed the light, and shadows frowned from the overhanging snow. Music stumbled twice. But she noticed he no longer walked on his toes.

The sound had stopped. They waited and nothing happened, except that a stoat fled across their path and a pheasant stirred in a nearby tree. The path had run into a clearing about ten yards in diameter, but here it seemed to end.

‘What now?’ she said to Music.

‘Reckon ’twas this way. Reckon ’twas this way somewhere. He’ve gone quiet. Maybe we’d best be going back.’

‘Wait a bit.’

Silence. The quietness of the snow ate into their ears.

‘Who-eee,’ called Clowance. ‘Is anyone there?’

It did the trick. The howl came almost immediately from a few dozen yards to their left. Music pushed through the undergrowth, getting snow-smothered. Clowance followed and presently stopped.

It was a dog, caught in some sort of a trap. A very big dog, the size of a young calf but much thinner. Lean-flanked, grey-flanked, great head, sharp-eared, red tongue lolling. Clowance had seen it often before – at the Warleggan fireside – frequently to George’s distaste but tolerated for Harriet’s pleasure. The dog had been caught in an iron trap; one leg was held by a spring device with short iron teeth.

‘My dear life,’ said Music. ‘’Tis a mantrap, you. God save us all!’

There were two of these boarhounds. Castor and Pollux. Which was this? The creature had obviously been in the trap for some hours and had torn its leg trying to pull free. But there was no chance of pulling free for the trap was attached to a steel chain which itself was fixed to a concrete stone sunk in the ground. The dog was panting but had its eyes closed.

‘Castor,’ said Clowance.

One eye opened; a gleam of quick intelligence. It seemed she had guessed right first time.

‘Castor. You poor, poor dog. Oh, my dear, it makes me sick to see you. Music!’

‘Ais, ’m?’

‘Can you spring the trap?’

‘Oh, ais. ’Tis like most traps only biggerer. Ye d’pull them two levers back.’

‘But are you strong enough? The springs must be so strong to prevent a man opening them.’

‘Oh, ais. But he couldn’t get at ’em, see? ’Tis strength and knack. Strength and knack . . . ’Twill ’urt the ’ound some awful. ’E’s like to leap and bite.’

‘I don’t think so. He knows me, don’t you, Castor? Don’t you, boy? He’ll

I DON'T THINK SO. HE KNOWS ME, DON'T YOU, CASTOR? DON'T YOU, BOY? HE II know we're trying to help him, and he's quite weak, I think. He's lost a lot of blood. I think we must try. I will put my arm around his shoulders when you begin. You can open it quick?'

'Oh, ais, I can open of 'n quick.'

III

George Warleggan was in a bad temper. Although normally tight-lipped and taciturn, it was seldom that he allowed himself the luxury of anger. He seldom had to. The mere sight of his annoyance was enough to send most people scurrying. (But not his wife.) But today his mood was of the blackest.

He told himself it didn't matter. It was no longer of the slightest importance to him what any of the shabby, pretentious Poldarks were up to. All rivalry had properly died with the death of Elizabeth. Chance encounters since then had been few and, if tautly hostile – particularly that encounter at Trenwith when Geoffrey Charles was showing off his Spanish wife – had led to nothing, could lead to nothing. It was a chapter ended, a door banged shut. So why this black anger at an entry in *The Times*?

He seldom glanced at the Court news. He read the parliamentary reports thoroughly to keep himself up to date – it was easier than going up to the House himself: the tiresome trip to Westminster was one he was becoming less and less inclined to undertake. Then he would read the shipping news; then the foreign news, and would glance at the rest of the paper to see if there was anything on the movements of the markets. But just by chance his eyes glimpsed a name; then he read it. 'The Prince Regent has graciously bestowed a baronetcy upon Captain Ross Vennor Poldark, of Nampara in the county of Cornwall.' Just that. Just three lines.

It was the baronetcy that stuck in George's crop most, elevating his old enemy above the mere knights, ensuring that the title would go on. There had been a time not so long ago when George himself had thought to pull what parliamentary strings he could to gain the same title for himself; but since his bitter, irreconcilable quarrel with Valentine he had lost interest. The thought of Valentine inheriting *anything* from him would have made him sick. If only little Ursula could have come in for it . . . Ursula should have all.

He wondered savagely what influence Ross had been able to exert on Liverpool. Those trumpety little trips he took abroad might look good on paper but were in fact of minimal importance. No government in its right mind would pretend they deserved any recognition

pretend they deserved any recognition.

Of course Ross had for a long time been a toady to Canning, and though Canning was now a thousand miles away lording it over the Portuguese in Lisbon, he probably still had influence in the right places. Two or three of his cronies had received awards and sinecures last year.

Anyway it was done and one had to live with it. But George knew from his own experience what a title meant to ordinary folk, especially in Cornwall, and it was gall and wormwood to think of that arrogant, prejudiced squireen returning here with his servant-girl wife. Insufferable.

At this time of year Harriet hardly opened *The Times*, and he did not feel inclined to tell her. Let her find out in due course. In any case if he told her she would only laugh. She might even have the lack of taste and tact to show her pleasure. He had married Harriet long years after Elizabeth's death, and she had never become involved in the feud. She pretended to like Ross Poldark – she had said once, 'He looks the sort of man who if he ever draws his sword will throw away the scabbard' – but this was probably chiefly to annoy her husband. She had even danced with Poldark at that Trenwith party. She refused to accept her husband's judgement, never attempted to put herself in his place, to try to understand the causes of the enduring enmity.

Of course she might well pick up *The Times* today, for it was snowing and hunting was off. No doubt she would have done so, but she was distracted to a ludicrous degree because one of her boarhounds was missing. Pollux – he thought it was Pollux – had come home yesterday, dirty and dishevelled and scratched about the mouth and paws as if he had been trying to get through wire. But Castor had not come home at all. It was very rare for the dogs to stray far from the house – they were gentle creatures in spite of their great size – and although given full liberty hardly ever took advantage of it. But – and this was the only circumstance which gave George a twist of amusement – there had been a bitch on heat somewhere and they had gone off on a long chase. Forgetting their duties, their fealty to their indulgent mistress. Ha, thought George, and would have laughed in her face if he had dared: so much for loyalty when a bitch is loose.

His relationship with his wife had not improved over the last year. It was not so much that they outwardly quarrelled but that she took less notice than ever of what he said. Of course this had been true in a sense ever since their marriage, but she was becoming, he thought, less and less concerned to put a pleasant and humorous face on it. She lived in his house, took his money – for she had none of her own (three hundred pounds a year he had discovered by devious means) – and did precisely what she liked. She still accepted him into her bed occasionally, and this was still an earth-stirring experience for him: he would

come down next morning ready in his grudging way to forgive and forget a lot, and she would have slipped back into her detached, impersonal, aristocratic indifference. The woman of the night was gone – a woman to whom he would have given a great deal – and in her place was the sister of the Duke of Leeds.

Indeed, he thought with mounting annoyance today, she would probably have betrayed less anxiety if *he* had gone missing, not a damned dribbling lolloping great boarhound.

She had been out all morning with a search party but condescended to come in to dinner and swallow a few moody mouthfuls. They had gone down to the River Fal, she said, and as far as Restronguet Creek. Another party had covered the area of Kea, a third Perranwell. (George realized why the house had seemed so empty of servants and the dinner half cold.) Pollux, she said, had been completely useless; dogs couldn't follow a scent in snow.

'It should thaw by tomorrow,' George said.

'Tomorrow is likely to be too late.'

He saw she was in no mood to be consoled so gave up his attempt at consolation. Instead, eating his venison pie with sweet sauce, he occupied his mind with matters nearer to his heart such as a possible change in one of the parliamentary members in his rotten borough of St Michael-Colleton had become impossible and pressure must be put upon him to resign; such as the knowledge of the figures for Wheal Spinster where, after a lean two years when part of the mine had been closed, a fine new lode had been sprung, promising high grade copper; such as the fact that his granite quarries above Penryn were turning in a handy profit; such as the fact that he greatly missed little Ursula who was in her first term at Mrs Hemple's; he would have been in Truro today to greet her when she came home from school, but for the snow.

'If you please, ma'am,' said Smallwood, appearing suddenly in the doorway.

Smallwood was a groom and it was on George's tongue to order him out of a room in which he was not normally permitted to appear; but clearly this was a moment of some special importance. Smallwood's ginger hair was speckled with unmelted snow, and he was not addressing his master.

'Yes?' snapped Harriet. 'Is there news?'

'I think he've been found, ma'am.'

'What? Where?' Getting up, her chair rocked back on its legs.

'They've brought 'im to the side door, ma'am. A lady and a servant. I think he's . . .'

Harriet was out and striding through the rooms to the kitchen. At the door, surrounded by other servants, were two horses. Dismounting from one was Clowance, scarcely recognizable among the mud and snow and bloodstains.

Slung over the other horse, which Music had been leading, was the great dog, half open bloodshot eyes, very crestfallen and sorry for himself, tongue lolling, a front leg tied and bandaged.

‘Careful!’ Clowance was saying. ‘Easy now. Don’t let him fall. Two come this side, two the other . . . Oh, good-day to you, Harriet. We have brought back Castor. It is Castor, I think? We found him in a trap in the woods some miles up the valley. I think he will be well enough if he gets a good meal.’

Chapter Eight

I

They had been in Paris two weeks. To the opera with Brigadier and Mme Rougiet; to the Tivoli Gardens with Lieutenant Havergal; to a soirée at the Duchess of Orléans'; and to a ball given by the Duc de Gramont, who spoke English without an accent and was a captain in the 10th Hussars. They had been to the Louvre, admiring the many masterpieces that Napoleon had brought there. They had ridden up the Avenue des Tuileries as far as the Place du Carrousel and seen the bronze horses stolen from St Mark's, Venice, still waiting to be placed on top of the unfinished Arc de Triomphe. Ross had spent two nights with the 2nd Army Corps at Auxerre as a guest of Brigadier Rougiet and had twice written despatches home. They had met Mlle de la Blache and supped with her and her brother at Tortoni's. Uncertain whether to open old wounds, but feeling the moral compulsion of that long-made promise, Ross had given her the ring Charles de Sombreuil had left him to give to her twenty years ago. Jodie's eyes had filled with tears but she thanked him and put it on her finger where it was dwarfed by other rings.

'After I had heard about Charles I am badly broken. I stayed in England two more years. Then I left my brother at school in England and went to stay with an aunt in Vienna. There I met Baron Etmayer and a year later I married him. He is attached to the Court. When he died in 1806 I moved back to Paris but as Baroness Etmayer and made no attempt to claim my family's property. For eight years . . . I suppose I can tell them now, Henri?'

'Assuredly.'

'For eight years I have acted as *une espionne*. Reporting to King Louis in England, and sometimes to members of your government, events in Paris, sentiment in Paris, and what military and naval information I could glean.'

'Often I trembled for her,' said Colonel de la Blache. 'For if she had been discovered she would have been shot. Do you know what *espionne* means, Lady Poldark?'

'I can guess,' said Demelza.

I can guess, said Demelza.

‘If you say you wish to learn French,’ said Mlle de la Blache, ‘pray come and visit me often. I have a very easy way, by talk, by conversation, much better than any teacher!’

‘Thank you.’

She had changed a lot from the day of that one meeting at Trelissick. She was now red-haired instead of dark and was more brittle in manner; she had tired eyelids and the lines of living. It was said she had been the mistress of one of Napoleon’s most gifted generals. Yet she was so open and frank that it was hard to see her in a world of concealment and deception.

‘When Bonaparte was deposed, and there is a chance of some of our property to be restored I return to my *nom de demoiselle*, for it is then the family name which matters. And so I have become unmarried again! And now we have about half our property restored, which is more than the King has managed for many of his subjects. Bless him!’

‘Amen,’ said Henri.

Demelza said: ‘Did you stay in England, Colonel? Your accent is – is *parfait*.’ They all laughed.

‘I stayed in England for ten years, Lady Poldark. I stayed for ten years, but then I too went to Austria and later fought in the Netherlands – on the side of England, believe it or not! – but for three years, the last three years, I remained at Hartwell with the King, and came over with him as part of his personal bodyguard. It was, for me, a very frustrating time, for there was so little to do. I was young and ambitious. Dancing attendance at a non-existent Court is not an ideal way to occupy one’s most vigorous years.’

‘And now?’ said Ross, knowing pretty well already.

‘I am still one of the *Garde du Corps* to the King; when not on duty in the palace I am an artillery colonel at the barracks. When the King returned to his throne he wished to make me a general but there were many other and older men expecting favours and I chose to refuse. That of course is part of the ill-feeling in Paris today. The King has so many obligations to repay, often to men who have spent the whole of twenty years in exile with him, and seen little of war; yet he owes them much and must promote them to positions of authority while much of Bonaparte’s great Imperial Guard is disbanded. One cannot be surprised at disaffection.’

‘It will pass,’ said Jodie. ‘Time will allow the passions and the jealousies to cool.’ She smiled at Demelza.

Ross thought of the conversation he had had with Brigadier Rougiet and two other officers at Auxerre.

The second of these men, a grizzled colonel, had said: ‘These people who

THE SECOND OF THESE MEN, a grizzled colonel, had said. 'These people who have come to take over now, sir, they are attempting to dig up a corpse buried for a quarter of a century! They expect to live as they lived in 1790! They have learned nothing and forgotten nothing. The revolution might not have taken place. Very well, accepted, there were many cruel outrages committed in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity, but there was a great new ideal born with it all. When Bonaparte became Emperor he did not try to put the clock back – rather he built on what was good, established his own code of justice, stabilized a rule of law and common fealty – that was why we fought for him so well and so long! But these royalists, with their endless train of rouged and powdered countesses and duchesses and little princelings – they are arrogant, insolent, self-seeking! Wherever they go they make themselves hated. They are no longer France! They died with Louis the Sixteenth!'

The other was a quieter man but a general. He said: 'Last month I was at a reception given by the King. Marshal Ney was present, with his wife – who is now herself a duchess because the marshal was created a duke. But I saw her deliberately snubbed and cold-shouldered by these old aristocrats. I think Mme Ney was almost in tears!'

After a silence Ross had said almost what Jodie de la Blache said three days later: 'Perhaps it is all too new. There have been rights and wrongs on both sides. Time may help everyone to adjust to the new circumstances.'

No one replied to this. Then Rougiet made an effort and said: 'I believe the King is doing his best for the army. Arrears of pay have been made up. Most of the cavalry regiments have been remounted. Fresh supplies of clothing and arms are being issued. He said only the other day to a group of generals – "It is on you, gentlemen, that I must lean." I think we must give him his due.'

'There was hope at one time', said the Colonel, 'that he would attempt to retake Belgium. It is after all our natural possession. But no. He is peace-loving, flabby, weak. The army remembers the old glories but cannot add to them.'

All this and more had been said. When they returned to their apartment after their supper with the de la Blaches it was late but Bella was sitting up in bed reading. When Demelza looked at the book she saw it was an illustrated French book called '*La Cigale et la Fourmi*'.

'Christopher gave it to me,' she said.

Demelza exchanged a glance with Ross but kissed her daughter good-night without comment.

They had been rather much together, Christopher and Bella during the last two weeks; too much together; but it all seemed so light-hearted, so jolly that Demelza did not want to become the heavy parent. He was like an older brother. In fact he was younger than Jeremy. Far more sophisticated than Jeremy and

in fact he was younger than Jeremy, far more sophisticated than Jeremy, and enlarging Bella's experience enormously, yet boyishly scrupulous over just what he said and how he behaved to her.

Another, though far less important, influence in Bella's life in Paris was her friendship with Etienne, one of the menservants. He was not a particularly good servant, but he knew a little English and was happy to prattle away to Bella, teaching her French. He was also a passionate Bonapartist and impressed on Bella the idea that Napoleon had never been defeated, only betrayed by his generals. He also taught her a new song.

'What is that you are singing?' Demelza asked one day.

'The "Marseillaise", Mama. *Aux armes, citoyens! Formez vos bataillons!* Is it not a lovely tune?'

Ross had no objection to revolutionary songs, but he was less inclined than Demelza to view Christopher Havergal's friendship with his younger daughter in such an easy light. Havergal was an army officer; a hardened campaigner though still so young. Bella was a child, yet no longer a child. She certainly didn't look one. Under Havergal's admiring attentions she had suddenly become much prettier. Little spots on her face, just where the chubbiness of her cheeks joined her mouth, disappeared as if by magic. Her hair seemed to grow more exuberantly. Her eyes, so often alight, glinted from a deeper fire. Of course it couldn't mean anything at her age. Did Havergal even know her age?

Talking of ages, Ross looked not infrequently at his wife and wondered if the men who made such a great fuss of her knew how old *she* really was. It was Bella's situation in reverse. If Bella sometimes looked nearly ten years older, Demelza looked ten years younger. Ross wondered what he had fathered, what he had fostered, what he had wed. In spite of the language barrier Demelza was enjoying herself. A Cornish housewife for most of the last ten years – with the brief interlude at Bowood excepted – she had happily settled into her life as the wife of Captain Poldark and the mistress of Nampara, not so much considering her looks as long as her most beloved husband contrived to be pleased by them. That was life; that was the way it went. She was the wife of one of the most distinguished of Cornishmen whom she loved dearly and who loved her with equal devotion, mother of five children, four living; worrying for them, caring for them, loving them and him, the mother and wife of a happy family. What more could she want?

Certainly not to be sharply translated to a strange capital city with no knowledge at all of the outlandish language they all talked. Not understanding a word, coming to grasp a word here and there, making do with the many sentences of halting English her friends and hosts and neighbours spoke, somehow surviving and surmounting the barriers of communication. But out of

the blue, as it were, suddenly, as it were, without the least intention or design, as it were, finding herself the centre of so much male admiration as to take her breath away.

All right, perhaps all foreigners were like this; perhaps it was a sort of hot-bed society in which attractions and repulsions sharply flourished but she was overcome – and as the Lord was her witness she could not say unpleasantly overcome – by this wave of sexual attention. She had no thought in her mind of being unfaithful to Ross; but one simply could not fail to be inspirited, laughingly diverted, occasionally thrilled and excited by it all.

There was a belief abroad that she really knew more French than she pretended, and that her stumbling attempts were a sort of conspiracy on her part to make fun of the language and of them. Her frank replies to subtle compliments were looked on as witty. Her company was sought by women too – much older women who looked on themselves with confidence as still being in the prime of life.

She *had* to do some shopping – for the Bowood purchases were simply not enough – and Jodie de la Blache went with her, acting as interpreter and consultant. Not only did she take her to the right shops, she insisted the merchandise should be at the right price, denigrating some beautiful material or costume in a way which would have deeply offended Demelza had she been the milliner, until it was bought and paid for and they were on their way home; then she was full of admiration. Jodie was a very feminine woman in a very French way, and Demelza had never met anyone like her.

With Ross's tacit acceptance as to expense they bought two new gowns, one for evening, one for afternoon, and two outdoor habits. The afternoon frock was of jade-green gauze over a grey sheath of silk marocain, the evening one a rich plum-purple velvet, much off the shoulders but with a wide necklace of silver tulle. And there had to be sandals – much in vogue – and stockings and fans and reticules. Demelza died at the thought of the expense but died with pleasure at the thought of wearing them. And like many of the men, Ross approved of the result; and unlike the other men, he was able to prove his approval when he got her home at night or most often early in the morning. It was many years since he had been out of love with his wife, but now he fell in love with her over again.

He even, wonder of wonders, allowed himself to be persuaded to order a new suit for himself, from Staub in the rue de Richelieu, for his evening clothes were horribly out of date. Knee breeches and stockings had altogether gone except when royalty was present. The young men in particular wore bright coats and embroidered waistcoats but tight ankle-button trousers with low shoes.

Jodie tried to persuade Demelza to have her hair cut *à la Titus*, which meant a short cut curling round the head: it made the new hats so much easier to wear and was all the rage; but the most Demelza would agree to was a shortening. She was reluctant to lose too much of her hair which for so long had been a part of her, and she was scared to face Ross. But when he *was* faced, albeit with a compromise, he approved it.

Sometimes she would watch Jodie making up her face. Jodie would put rouge on her bare ears, on her temples, under her eyebrows. It was extraordinary. Demelza wouldn't let Jodie touch her own face, but, left alone, she experimented a bit and the result was interesting.

Of course there was much that was surprising in this strange city. Everyone spat, women as well as men, in church and in shops, rubbing out the spittle with their heels. The streets had no pavements for pedestrians to use, and you had to be careful lest a window should open and slops be emptied on you. All the ordinary people wore sabots, which made the noisy streets even noisier. The air was much cleaner than London, but the litter even greater. The food was strange, often poor in quality but rich in flavour.

It was embarrassing to be picked out as English and followed by a crowd of urchins, dancing and jeering; nor were some of their elders so much better behaved, making loud and unflattering observations about hats or clothes as they passed. On the other hand, you scarcely ever saw a drunken person in the street, or a badly treated horse, and those pedestrians who didn't choose to be insulting were notably polite. Bella on one occasion was immensely diverted by seeing a man arrested for urinating against a wall.

It was all heady fun.

Or almost all fun. The persistence of Jean-Lambert Tallien, who absolutely refused to be put off by competition from younger and better-looking men and by Demelza's distaste for him, which in the interests of good relations she tried to disguise but which a less thick-skinned man would soon have perceived, led to the first unpleasant scene of their stay.

No more tolerant of people he did not like than he had ever been, Ross pursued his chosen policy of listening to everyone and being superficially agreeable to everyone, so M Tallien was accepted with a degree of patient, cold courtesy that he may have mistaken for friendship. Or perhaps he thought nothing of Ross's feelings either way, being certain that no wife long married to one man could continue to care for him and that this ingenuous Englishwoman with such a pretty face and engaging manners could not fail to fall for him who had had so many agreeable conquests in the past.

It came to a head when Ross returned from Compiègne, where he had been to

spend a night at the Palace there as a guest of a M Vendôme, a friend of the de la Blaches. When he returned Tallien had called at their flat and found Demelza alone except for the two servants, Mrs Kemp being out with Isabella-Rose and little Henry.

It was midday, and Ross was dusty and tired after an early start, his horse having just been taken round to the stables by a groom. M Tallien and Lady Poldark were sipping coffee, Lady Poldark very much on the edge of her chair and preparing to retreat from the Frenchman's advances.

'Ah, Sir Ross, is it not,' said Tallien, putting down his cup and rising. 'I have called to invite you both to a supper party I am giving, with the Duke of Otranto, at the house of a good friend – Mme de Brune – who will play the hostess on our behalf. There will be supper and a little gaming. A very fashionable evening.'

'Ah, M Tallien, is it not,' said Ross. 'I regret we shall not be able to accept your invitation.'

Tallien adjusted his eye-patch and smiled at Demelza. 'But you do not know the date yet! I am sure madame will enjoy the company in which she will find herself.'

'I am sure', said Ross, 'that madame is not enjoying the company in which she finds herself at present. Do I make myself clear?'

'In what way is he clear?' The Frenchman still addressed Demelza. 'We were very happy, were we not, in simple conversation. Tell your husband, pray, that he is mistaken.'

Ross did not wait for Demelza to reply. 'All I can say, sir, is that I am not happy to see you here. Nor is my wife. Nor shall we expect any sort of meeting with you again.'

Tallien bent and finished the rest of his coffee. 'We do not take kindly to insults in this country, monsieur. Unfortunately I am somewhat handicapped in the matter of demanding satisfaction, since the absence of an eye puts one at a disadvantage. Perhaps you had counted on that before offering me such offence.'

'If you wish me to,' said Ross, 'I will meet you with a patch over one of my own eyes so that the contest can be fair. It would give me the greatest pleasure and satisfaction to rid the world of such scum as you.'

There was a change of colour in Tallien's face as he bent over Demelza's hand.

'I will take my leave of you, madame. It grieves me that you should be afflicted with such a husband.'

Ross took him by the collar. A coffee cup rolled and smashed.

'Get out,' he said.

Tallien struck at the hand as Ross thrust him towards the door.

'You shall hear more of this!'

'Get out!' said Ross. 'Before I kill you now!'

II

Bella said: 'Where were you yesterday?'

'Oh . . . out with some friends.'

'Drinking and wenching, I suppose.'

Havergal laughed. 'My beautiful girl, it is not proper for such words to pass your lips!'

'I have lived on a farm,' said Bella. 'I am not ignorant of life.'

'And you would rate me among your farm animals? Shame on you! Do you not admit that I am a human being with all the feelings of sentiment and attraction that a young man can feel? It is not animal, I assure you.'

'What is it, then?'

'Avuncular.'

They both burst out laughing, as Mrs Kemp came back holding the reluctant hand of Harry, who had been toddling off.

They were in the Boulevard du Temple where Punch and Judy shows were daily performed and run by a man called M Guignol.

Mrs Kemp was a great one for taking the children for walks – or, in the case of Henry, partly rides – 'for the good of their health'; and after a week, during which she had gradually become reassured that there was no particular hazard in the Paris streets in daylight, she had gone farther and farther, keeping chiefly to the wide, tree-lined boulevards of Madeleine, Italiens and Poissonnière. They had made a longer than usual trip this time to du Temple because she thought this would prove good entertainment for both children. By some mysterious means of his own, Lieutenant Havergal had discovered them. He could of course have been mischievously following them from a distance.

'Why, Lieutenant Havergal!' said Mrs Kemp, more than half disapproving. 'How strange you should meet us here!'

'Isn't it?' said Christopher, uncovering to her with elegance and a slight bow. 'It is a popular place, and I ventured a guess that just possibly you might come this way. So this way I came, and on the way ventured to buy you a posy.'

'For me?' said Mrs Kemp, staring at the violets with suspicion. 'Well, you know, I didn't ought to accept that sort of thing. A kindly thought, no doubt, but —'

'And kindly accepted,' said Christopher, handing the posy to her.

'Thank you,' said Mrs Kemp. 'Thank you very much, indeed.'

'Judy,' said Henry. 'Judy. Kempie, where's Judy?'

'In a moment. Any moment now,' said Havergal. 'See I have kept you a seat next to me, Henry. Up you get. There! And while we are waiting I have bought you a toffee-apple. How's that?'

'Kyou,' said Henry, grasping the stick firmly and beginning to lick at the toffee.

'And for Miss Poldark,' said Christopher, handing her a packet, 'a little box of sweetmeats, specially chosen for a songbird.'

'Oh, thank you, Christopher. I do call that very genteel of you.'

Sitting in this formation with Henry between them and Mrs Kemp, they were able to mutter asides to each other which she could not hear. Havergal had soon noticed that she was a little deaf and took advantage of it. He had even worked out which was the deaf ear.

Presently a man dressed as Punch came out onto the little stage and addressed the audience in harsh nasal French. It was a monologue which went on and on.

'Can you follow this?' Christopher asked.

'Not at all.'

'He reminds me of my riding instructor back in England. You could not understand a word he said and he was talking English.'

Bella giggled.

'Do you hunt, Bella?'

'Very little. My parents do not hunt at all but I have an aunt – a sort of aunt – who sometimes takes me.'

'Foxes?'

'What else?'

'Oh, I hunt everything. Rabbits, stoats, wild boars, geese, ducks, fieldmice, moles, voles, anything that hides in holes . . .'

'I have never met so comical a person as you.'

' . . . I even hunt men sometimes. And little girls . . .'

'I'm *not* a little girl!'

'As you say, I am being comical. And I would never hunt you, Bella. You are only to be wooed.'

'With sweetmeats?'

'Yes indeed. But notice I give the posy to Mrs Kemp. Did you not know it is really Mrs Kemp I come to see?'

She giggled again and they chewed contentedly together as the Frenchman at last finished his introduction and the performance began.

Unfortunately they had to leave – much to Henry's disgust – well before it was over, as Mrs Kemp, not without reason, judged the show to be obscene.

III

Demelza said: 'I am still upset for you. Even if he does not challenge you himself he can so easy get one of his officer friends to pick a quarrel with you. One hears of duels all the time.'

Ross shrugged. 'It could happen. I will be scrupulously polite to everyone.'
'I shall believe that when I see it!'

They were lying in bed together. She had herself been offended at Ross's brusqueness.

Demelza said: 'It is the 1st of March, isn't it. In three weeks Dwight and Caroline will be here. I wish they would hurry.'

'You think they might look after us?'

'Not so. But they are such old friends. You can talk to them in a way, in such a way.'

'By the time they come a lot may be clearer.'

'A lot of what?'

He did not reply, wondering why he had not told Demelza the rest.

After a while she said: 'Mrs Kemp tells me Lieutenant Havergal was with them again this afternoon. He is such a nice young man and such jolly company . . .'

'I'll have to warn him off.'

Demelza turned on to her side where she could see Ross's profile in the candlelight.

'I think he is just – lightly taken with her, as she is lightly taken with him. It cannot be serious. She's only thirteen.'

'Juliet was fourteen.'

'Who's Juliet?'

'Romeo and Juliet.'

'Oh.'

'Some girls grow up very young. Shakespeare knew well enough.'

She put her hand over his. 'Give it until the end of this week. I think his leave is nearly up.'

The candle was guttering but he delayed to put it out.

'Demelza, you may as well hear. I have not been quite frank with you, and God knows why, for there is nothing I need keep from you. About Tallien . . . I know too much of Tallien. Otherwise of course I should not have said what I did say.'

'What?'

'On our second visit to the de la Blaches, I told Jodie the purpose of my visit

On our second visit to the de la Biaches, I told Jodie the purpose of my visit to France. There seemed no reason why I should not. It was quite clear from what she had been saying that, although her mission in Paris as an agent of the Bourbons has ceased, since there is no more need of her; yet she has continued to remain in touch with the many sources that she had dealings with until Napoleon fell. I felt that she might help me, and she has done. Last night in Compiègne I supped with a M Vendôme, who had many interesting things to tell me about the disposition of the army. Among other things that the Duke of Otranto – Fouché – and his creature Tallien are conspiring to start an insurrection to depose Louis and to put Bonaparte’s son, the King of Rome, on the throne (under a Regency, since the boy is only four). Jodie said she had heard that the revolt was planned to start under a general of the 6th Army Corps, from Lille in about two weeks’ time, and this Vendôme confirms.’

‘So Fouché and Tallien are traitors. Can they not be arrested?’

‘So far it is all confidences behind the hand. No solid proof. At the moment Fouché is apparently advising the King!’

‘My mind spins. What shall you do?’

‘Nothing except report it to Liverpool. But in truth it is not *that* I wanted especially to explain to you – to explain my particular animosity for Tallien. Of course I resent his insolence, his arrogant attempt to seduce you under my nose. But it is something more. Something much more. Jodie has told me . . . You remember of course the landings in Brittany in 1795, in which I took part, when Jodie’s fiancé Charles de Sombreuil and many others lost their lives . . . It was an ill-wished adventure from the start, and it was crushed by General Hoche – as brilliant a soldier as Napoleon. At the last, only de Sombreuil remained with about eleven hundred men, in a strong defensive position until they ran out of ammunition. Then he entered into a parley with General Hoche, who agreed that they could surrender with honour and that their lives could be spared. But a man came down from the Convention in Paris and ordered that this promise should be betrayed – so, after they had surrendered, eight hundred men – most of them gentry and aristocrats – were shot to death in a field outside Autry. The others, the leaders, were taken out on to the promenade of the Garenne at Vannes – including Charles de Sombreuil – and executed. Personally supervising the execution to make sure that none should escape was the representative of the Convention from Paris. His name was Jean-Lambert Tallien.’

IV

In the afternoon of that day on the south coast of France in the gulf of St Juan

In the afternoon of that day, on the south coast of France, in the gulf of St Paul near Fréjus, a flotilla of seven small vessels began to land men on the sandy beach in the bright spring sunshine. They consisted of six hundred and fifty officers and men of the Old Guard. With them were a hundred and eight Polish lancers, unmounted but carrying their saddles, about three hundred motley volunteers, and wives and children of members of the former Imperial General Staff; something over eleven hundred in all, with arms and some scanty baggage.

Leading them was a stocky figure, grown portly, wearing a grey overcoat – for the air was chill – and the familiar battered tricorne hat decorated, since midday, with the famous red, white and blue cockade. There was no one to oppose the landing, scarcely anyone to witness it. As he stepped ashore a thin but hearty cheer from his supporters was almost lost in the wide, open air. Then some of the vessels fired off their guns in salute.

It was the man who only two years before had been the master of Europe, come to reclaim his rightful kingdom.

Chapter Nine

The medical fashion of the day, which catalogued people according to their humours, would have listed Stephen Carrington as sanguine. He felt himself at present to be on a wave of success, and he had no doubt he could continue to ride it until he had made his fortune.

Ever since he married Clowance things had been running his way. In years it was no time at all since he was picked up off Nampara Cove, a penniless starving seaman; yet now he was married to a beautiful, well-bred and well-connected girl, financed by the most influential bank in Cornwall, and owner of three vessels – *three*, mind you – which were in service earning him money in the coastal and cross-Channel trade. And he was building his own substantial house overlooking the harbour of Penryn. Everything was coming right.

Because his nature was what it was he disregarded the problems he had to surmount in making his three ships pay. Ever since he married he had spent more than he earned, and building the house would add to his indebtedness. But these were all natural developments in the life of a man still only feeling his way in the maritime world. His principal difficulty was in keeping his ships fully employed. The trade was there but it had to be fitted in. A vessel idle for two weeks cost almost as much as one employed. Even ‘light passages’, as they were called, when a vessel sailed out or home half full, usually meant a loss.

The *Lady Clowance*, under Sid Bunt, was slipping nicely into a routine. She would take on tin at Truro or copper at Gweek and carry them to London, bringing back a miscellaneous cargo for the small ports around the Cornish coast: groceries for Devoran and Port Navas, pipe clay and salt for Gunwalloe and Porthleven, ironware and maybe a ‘passel’ of books for Penzance. Because the *Lady Clowance* had a shallow draught she could venture up almost any creek, and Sid Bunt, the best navigator among them, could edge her in and out with the tides. He knew just how to handle her. Well and good.

But the *Chasse Marée*, though fir built and with fine raking lines, was what was known as a slopped ship: corners had been cut in her construction and she

had been inefficiently fastened; so that there was a bit of trouble on most voyages. Moreover Andrew Blarney, who was in charge, though a good enough seaman, didn't understand the coastal trade. Bred into the Packet Service, which was only a step down from the navy, he never seemed to accommodate himself to his new role as master of a casual tramp. Nor was the money good enough for him.

Andrew was something of a thorn in Stephen's side; a jolly character in his way, but attracting trouble (either with men or with wind and water) as a magnet attracts iron filings. And in his new-found respectability and settled married state Stephen was keen to side-step trouble if he could – at least relating to his past life. (The sudden appearance of his son was bad enough.) Andrew, though mercifully ignorant of Stephen's involvement in the coach robbery, knew enough about his past life to hang him.

Not that Andrew for a second would mean to give him away; his cousinship with Clowance was surety against that; but Andrew in his cups was not a safe person to know anything. An incautious word at a wrong time might fall on a receptive ear.

So cargoes for, and maintenance of, Stephen's two larger vessels still had to be constantly seen to and negotiated. For some time he had been angling with George for a share of the trade carrying granite from the quarries above Penryn. This regular trade – at least outward – would almost certainly lead to reciprocal cargoes in London and Hull and Newcastle, and once established would mean a constantly profitable line. *Chasse Marée*, though built for fishing – or privateering – would well adapt for that if the chance came along.

That left his flagship, *Adolphus*, in which so far he had been chiefly trading with Brittany. Since the end of the war a flourishing – and now legal – trade had grown up. The French were eager for all the manufactures of England, of which they had so long been starved, the English for the silks and wines and fruits which until now had only come in under cover of darkness and under threat of seizure. It was a fairly easy trade, the easiest to negotiate though not the easiest to exact payment for, since the French were slow to part with their gold. And of course the profit was only a modest one on each trip, eaten into by maintenance, seamen's wages, and the like. Nothing to compare with a cargo run at night and shipped in duty free. There was also tin to be had – if one chose to carry it – on which poundage duty had not been paid, and this, shipped illicitly, doubled the profit.

So far, with Warleggan backing, Stephen had chosen to live within the law, but at times he grew restive.

It was on a fine early-March morning that they walked together – Stephen and

Clowance – over to the site where their new house was to be built. In fact it was already in the process of being built, the first sods having been cut, some of the foundations already laid. Mr Jago, the master mason, had gone over it with them, pacing out the size of the rooms.

‘They mayn’t look so very big when ye just see the foundations,’ said Stephen, ‘but Jack Jago says rooms always look smaller when they’re only planned out, and I believe he’s right.’

‘They’re big enough for us,’ said Clowance. ‘Heavens, there are only the two of us, as yet – and did you say two servants?’

‘To begin. But there’s more bedrooms to spare in the space over the stables.’

‘Can we afford even two?’

‘This’ll be my office,’ he said. ‘Clowance, I been thinking a long time – when we move in here and I’m away, could ye bring yourself to see to things for me?’

‘See to things? You mean – the ships?’

‘Just the business side. Just while I’m away.’

‘Of course,’ said Clowance instantly. ‘I’d be delighted.’

‘Ye would, my dear heart? Ye would? Not find it – unwomanly . . . demeaning?’

‘Heavens, why should I? A woman is allowed to look after her husband’s affairs! If anyone is so stupid as to think different, they can take their thoughts elsewhere!’

He squeezed her arm. ‘It would be a great help to me. I try to deal with agents as little as possible, for they eat into your profit. But I have to tell you I get real frustrated sometimes – the paperwork is not what I like, and now Warleggans finance me I’ve always got to write things out to satisfy ’em. And then I get held up with mastmakers, ropemakers, chandlers and the like. Even if I miss one tide it costs money.’

Clowance was flattered by his invitation and squeezed his arm back.

‘Talking of costing money. This house . . .’

‘It is a question of planning for the future,’ said Stephen, ‘and not being afraid to expand. As things are going at the moment I reckon in a few years we shall be rich, and it’s right that we should be living in a suitable house, like. Why, in a few years’ time your father’ll be talking about his son-in-law, the ship owner!’

Clowance somehow could not see her father expressing himself in those terms but she held her peace. Presently Stephen was called away and she paced round the perimeter of the new house, trying to visualize it when it was completed. From this site you could not see the creek, but you had a fine view of the bay of Falmouth. Today the sun glinted on a score of coloured sails bending before the breeze; there were brigs, schooners, snows, luggers, smacks. The water drifted

and shaded into bottle-greens and kingfisher-blues and muddy browns about the vessels and the piers and the headlands of the Roseland peninsula.

She was happy at his new suggestion and appreciated again the zest with which he tackled any new enterprise. This was the first time he had had a business of his own and a home of his own. If he was over-stretching himself out of sheer hubris, out of the pleasure of his new situation, well and good; should unexpected obstacles arise he would have the determination and the enterprise to surmount them. He was that sort of man.

Last night Verity had told her that she and Andrew senior were going to spend a month with James Blarney – Andrew’s son – and his family in Portsmouth, and she, Clowance, was feeling isolated. For Easter her family would be in Paris, the Enyses in Paris, Jeremy and Cuby in Brussels, and the Blameys in Portsmouth. It was a notable exodus at a time when she would have liked to see her family or old friends. Not that Stephen must be allowed to notice this. She could not help but wonder whether his latest suggestion had come partly because no child was yet on the way. It was logical enough.

A step behind her and she turned to smile at Stephen brilliantly. But instead it was Jason.

Washed and shaven, in good clean workaday clothes, with the same blue woollen jerkin, fuller in the face, his blond hair brushed, his face smiling.

‘Mornin’, ma’am. Handsome, handsome mornin’. I thought as my father was here . . .’

‘So he was but he has just gone to see Mr Jago.’

They stood in the sunshine, looking over the scene. Turning away from the sea, you could see part of the town, the parchment works, the gunpowder factory.

‘Are you settling down, Jason?’

‘Oh, aye, ma’am. This be the best thing that’ve ever happened to me. Tomorrow I leave for Cork in the *Chasse Marée*, carr’ing slate and bark and tin stuff. Mr Blarney in command. My father have made me second man.’

‘Where have you been living? In Penryn, I mean.’

‘There’s a room at Widow Cardew’s. But I’ve been to Liverpool and Glasgow since I seen you last.’

For him to keep calling her ma’am seemed too respectful, but her Christian name was too familiar and she felt Stephen would not like it. Officially she knew he had been introduced into the town as Stephen’s nephew, but how long that story would hold she wasn’t sure.

‘They’re ploughing over there,’ said Jason. ‘Bit late, but I suppose ‘tis all this wet weather.’

‘Of course. It’s a pity that the weather should be so bad at this time of year.’

‘Of course, I’d forgotten. You were brought up on a farm, weren’t you?’

‘Sort of, yes. But before ever I seen the sea I wished to venture upon it.’

‘Like your father,’ said Clowance, smiling.

‘Oh, I suppose. ’Twas my grannie’s sister learned me to read an’ write. She lived in a cottage two mile from us; ’twas a tiny shop they kept; and Uncle Zed had a pair of millstones that he worked wi’ a horse, grinding barley and wheat for the folk around. But he died quite sudden and Aunt Loe couldn’t manage by herself. But they was better than us, had been school themselves, better’n my grandfather, who seemed to know naught or care for naught except horses. They was his life. But I used often to go help Aunt Loe, and she give me books to read; there was only seven, I remember, extra to the Bible, but the four of ’em was about the sea. Two of ’em was books called *Voyages*. Somebody’s *Voyages*. Hak – Hak-something. I read ’em over and over and I s’pose that started me off. That was before ever I seen the sea. I only seen rivers until I was a ten-year-old.’

‘I expect you helped your mother as well,’ said Clowance.

‘Oh, yes. My grandfather kept two cows and a donkey and did cartage work t’ make ends meet. I used to milk the cows and drive the donkey and help load the cart. Gran had rheumatism so bad she couldn’t bend to get her shoes and stockings off. When one of us was about we’d do it for her, but sometimes I’d come in and see her sitting on the floor trying to get undressed for bed and pushing her stockings down with the kitchen poker. Mam did most of the work about the house, see, and of course helped Granfer wi’ all manner of things.’

‘Do you not have any real uncles and aunts?’ Clowance asked.

Jason blinked. ‘Real ones?’

‘Well, you’re speaking of your grandmother’s sister, aren’t you? Did your mother have any brothers and sisters?’

He blinked again. Perhaps the sun was too bright. ‘Oh, aye, two, but they left home when I was young.’

He stopped there. A man was climbing the gate back into the field where shortly his fine new house was to be built. He wore a blue coat with a yellow swansdown waistcoat, dark kersey small-clothes, brown top-boots. His mane of yellow leonine hair was ruffling in the wind. The coat was becoming too tight to fasten comfortably. (They laughed together that he had put on weight since their marriage.)

But he did not look over-pleased to see his son.

‘Well, Jason?’

‘I hoped to find ’ee here, Father,’ Jason said. ‘Mr Bunt sent me t’ask about the replacement bow anchor. I know ’tis off the schooner *Ferris* but Bunt says it is not the weight Barker’s promised. *Lady Clowance* catches the morning tide and

he'd like a word . . .'

Stephen put his arm round Clowance. 'Tell Bunt to go to Barker himself. Tell him if there's anything not to *his* requirements we'll trade elsewhere. I'm for Truro myself and shall not be back till the morning.'

When the boy had gone Stephen said: 'I intended to tell you, dear heart, but there's a consignment of carpets and rugs from Calvert's not yet agreed and it will be to my advantage to see them personally. Calvert thinks he can strike a hard bargain, but two can play at that game. Also I wish to see Sir George, for there's the deeds of the land to be transferred and other associated matters.'

'Will he be in Truro?'

'Yes. I hope Jason was not bothering you.'

'No. Oh no.'

'I'll do my best by him. But him being here, it's a reminder of what I did wrong by not telling you about him, and that makes him uncomfortable company.'

He went to Truro by dinghy, sailing up the river and mooring at Town Quay: with a decent breeze it was quicker than by road, and he still lacked what he called a first-class horse. On the way he wished he had brought Jason. Honest truth was, he *liked* the boy. Maybe it was natural, finding a full-grown son – reminding you of yourself – where you had left a squalling child.

There was no trace of resentment in Jason's manner at having been deserted, only pleasure at having found his father again. And admiration. He was *full* of admiration for Stephen, and this warmed Stephen like the summer sun. Jason was more romantic than Stephen had ever been. The books he had read – *Somebody's Voyages*, *Piracy on the High Seas*, *The Corsairs of the Barbary Coast* – had all given him an unduly romantic picture of what it was like to make a living at sea. Stephen, who had begun his short commercial career by taking all the unorthodox risks, who had broken the law on so many occasions, found himself taking the orthodox, law-abiding view against the eager questions of his son, who thought privateering the natural aim of any daring and ambitious man, who saw smuggling as a suitable side-line and expected his new-found father to know all about it.

His new father did. It was a paradox. The war had ended too soon.

There being as yet no children between himself and Clowance had not become an issue – nature was taking its time, no need to fuss or worry. But the absence of that issue was partly filled by the arrival of Jason.

Clowance had been very good about it, bless her. But he walked on a high wire; an incautious word would tip him off.

He saw the Calvert brothers that evening, drove a hard bargain with them,

which ended with an equally hard handshake accepting the terms, and ate a hearty meal and slept at the Fighting Cocks Inn. He was up early and waited on George at nine.

George had slept well too, and all his interests were prospering. Ursula had been bright and affectionate last evening and she had hugged and kissed him before going off this morning. So he greeted Stephen without evidence of distaste. One could not put it higher than that, for his association with the young man had frayed and irked him since he had allowed it to begin. Apart from the fact that Carrington was married to a Poldark, the man was too free in his manner – had no real *manners* as such – thought too highly of his own abilities, was over-confident, with the slightest encouragement would get above himself. Harriet – *naturally* – pretended to like him.

Yet he, George, was really responsible for bringing the fellow forward and helping him to establish himself as a small-time but potentially prosperous merchant.

That first morning when they had met in the chamber above the bank George had just been fresh from the bitter, searing quarrel he had had with his own son over his marriage to Selina Pope; and the idea of putting this young man on his feet instead had had a cynical appeal. Now he kept Carrington at a grudging distance; so far he had been a good investment, and was likely to remain so. But if in any way he overstepped such marks as George had mentally laid down for him, he could be very quickly brought to heel.

That morning there were several legal documents to be signed, so Hector Trembath had been called in. Trembath was the tall, thin, still youngish mincing solicitor who fifteen years ago had taken over the remnants of old Nat Pearce's business and had since become very much a Warleggan man. (Ross now used Barrington Burdett.) He was a man of good education and genteel manners who had served George well.

The documents were signed and witnessed. Stephen Carrington became the official owner of four acres of Penryn farmland and of the house which Warleggan & Willyams Bank were going to finance him to build on it. They drank a glass of canary wine, and Stephen spoke of the hopes he had of getting one of his vessels into the granite trade. He knew well enough that George could put this business in his way with the stroke of a pen; but George, knowing Stephen knew, would not be drawn.

After it was over, Stephen shook hands with the two men and left.

'A forthright young man, sir,' said Trembath deferentially.

He would please me more if he were as deferential as you, George thought. But he only grunted and turned over the papers on his desk.

‘One thing did strike me, if I may say so,’ said Trembath. ‘It was just a thought that occurred to me but . . .’

‘Well, go on, go on.’

You’ll remember, Sir George, the mission you sent me on to see Mr Rose, to bring him from Liskeard for the purposes of – of identifying if he could the – the —’

‘Of course I remember, man! My memory is not so defective as to forget something of such importance! What are you on about?’

Trembath’s bony Adam’s apple jerked as he swallowed nervously.

‘I never told you, Sir George, it seemed then to be of little import at the time, for Mr Rose was coming in *person* to see if he could identify any of the men concerned in the coach robbery. And after he died, the matter went quite out of my head. While we were in the coach proceeding from St Austell towards Grampound – this was before he was attacked by the gouty pain in the head – he was talking about the men with whom he shared the coach on that fateful day. And he said – he said he particularly remembered that the naval lieutenant – what was his name? – Lieutenant Morgan Lean – that was it – Lieutenant Lean. Mr Rose said he particularly remembered that Lieutenant Morgan Lean lacked an eye-tooth. You’ll forgive me if I am making too much of nothing at all, but this morning, talking to Mr Carrington, it was clear, was it not. I mean, it is clear, if you take my meaning, that he – that he—’

‘Lacks an eye-tooth,’ said George. ‘I had noticed it.’

‘Oh, so then there is no need for me to have brought it up!’ said Trembath, in relief. ‘I do beg your pardon.’

‘I *had* noticed it on Mr Carrington,’ said George quietly. ‘I did *not* know until this moment that Mr Rose had noticed it on Lieutenant Morgan Lean.’

‘Oh. I see. Well, then.’

‘Well, then,’ said George, ‘may I put a suggestion to you, Trembath. If you wish to retain the business that I put in your way from time to time, pray never again forget to keep me informed of such things. Do not allow them to go out of your head. It is not a suitable characteristic in a solicitor. Indeed if it were to occur again I should look elsewhere for my legal assistance.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Trembath, sweating. ‘I’m sorry.’

‘Did Mr Rose, if you recollect, say whether it was the left or the right eye-tooth that was missing?’

Trembath thought. ‘I believe it was the left.’

‘And Mr Carrington’s missing tooth is on the left also.’

‘That is so,’ said Hector Trembath, rubbing his fingers nervously together. ‘That is so.’

Chapter Ten

It was Cuby's birthday. She was twenty-three; ten months younger than her husband.

Jeremy planned a party for her. When she asked if they could afford it he said that they could always afford the necessities of life, and celebrating the birth of his beloved wife was the most necessary thing in the world.

He planned a supper for ten at one of their favourite restaurants, the D'Angleterre, and invited the best of the friends they had made while in Brussels. There was his first special friend, Frederick Barton, from Tiverton, a lieutenant like himself. There was John Peters, the farmer's son, who had recently married a Belgian girl with a very difficult first name which had been simplified into Denke. And David Lake, who had known Valentine at Eton. Three other men and two girls made up the party, which began in lively fashion and never lost its zest.

Jeremy, by now knowing his wife's taste in food, had been along to the restaurant to order it in advance. They had soft-boiled eggs on shrimps in little pastry tartlets; lamb cutlets garnished with cock's combs and chicken livers; then pigeon pie with creamed spinach; and French open apple tart. A good Rhenish wine went down bottle after bottle. And then they called for nuts and sweet tarts and cheese. They were at the table from eight until midnight, talking, laughing, arguing, gossiping. At ten Jeremy rose and proposed the toast of the evening: to Cuby, who had won his heart four years ago and who, four months ago, had brought joy into his life by giving him hers.

Demelza might have been surprised at the warmth and emotion with which her son spoke, considering that it had always been his habit to disguise his feelings in an amiable easy-going flippancy.

But perhaps the Trevanions would have been equally surprised when Cuby, being pressed and pressed and pressed to reply, got up and pushed back her hair and quietly said: 'In December Jeremy made me part of him. There is no other way in which I ever want to live.'

Of course there was a present. It was a star ruby brooch set with small

OF COURSE there was a present. It was a star ruby brooch set with small diamonds. 'Madness,' Cuby said under her breath to him, knowing they were already in debt. 'But sweet madness. I so love you, Jeremy.'

He put his fingers over hers, one finger over another, like playing a piano. It was a sexual caress.

'Later you shall tell me.'

By eleven most of them were become hilarious and a little fuddled. They had discussed the vulgarity of the Prussians, the inefficiency of the Belgians, the perfidy of the French, the ruthlessness of the Russians, the unreliability of the Austrians, the treachery of the Irish, the boastfulness of the Americans, and over and above all the total awfulness of the English.

Each member of the party was drawing on some reminiscence to confirm these opinions, and each one seemed to be funnier than the last. The laughter was getting more continuous, when a young officer called Carleton was seen to come into the restaurant with a girl they did not know. He waved and they all waved back. David Lake, who knew him best, called to him to come over. Just then the restaurateur showed them to a table at the other end of the restaurant. Carleton saw the girl to her seat, excused himself to her and came across.

The group exchanged quiperies with him and he wished Cuby many happy returns.

Then he said: 'Oh, had you heard? No, I don't suppose you will have. Word has just come through that Bonaparte has landed in France.'

This news sobered two or three men at the table, the others were too fuddled to find it anything but amusing.

No, Carleton had no details. Just that it was somewhere in the south. They'd sent the news by this new semaphore telegraph. Got away from Elba somehow. He'd always promised he'd come back when the violets were in bloom. Well, well, pardon me now, I must rejoin my pretty Clotilde.

When he had gone talk quickly broke out again, but a little of the spontaneity had gone from it.

'Imagine,' said David Lake. 'Old Boney back again. That's going to be a trifle of a nuisance. Wonder what he hopes to do.'

'Little he *can* do,' said Barton. 'It's not twelve months since he was turned out. They say on his way to Elba he had to travel in a closed cab; people, his own people, were hissing and spitting after him. Even his own generals repudiated him.'

'It might mean civil war in France,' said John Peters.

'Doubt it. He hasn't got the following. Where's Nosey these days? Isn't he Ambassador in Paris?'

'No, he's in Vienna,' said Jeremy. 'At the Congress. With Talleyrand and

Metternich and the rest. My father and mother are in Paris at present. I've applied for leave to join them for Easter.'

'Might put that plan out of joint, my boy. There's sure to be a bit of edginess with old Boney on the loose. Unless he's caught soon and taken back to Elba with a halter round his neck.'

'Halter should have been put round his neck and tightened!' said one of the other men. 'Last year when we had him. Or stuck under the old mincing machine, what? Put him out of mischief for good.'

After the supper they all went on to a dance hall and danced till three. When Jeremy and Cuby reached their room it was twelve minutes to four. The fire had nearly gone out in their bedroom, but Jeremy went downstairs and brought up more faggots to set it to a new blaze.

'Don't undo a single button,' he said to Cuby. 'I want to do it all.'

Which he did, by the flickering light of the fire. When they were naked she moved to the bed and lay on it while he stroked and kissed her. The only light then seemed to come from her dark fringed eyes.

He said: 'This is not lust. It's love.'

'Just love,' she said, and put up her hands to his face.

Chapter Eleven

I

The news was slow in reaching Paris, and when it came at first it seemed to have no impact. The King was on his throne. The Bourbons controlled France. Outside their frontiers powerful armies possessed by powerful kingdoms ensured that the world should not be turned upside down again. The Palace first heard only that Bonaparte had left Elba; many people thought he would go to Africa or seek asylum in Egypt. Not until the 4th March did the semaphore telegraph confirm that he was in France and moving up from the coast making proclamations as he came.

The 5th was Lieutenant Havergal's last day in Paris before he rejoined his regiment in Louvain. He invited Mrs Kemp and Isabella-Rose and Henry to visit the Jardin des Plantes. Demelza had persuaded Ross to say nothing to the young man, and, as this was his last day, she let them go.

The garden – a long way over on the other side of the Seine, Havergal having hired a carriage for the morning – was much more than a botanical garden, it was a sizeable zoo, which was much to Henry's liking, and Bella's also, for she had never seen a live elephant before – nor in fact many of the strange creatures on display. There were wolves, panthers, hyenas, porcupines, deer, gazelle, elks, and no less than six lions, one of which kept a dog as a pet. Wherever the great beast strolled the little mongrel terrier would follow faithfully after him, and sometimes a long tongue would come out and lick the terrier's head, whereupon the dog would roll over and bark with delight.

With Henry off on determined treks of his own, Mrs Kemp was kept busy and gave Christopher plenty of time to talk with his little songbird.

'You see that bear,' he said, 'the one with the white on his snout. He's called M Bertrand.'

'How do you know? And why?'

'A few years ago, they say, M Bertrand was his keeper, and one day someone threw some francs into the cage. Bertrand decided to go and recover them, but the bear was waiting and caught the keeper and gave him such a bear hug that he

the bear was waiting and caught the keeper and gave him such a bear hug that he died. So ever after the bear has borne his name.'

'Ugh!' said Bella. 'What a spookish story. You are full of spookish stories. Do the French find that amusing? What a strange race they are!'

'No stranger than us, surely, since we glory in bearbaiting.'

'But *are* they not strange, Christopher, are they not? Look at them. Look at those two men over there, with their tight brown trousers and their thin legs and their swollen bellies. Do they not look like frogs? One expects them to go jump, jump!'

'Some people do call them frogs,' said Christopher. 'They use the name Frog for a Frenchman. I thought it was because they ate them, but perhaps you are right and it is because they are like them!'

They strolled on. Bella hummed to herself.

'What is that? Tell me the words.'

*'Entendez-vous, dans les compagnes
Mugir ces farouches soldats.
Ils viennent jusque dans nos bras
Egorger vos fils, vos campagnes.'*

'I never knew the words before.'

'Etienne, our manservant, taught me them.'

'That song is almost treasonable, little love.'

That is why I am singing under my breath.'

They both laughed.

'Talking of frogs,' said Christopher, 'reminds me of my old headmaster at the Charterhouse. Frogmore. Naturally he was called Frog. Or Flog, for he flogged his pupils for the slightest misdoing. He was much hated, for he followed a man called Green who was a learned, gentle, understanding soul. But we got back at Old Frog on one occasion. Let us go look at these wonderful birds.'

'No, tell me what happened, Christopher. I want to know.'

'How much d'you want to know? This much?' Havergal held up an inch gap between finger and thumb.

'This much,' said Bella, opening her arms.

He looked at her in admiration. 'Yes, you would, wouldn't you. It is in your character, my little one. My not so little one. I think you are adorable.'

'Hush,' said Bella. 'Mrs Kemp is near.'

But she took his arm as they strolled towards the parrots.

'Well,' said Christopher. 'I and a man called Flanders, we thought we should get our own back on the Frog. The headmaster on his way from his own

chambers into the upper schoolroom has to come through his private door to which only he has the key. But this day when he came to the door he couldn't get his key into the lock, and he found that a piece of a bullet had been forced into it. The horrid man then had to retreat and go down his private stairs and up another flight eventually to reach the upper schoolroom by a long detour – which he did, and by the time he reached it he was breathing like a dragon. With all the upper school watching, he marched across the room and went up the stairs to the pulpit, where he found that door screwed up and he was unable to enter.'

'How very droll,' said Bella, laughing.

'However, not to be outdone, he takes two steps backward and puts a hand on the door and vaults over it and into his sanctum. He glares around the room and says: "The insolent puppies who prepared this surprise will suffer the severest beating it is in my power to administer." Whereupon he sits down, and finds he cannot get up without tearing his silk breeches, which have become glued to the chair.'

'Isabella-Rose!' said Mrs Kemp reprovingly, 'you must not laugh so loudly. It is not ladylike.'

Bella bubbled and crowed and choked. 'Sorry, Mrs Kemp, but Lieutenant Havergal does tell the most comical stories!'

Later, when they had another moment alone as they were about to leave the gardens, Christopher said: 'Tomorrow I shall be on my way to Louvain. It is a sad parting. But believe me I shall find you again, even if it means coming to Devon to seek you out.'

'Cornwall!' said Bella, not as indignantly as she would have done if anyone else had made such a mistake.

'Cornwall, then, or the ends of the earth. That is the end of the earth, isn't it? What do they mine down there? Is it diamonds?'

'Copper and tin.'

'I think it is diamonds also.'

II

On the 7th, which was a chill, foggy day in Paris, the French newspaper *Moniteur* published the news of Napoleon's arrival in France, and the general public of Paris learned of it for the first time, though rumours had been circulating. Not much changed. Life went on as usual. The theatres were full, the cafés busy, the traffic in the streets as crowded as ever. There was some extra

surreptitious activity at places like the Café Montansier, near the Palais Royal, but these disaffected minorities were disregarded. The ogre would soon be rounded up and put back on his little island.

That evening the Poldarks and the de la Blaches dined together at Hardi's and then went to the French Opera in the rue de Richelieu, to see *Castor and Pollux*. Afterwards they went to the Ice Caffé on the Boulevard des Italiens, which as usual was crowded with well-dressed people, chattering and drinking and laughing.

Henri had been with the King part of the day and said that, in spite of a general lack of apprehension, he and his ministers were leaving nothing to chance. At a council that morning Marshal Soult, the Minister of War, though long one of Bonaparte's most notable generals, proposed to put an army of thirty thousand men into the southern provinces to confront any advance by the usurper. The Comte d'Artois, brother of the King, would command them, and under him would be the three Marshals of France, Macdonald, Saint-Cyr and Ney. Ney had had a personal audience of His Majesty, in which he had promised to bring Bonaparte back as a prisoner in an iron cage. Word had also been sent to the Due d'Angouleme, who was in Bordeaux, ordering him to proceed at once to Nîmes.

All the same the de la Blaches were not without their doubts. If once Bonaparte collected an army about him it would mean civil war. Most of the officers were loyal to Louis but one could not rely on the ordinary soldiery. So many forgot the bad times of Bonaparte's reign and remembered only the good. Henri was confident but anxious, Jodie just anxious.

'And you, Ross?' she said, half smiling, but with wide open, deserted eyes. 'How will you report this to your Prime Minister?'

'I am not too certain even of some of the officers. Gaston Rougiet would never, I'm sure, betray his King, but there are others I have spoken to I'd hardly be so sure of.'

Henri said: 'Have you seen more of Fouché and Tallien?'

'Twice at receptions,' said Ross, 'but we have avoided each other.'

'Be careful, my friend,' Jodie said. 'They are enemies to beware of.'

'But are they Bonapartists?'

'They began as Jacobins. Now they bend with every wind. But Fouché would come to have a greater influence under Bonaparte than he has done under the King, and he knows now how I fought him and his kind during the long years of Napoleon's greatness. He did not then, otherwise I should not be alive. But under the King he is powerless.'

'Except to begin new revolutions in Lille to put the Bonaparte child on the

throne.'

'I have to tell you that the authorities have now been fully informed of this. The revolt is due to begin this week. I do not know whether Napoleon's reappearance will have altered their plan or whether it was part of it.'

Demelza had been trying to follow this conversation, which had been partly in English and partly in French. 'But if the King knows of this plot, why are they not arrested?'

'Because, my dear, until they move we have no proof against them, and because Fouché is too powerful a man to arrest on suspicion.'

Ross said: 'Rougiet has invited me to visit him at his corps headquarters at Auxerre next week. I was there, as you know, in February, and learned a lot from the officers I met there then.'

Jodie shrugged. 'By next week we shall know it all.'

'I hope this fog clears,' said Henri. 'Today the telegraph cannot work, and it is important to know what is happening in the south.'

III

Unlike in France, the day had been fine in Cornwall and visibility was at its most startling. The heavy rains which had washed the snows away had so drenched the atmosphere that no dirt or smoke or steam remained. Everything could be seen for miles. Not that this greatly affected the interior of Warleggan & Willyams Bank in Truro. Windows as usual were scrupulously clean but, as befitted a building in which security was paramount, they were small and the cross frames were reinforced with iron bars. The sun thieved its way in but received no priority treatment.

Frederick Lander, the chief clerk, came quickly to his feet when at about five in the afternoon his employer entered the little office behind the main counter. Lander was a man of forty-six, who had the misfortune to have bad teeth and disagreeable breath, but George bore with him, overcoming his distaste for the sake of the man's acute financial brain.

'Sir?'

George turned over the guineas in his fob and stared at the clerk, not quite sure how to announce his purpose.

'Mr Stephen Carrington is one of our clients.'

'Yes, sir. And doing pretty well for himself, I rather fancy.'

'No doubt. And largely thanks to us. He came to us, as you know, about six months ago, putting his affairs in our hands. Since then he has prospered.'

Lander sucked some of the tartar off his teeth. Yes, sir.'

'When he came,' said George, 'you will recall that his attempts to keep a record of the financial transactions in which he was engaged were primitive, minimal.'

'They were, sir. I helped him to go through them, at your request. Really they were just entries in a notebook, and none too many of those. No attempt, of course, to strike any balance or keep a detailed log. Since then, with our help, all that has been changed.'

Sunlight was reflected from the top of a deed box and a ray struck George's grey cheek. He turned away.

'I would like you to go carefully into his books. Such as they were before he joined us, but more particularly since. I would wish you to scrutinize each entry for its accuracy and for any discrepancies which may appear.'

'Yes, sir.'

'If there are any I would like you to find them.'

'Of course, sir.'

There was a pause.

'Mr Carrington does not have, I would imagine, a good head for figures.'

'Well, sir, average, I suppose. He is very – alert, as you might say; has quite an instinct for making money. But, of course, I have been helping and advising him, at your request, sir, so it may be that all his later book-keeping will be free of serious error. I thought that was your intention, sir.'

'So it is. So it was. But are you sure that all the information with which he has furnished you is as accurate as it might be?'

'Not that, certainly, no, sir. But I have never found him out to be untruthful deliberate. He does not have much patience, like, hasn't really time for detail. Putting it down in black and white and red, so to say. Could do with a full-time clerk, I would advise.'

'See that this matter is looked into, will you. I should like you to spend some time on it.'

'Only last week,' said Lander, 'he accepted a contract by word of mouth and a shake of the hand. He's willing to do the sums later. Would you like—'

'See what you can *find*,' said George impatiently. It was better after all that there should be no misunderstanding.

IV

French society – or more properly Anglo-French society – or that part of it

which in some way had connections with the Court – round Ross and Demelza an attractive couple, and there was a round of events in which they became involved, sometimes together, sometimes apart. Demelza went on her own, that is, with Emily Fitzroy Somerset, to meet the fearsome and formidable Mme de Staël. The company was altogether brilliant, and included her secret husband, Albert de Rocca, and her daughter, Albertine. Demelza was terrified, but the conversation of the entire afternoon was conducted in English for her benefit, and Germaine, as her closest friends called her, seemed to take a fancy to the alert, humorous Cornishwoman.

Mme de Staël gave it as her opinion that if by any frightful mischance Napoleon ever came back to control France again it would be the end of all liberty.

The same evening Ross went with Charles Bagot to the Palais Royal. This enormous building, erected round five courtyards and formerly the home of the Dukes of Orléans, had for the last quarter century been given over to the lower pleasures of Parisian life. Although close to the Louvre, it was surrounded by a labyrinth of narrow streets and alleys and was considered to be the very centre of the city's dissipation and depravity. No decent woman would be seen there, but Bagot said a man could not possibly visit Paris, even on the soberest of missions, without spending an evening in the place.

The ground floor had neatly arcaded shops and booths, and an uncountable number of restaurants and cafés and drinking dens; below were the vast wine cellars, gaming houses, billiard and hazard tables, dance halls and beer parlours; on the first floor, vastly larger gambling rooms, and bawdy houses so public as to be exhibitions in themselves. The top floor was chiefly for prostitutes, but in fact they were everywhere. Noise and quarrels and semi-nudity and sweating clowns and drunken soldiers and beggars and pickpockets abounded. Not surprisingly, the present Duke of Orléans had not attempted to reclaim it as his own.

The only incident of note on this particular evening was when a drunken Grenadier fell over Ross's foot and accused him of having stretched out his leg deliberately. It seemed inevitable that cards would be exchanged and seconds appointed, but Ross, contrary to the habits of a lifetime, apologized profusely and insisted on buying the Frenchman an expensive drink, whereupon the incident ended peacefully. They left the Frenchman laughing but talking loudly of *le sale Anglais*.

When they were out of earshot Charles Bagot said with an inflexion of criticism in his voice: 'You were well quit of that. These out-of-work officers have little better to do than pick quarrels and shoot each other.'

'It's a new policy I have,' said Ross.

It is a new policy I have, said Ross.

On the Sunday they were invited to sup with a Countess de Jordan at her apartment in the rue de Clichy. Ross had referred the invitation to Jodie de la Blache – as he was coming to refer many things – and she said: ‘I know this one by repute but I have never met her. There are a number such in Paris. She has no title: it is just assumed to give her the importance. As you will have seen, titles are held in esteem in Paris today and one can hardly afford to be without one.’

‘Yet you abandoned yours.’

Jodie fingered the ring de Sombreuil had left her. ‘It was an Austrian title. And the de la Blaches do not need one in Paris.’

Ross inclined his head. ‘Is there anything against one going to take supper with the lady – apart from the fact that she is presumably a parvenue?’

‘She is not so much a parvenue as an adventuress, employed by other adventurers to entice the unwary. After supper you will be invited to gamble, and the tables are always crooked.’

Ross looked at Demelza. ‘We have accepted, but can make an excuse . . .’ To Jodie he said: ‘There will be army officers there?’

‘Oh, of a certainty.’

‘So it’s likely that much will be said about Bonaparte . . . I am trying to gain all the information I can . . . Would it be better if I went without Demelza?’

‘No,’ said Demelza.

So they went together.

V

Their hostess was elegant in a slim-fitting gown with black sequins and ostrich feathers. She was gracious to all, and her guests, though not of the group with which the Poldarks had previously mingled, were titled and rich and from both the army and the navy.

Another fine house, this, with two rooms adjoining, one for supper, one for gaming. Silver candelabra lighted each end of the dining-table, which was laid with a damask cloth, Limoges china, antique silver. A sirloin of beef was flanked by game, poultry, ham, tongue, lobster, salads; preserves and confections, creams, jellies, fruits. The rooms were made to look larger by the use of carefully sited mirrors and mirror branches candle-lit; the chimney pieces were hung in crimson and gold velvet; chandeliers suspended from the ceiling seemed to glisten as much from the cut glass as from the lights they carried.

Before supper and through supper, as Ross had hoped, the topic was Bonaparte. He could now no longer be ignored but as the frosty weather had

Bonaparte. He could now no longer be ignored, but as the foggy weather had persisted accurate information was impossible to come by. It was said that he had reached Grenoble, marching two hundred miles in a week, and not a shot had been fired. At the gates of Grenoble, confronted by troops under hostile officers, who were ordering them to fire, he had walked forward calling, 'Soldiers of the Fifth, do you recognize me?' and when it was clear that they did he had opened his greatcoat and walked towards them smiling and inviting them to shoot their Emperor. They had unanimously thrown down their arms and joined him.

Some said Bonaparte now had four thousand troops at his disposal, others eight thousand. But in any case, this was all several days ago. What of Lyon, the capital city of the Rhône, only eighty miles north of Grenoble, where the Royalists were in force under the command of the Comte d'Artois, the King's brother? It was said that Napoleon had met with resistance on the way and had turned back towards the south.

There was also talk of a revolt that had broken out in Lille and, led by General Desnouettes, was now heading for the capital . . .

But overall the mood was jolly, not unaided by the dry, cool, tingling champagne served before, during and after the meal. Soon after supper people drifted towards the gaming room where a long oval hazard table occupied the centre of the room, with rouge-et-noir on one side of it and roulette on the other. A very pretty French girl approached Ross, and he allowed himself to be steered in the direction of the tables. (It had been planned before between himself and Demelza that he should allow himself to be treated as a dupe; but she could have wished that the girl might have been less obviously ravishing.)

Early on they had seen the Duke of Otranto was present – though this time not accompanied by Tallien. So far they had avoided him, but going into the gaming room they came face to face.

'Sir Ross,' said the Duke, in his even, clerical voice. 'So you are still in Paris?'

'Did you suppose I should be elsewhere?' It was only the second time they had ever spoken. Ross looked restlessly over this priesdy regicide, this one-time leader of the Jacobins, who by sheer manipulative skill had ridden all the storms of revolution, dictatorship and restoration and still remained a power in the French establishment.

'My inquiry was a solicitous one,' Fouché said, bowing to Demelza. 'Reports have it that many English are making preparations to leave Paris, or have already left. I understand that the Duchess of Wellington plans to leave tomorrow.'

'Are you suggesting that it is dangerous for the English to remain in Paris?'

'I am suggesting nothing, sir. I am simply observing – observing not so much

a migration as an emigration. I suppose it is always possible that if Napoleon should reconquer France – which Heaven forbid! – the British might suffer at his hands in the way they did before. That must be the opinion of your Minister Plenipotentiary, who, when consulted, is advising your countrymen to leave.’

‘And what if the other revolt should succeed?’

‘The other?’ Fouché’s eyes, which Demelza thought were like a fox’s, clouded. ‘Oh, that uprising led by General Desnouettes? If the King of Rome is put on the throne, there will clearly have to be a regency, of which I shall hope to be a member; and I can assure you in that case that the English will have *nothing* to fear!’

‘Nor the French?’ Ross asked. ‘The loyalist French?’

‘Oh,’ Fouché shrugged; ‘I have lived in every climate; why should not they?’

‘Perhaps they do not all have your ability to trim your sails to differing winds.’ After Fouché had looked his dislike at the remark, Ross added: ‘Many were not given the opportunity.’

‘I don’t think I follow you.’

‘Courtesy forbids me to remind you of the massacres in Brittany, the countless women and children murdered on the guillotine.’

Fouché smiled. ‘It is a strange kind of courtesy, sir, which seeks to offend while pretending the opposite. This is an English custom, no doubt?’

‘It is an English custom’, said Ross, ‘to dislike regicides.’ And passed on.

‘Ross,’ whispered Demelza, ‘you should *not* have said that! You *promised*! He is still a dangerous man.’

‘Who should be in prison,’ said Ross, wiping his hands, which had become damp with anger. ‘And surely will be if the Bourbons stand firm and his insurrection fails.’

‘And if it succeeds?’ Demelza said; but the ravishing French girl was plucking at his sleeve.

They gambled for a while, but Ross was too old a hand to allow himself to be drawn in deep. He had two soldiers as his neighbours, and between hands they exchanged news and speculations which he was careful to take note of.

For a while Demelza stood watching, then she moved to a table where coffee was served. She enjoyed champagne – unlike most wines it uplifted instead of making you heavy in the head – but after a time it dried the mouth and one became thirstier than before. (As thirsty as a goose with one eye shut, as Prudie would say.) So she took coffee. One thing the French could do was make coffee. They seldom drank it in Cornwall; henceforward it would be much more used at Nampara.

She thought of Henry, who was ailing. So far the change of food and

surroundings had affected him not at all, but today he had been fractious and queasy. Demelza had brought a variety of Dwight's powders and syrups for just such an eventuality, and she hoped they would put him right again. Thank Heaven for Mrs Kemp, who had been an absolute rock all through the visit, disapproving of everything French but adapting herself to whatever she found she could not change. She provided a sturdy English-Cornish basis on which you could rely or refer back to.

She had been helpful too dealing with Isabella-Rose's recent moods. Isabella-Rose, you might conclude, had also been ailing. For two days after Lieutenant Havergal left she had hardly eaten a thing, picking at her food, complaining of headaches, ready to burst into tears at the least excuse. Ross did not have the greatest patience with moody children, so it was lucky he had been away with Henri de la Blache at the Paris barracks for most of the time.

It was young love, of course. Demelza knew the signs all too well. It was sad that it had come to Bella so early, because at that age there was no hope of a favourable outcome. Yet maybe it was salutary. The first time was the most awful for any girl – or any young man; after that it was never perhaps quite so terrible, and Isabella-Rose would get over it, and the inoculation would have worked.

In fact she was already getting over it; Demelza had heard her humming today; surprising how one missed it when it was not there, like a flower garden from which the bumble bee has fled.

They had seen King Louis this morning when they had attended mass in the chapel of the Tuileries. Distinguished visitors were permitted to sit in the *Salle des Maréchaux* and see him walk into the chapel. He had lumbered in, one foot swathed in bandages, helped by a page; but he had looked cheerful and well and happy, and he had bowed to the English and other guests as he passed. How could he be suddenly unseated by a defeated and discredited usurper?

And what of Dwight and Caroline? If they heard of Bonaparte's escape, would it prevent them from leaving England? Had not Bonaparte been particularly gracious to English scientists like Sir Humphry Davy, inviting him to come over and meet the French scientists, right in the middle of the bitterest part of the war? So even if the unthinkable happened . . .

Demelza got into conversation with two handsome young Frenchmen whose names she never knew. She was learning a little French and could make herself understood by the two servants who looked after them in the flat, but when it came to a social occasion such as this her new tongue completely deserted her and she had to help them struggling with broken English.

However, they made do very well, and somehow it turned into a laughing

interchange about the Palais Royal, which both of them assured her was not nearly so shocking as it was rumoured to be, and they would together be altogether enchanted to show her round any evening after five.

There was a stirring by the double doors which led from the large lobby to the gaming salon. A man unsuitably dressed for such a smart occasion had just come in, his face sombre, his leather jacket and riding breeches and boots spattered with dust and mud.

A flood of French which she could not follow, and then the taller of her two young escorts bent to explain to her.

‘Lyon has fallen.’

Chapter Twelve

I

Fitzroy Somerset said: 'Yes, the Duchess is leaving this morning. A precautionary move – no more – but if there is fighting, as there surely will be if Bonaparte continues to advance, Paris is no place for the wife of the Duke of Wellington. She would be too important a capture if anything went wrong. As for the ordinary individual holidaying in Paris, it is a personal choice. Ney and an army of twenty thousand are blocking Napoleon's advance. There is another whole army corps at Sens.'

Ross said: 'It seems that the garrison at Lyon and all the troops in the vicinity surrendered without firing a shot.'

'They didn't surrender, they just changed sides. What are your plans, Poldark?'

'To stay, of course. I believe I have been able to send home a few despatches which may have been useful. And now there is this emergency, it seems there is at last a good reason for my being here.'

'And your family?'

'Will stay with me for the present.'

Fitzroy Somerset plucked at his lip. 'I am undecided about Emily. You know she is with child?'

'No, I didn't. My congratulations.'

'Thank you. But in those circumstances I may decide to send her home. If one errs, it should be on the side of safety.'

'Of course. Have you news of the other rebellion?'

'What? Oh, the one from Lille? It has collapsed. Part of an army corps set out on Sunday from Lille, led by General Desnouettes and proclaiming the King of Rome; but it met with so little enthusiasm that by yesterday evening hardly a brigade was left. That dispersed at Fontainebleau. At least one crisis is over.'

'And Fouché?' said Ross.

'Fouché?' Somerset raised his eyebrows.

'Was he not behind the revolt?'

was he not behind the revolt?

'I hadn't heard so. Had you?'

'Yes.'

'I wonder if the King knows.'

'I think he may by now.'

Somerset looked at Ross. Your mission has led you into strange company . . .'

Ross did not answer.

'In any event,' said the young diplomat, 'I doubt if Fouché could be moved against. Proof would probably be hard to come by, and at the moment it is unlikely that the King, needing all the popular support he can get, would touch him for fear of alienating the Jacobins. Do not forget that under the Bourbons they have found a much greater freedom to operate than they were allowed under Bonaparte.'

'You know, do you, that I am invited to Auxerre again on Thursday.'

'You'll not go?'

'Oh, I may do. In two days, of course, the major battle may have been fought. But it is a long way from Lyon to Auxerre. I have been studying the map. Near on two hundred miles. An army can't move at that speed, even without obstruction.'

'Well,' said Fitzroy Somerset, 'now the weather has cleared we shall get our news more quickly. How long do you plan to be away?'

'If I leave on Thursday I can be in Auxerre before dark on Friday. Friday evening as a guest again of Brigadier Rougiet. I think there are some cavalry exercises he wants me to see on Saturday morning – I can leave late on Saturday and be back on Sunday evening.'

'The stables I recommended: did you get a good mount?'

'Excellent, thank you.' Ross got up. 'I realize that there may *be* no cavalry manoeuvres when I get there. Or they may have become manoeuvres in earnest.'

When he returned to the rue de la Ville l'Evêque he bore with him two letters Fitzroy Somerset had handed him which had come in the diplomatic bags. One was from each of their grown-up children.

Jeremy wrote:

Dear Absent Parents,

I trust you are both well and happy and are preserving a decent moral dignity among the depravities of Paris. We are well and very, very happy. This time last year I would not have conceived it possible.

Yesterday was Cuby's Birthday and I gave a party for a few friends, which ended in the small hours and was much enjoyed. She is a wonderful wife, and I still count my good fortune that – partly thanks to the encouragement of my

I can count my good fortune that – partly thanks to the encouragement of my mother and the urgings of my outrageous father – I was able to bully her into coming away with me. I want very much that you shall meet her properly very soon, and I am delighted that you will have room to accommodate us in your apartment in Paris, for we have been overspending of late – or rather I have been overspending and Cuby has been clinging to my coat-tails to deter me. We shall all be together for at least a week and I can see my big brother again and pull Bella's hair. Know you when the Enyses are arriving? It would be even more pleasure still if they were in Paris for Easter too.

News reached us last night that old Bony Part has slipped away from Elba and is in France again. Some Belgians are whispering that the English deliberately let him go. Can you imagine anything more stupid than that? Others think he will come heading straight for Brussels, and a few English are leaving. I'm sure you have more recent reports than we do, but he could make a Nuisance of himself. Perhaps by now he will have been re-netted and will not be casting shadows over our Easter holiday.

Did you before you left have any advance information as to the likely profits of Wheal Leisure? When I was home the 30, 45 and 80 levels were all yielding well, so I am hoping for a bumper share-out to see me free of my debts. I am hungry to be home long enough sometime to get the engine house thoroughly *cleaned* – apart from the engine which of course is spotless. It is a curious habit of mining engineers that they are only concerned for the working parts.

By the way, did you see about the disaster that occurred at Newcastle Colliery, Durham? A great many people assembled to witness the opening of the new steam railroad to carry the coal in wagons to the dockside. The engine burst and killed ten, with another fifty badly scalded. Perhaps I am safer in the army! Seriously, some people will never learn. I am comforted to hear that the London *Times* newspaper will shortly be printed by steam. Perhaps their editorials will become more explosive!

Cuby is beside me and sends you her love to join with mine.

Your loving son,
Jeremy

Clowance's letter ran:

Dearest Mama and Papa,

It was more than good to receive your letter and to learn you were safely installed in a comfortable home. How lucky you are to be there. I so very much envy you, and especially I envy Bella the opportunity to learn French.

And the opportunity to see Paris after all these years of War!

I trust you had my earlier letter telling you of my joy that Papa had decided to accept a title. It is so *right* that he should have done so. I trust you are now getting used to being so addressed. Stephen says he walks three inches taller for having a baronet for his father-in-law!

We are beginning the building of our new house! It is very exciting and I believe will be wonderful when finished. Stephen is away at times but less than he used to be. Sid Bunt is permanently in charge of the *Lady Clowance*, and Andrew of the *Chasse Marée*. Stephen is so proud of *Adolphus* that he is at present using her for quick trips to France and back only and commanding her himself. He can't bear to be away from Falmouth for long; but he has asked me if I can Deputize for him when he is away and maybe help with the office work even when he is home. Of course I shall love to do this, and in no time will be making out Bills of Lading in triplicate form!

Long before all this you will be home from your stay in Paris and will have told me all your adventures. Dwight and Caroline were much looking forward to joining you, and I only so much wish that Stephen and I could grow wings and make up the family party.

Lady Harriet (Warleggan) has been in a great taking because someone in the woods above Cardew has been setting mantraps to deter poachers, and one of her great boarhounds wandered off a couple of weeks ago and was caught in the trap. By chance I found him – returning from the Enyses accompanied by Music Thomas – and we bore him home. He has his leg in a splint but I think will have come to no hurt. Harriet's fury knows no bounds. She is still trying to find who is responsible and has narrowed the search to the Devorans and the Hills. (Lord Devoran, of course, wouldn't harm a rabbit, but Betty is capable of anything!) I incline to think she is to blame.

In any event, Music profited by it, for Harriet gave him five guineas and a new suit of clothes. I do not believe he had ever seen so much money, and I am sure he went lolloping off in the snow singing all the way at the top of his voice. He is a much improved person since Dwight took him in hand. He was wonderful with the hound.

The weather is brilliant now, but with a chill wind. The daffodils are in full bloom, and I'm sure the garden at Nampara looks its best. I am hoping to have a garden. We shall be exposed to the east winds, but look what a wall has done for Nampara!

We hunted twice with the Stithians pack last week. Nero is fine, but Stephen is still looking out for a hunter for himself. It is expensive to hire them and we cannot for ever be borrowing from Harriet. I saw Paul Kellow in

Truro last week looking *very* smart – the coaching business is strangely prospering for him – and with a new inamorata, one I had not met before, called Mary Temple. Someone says she is a daughter of the Temples of Tregony, who are supposed to be rich, aren't they?

All my love,
Clowance

'It does not look as if Jeremy yet knows about you,' said Demelza, turning the letter over. 'It is addressed to Captain and Mrs Poldark. You did say you had written to him?'

'Yes. I believe I omitted to mention it.'

You . . .? Oh, really, Ross! I cannot *believe* you! That you should not tell him the most important thing! I wish I had written myself!

Ross said: 'What would you have had me say? "Dear Jeremy, you will be shocked to know that your father's egoism has triumphed over his honesty and he has allowed himself to be pushed – not quite resisting every step, protesting loudly but insincerely – into accepting a title which he neither needs nor deserves. Furthermore, this absurd appendage which will now forever more be hung at the front and back of his name like a rosette on a donkey's head and a ribbon on his tail, will on his decease – which may occur any day – be transferred to you. This blot, this scar, this appendage, can never more be discarded—" Whatever's the matter?'

He could not go on for Demelza was crowing with laughter.

'Stop it!' he said angrily. You sound like Bella!

'My lover,' she gasped. 'My dear, dear Ross. I did not know you could express – express yourself so well! You have said you are no House of Commons man, but I am sure the – the chamber, is it? – would – would listen spellbound.' She sobered suddenly, dabbing her eyes. 'At heart, my lover, is it not now that *you* are being insincere? Not for accepting the title but for even pretending that Jeremy will look on it that way. Or that anyone else in the whole world over would, my dearest. *Would* they? Would any of your radical friends, even? They would say, if we have a friend called Sir Ross Poldark, is he not more valuable as a helper than *Captain* Poldark?'

You don't understand at all—'

She went up to him and squeezed his arm. 'I think maybe I do a little. You are too proud to *need* a title, is that not it? Your name is good enough anywhere in the world. Well, nobody has ever been prouder of the name of Poldark than I have since you gave it me. But this is just – just a little icing on the cake, is it not? Not to be taken serious. Not to grow larger in the head and more proudful

for it. Not to expect folk to bow and scrape because you are a baronet. Not to let it make one scrap of difference how you think and feel about people or people's rights, or justice or freedom. You are the same as you ever were, and if the world thinks different it will soon discover its mistake.'

'Your hand's cold,' he said.

'Tis your arm that's hot,' she said. 'Hot with annoyance because somebody has persuaded you to take what you do not want to take. So now you must sit down and write to your son today. Or else I will write.'

'That is someone at the door,' he said.

'Let 'em wait, Cap'n Poldark.' She slipped her hand down to his. 'See how your heat is warming my hand, Cap'n Poldark. It would warm my heart too if I thought you were as happy as I am about it.'

'Are you happy about it? About *that*?'

'Of *course*. It is just what I said – a little icing on the cake.'

'Caroline thought you would be.'

'*Caroline*? You haven't *seen* her!'

'After Christmas. I saw her one afternoon. She said you would have wanted me to take it.'

'I believe you take more notice of her than you do of me!'

'Sometimes. On some subjects. Yes. That *is* someone at the door.'

'If we wait long enough they will go away.'

'Jodie said she was coming round this afternoon to take you shopping. But it would be early for her.'

'I don't know what I can possibly want. Only perhaps shoes. Is Jeremy right, Ross? Is Leisure doing well?'

'Very well. We shall not want for a loaf of bread.'

'I dearly hope Jeremy does not get into the hands of moneylenders. I have always felt he was so good about money. Now I am not so sure.'

'Why? What has he done?'

'It says in the letter,' Demelza corrected herself hastily, 'that he is in debt. I just worry when I think of any of my children in debt.'

'No one is going to the door,' said Ross. 'Meurice is a lazy skunk and Etienne little better.' He detached himself from his wife.

'Ross,' she said.

Yes?'

'If you hate a title so much why did you allow yourself to be called Captain? Should not plain Mister have been enough?'

He considered her. Then he reached forward and tweaked her nose.

'Ow!' she said.

He kissed her nose and patted her hand as he went towards the door. 'You should be in Parliament,' he said, 'not I.'

II

It was Jodie, and she was just turning away.

'Oh, I thought you were from home. I came early for I may not have time this afternoon. Can you come with me this morning, Demelza?

She was looking very smart in her scarlet merino coat and white silk hat trimmed with striped ribbons. But her face was colourless and her dark eyes at their most desolate.

'Well, I can't go in this!' said Demelza. 'Give me five minutes to change. Have you brought your *coucou*?'

'Yes. It is quite a long way to walk.'

'I delight to drive in it.'

'Wrap up. The wind is cold.'

When Demelza had gone Ross walked to look out of the window at the trim little carriage with its single roan pony and the waiting groom.

'Do you have further bad news for us?'

'... Perhaps it is the news we do not have which is worrying.'

'Tell me.'

'Well, we have reports of Bonaparte's proclamations. He proclaims himself the liberator of his faithful subjects from a foreign-imposed Bourbon tyranny. He says his eagles are on the wing and will perch from spire to spire until they reach Notre-Dame. He proclaims that he was permitted to leave Elba by the British (who control the Mediterranean), that he is to be joined en route by the Empress and by her son, the King of Rome, and that they will shortly be crowned in Paris. (Thus implying that Austria also favours his return.) He has already named part of his cabinet: Cambacérès as Minister of Justice, Carnot of the Interior. Fouché's back to his old position as Chief of the Police. He promises free elections, a free press . . . Above all he asserts that he comes in peace and wishes peace with all nations. He is here to re-establish the Empire and the self-respect and dignity of France.'

After a minute Ross said: 'Part of it is lies, but it will appeal to many people.'

'Free press!' exclaimed Jodie. 'Four newspapers are published in Paris when Bonaparte rules, and all are in strictest government control.'

'What else do we know?'

'They say his route will be by Mâcon and Chalon, making for Dijon. But

before he gets there he must meet and defeat Ney's army.'

'Do you rely on Ney?'

'I know him well, my friend. He has lived a dissolute, a vivid life. He is impulsive, generous, brave to a fault, warmly fond of his wife in spite of all his infidelities, indiscreet, quick-tempered, emotional. He has quarrelled bitterly with Bonaparte but I suspect, yes, I suspect secretly loves him. He has two very loyal generals under him, Bourmont and Lecourbe, who will certainly keep him faithful to the King, even if he were to waver. But I do not think he can possibly waver – after such promises.'

Ross kicked at the fire. It was a cold day, and when there was a north wind this room was always chill.

'Well, the other insurrection has collapsed. The march from Lille. Fitzroy Somerset told me.'

'I have not seen Henri today. He has been working day and night to bring all our forces up to the maximum strength – just in case they are needed. The King's Bodyguard has been almost doubled by the enlistment of new Royalist volunteers. There is every sign of high spirits and warm affection in the Palace. This second army is to be concentrated before Melun.'

Demelza returned wrapped in a grey suede coat with fox fur at collar and cuffs. Her hat was of green suede with a small brilliant feather. Jodie smiled at her.

'We shall not be so long, Ross, for I have urgent work this afternoon.'

'And Fouché?' said Ross.

'Fouché. Ah yes. A strange thing has happened. The King sent for him this morning. He knew of his involvement with Desnouettes, but was not intending to face him with it. The King wished that he might ask for his advice, on the assumption that Fouché would be useful in this crisis. But when they send round they learn that the Duke of Otranto has gone away for a few days . . . This is clearly a diplomatic absence. He is somewhere in Paris – with Tallien, no doubt – waiting the events of the next few days before he emerges again from his sty.'

'Bonaparte has already said he wants him to serve as his next Chief of Police.'

'So our agents report. Of course if that ever happened . . .' Jodie opened the door and waited for Demelza.

Demelza said: 'If that ever happened?'

'I should be arrested at once. Fouché would never miss a chance like that.'

Chapter Thirteen

I

But on the 16th all was changed. The *Moniteur* published an official despatch received by telegraph that morning, stating that although some troubles had been reported in Mâcon, Chalon and Dijon, it was only among the dregs of the population. Napoleon with a harassed force of four thousand men and a few cavalry was now retreating upon Lyon and his troops were deserting in masses. He was isolated in the middle of France, and Marshal Ney was advancing on him.

It looked like a repetition of the collapse of the revolt from Lille.

The Minister of War entered the officers' guard-room at the Paris Barracks and said: 'Well, gentlemen, you may take off your boots. The commandant of Napoleon's advance has been taken prisoner and is at this moment in my apartment. Desnouettes is in a place of safety with his accomplices. General Marchand is in the rear of Napoleon. All is working quickly and well. The emergency is over.'

The *Moniteur* also reported messages of loyalty pouring into the Tuileries from the heads of departments all over France. The King attended the sitting of the Chamber of Deputies and made a moving speech which was loudly applauded. He announced he would review the garrison troops of Paris, six thousand in number, the following day in the Champ-de-Mars.

With the main struggle now over, Ross left for Auxerre as arranged. He had had no communication with Brigadier Rougiet for more than a week, but reasoned that if he arrived in Auxerre and Rougiet, because of the crisis, had had to change his plans, it would not so much matter. Ross felt he could gain a better idea of the swaying sympathies of the army by visiting them at their base.

To his surprise he found it hard this time to hire a good horse. In a month prices had doubled and quality halved. Too many people had recently decided to leave Paris. He wondered if Fouché and Tallien had really left or, as Jodie supposed, simply gone to ground. He would have felt slightly happier leaving

Demelza for three days if Tallien were under lock and key. Though, heaven knew, if Tallien turned up again and tried to take any liberties he would find himself faced by a spitting cat. (And two menservants, and an outraged Cornish Wesleyan.)

It was strange, he thought to himself, that he had heard Tallien's name, as the man who had betrayed General Hoche's promise of safe conduct all those years ago – twenty years this coming autumn – he had heard it and execrated it and then almost forgotten it. It had never crossed his mind that one day he would meet this evil man. Somehow he had thought all those monsters, like Robespierre, had ended up on the guillotine to which they had condemned so many others. Not so.

The best horse Ross could find was an elderly grey gelding called Bayonne; it was brought round for him on the Thursday morning, and after a loving parting from his family he made his way out of Paris and headed south for Melun. Because his horse was so slow, and soon slightly lame, it was late in the evening when he reached Sens and found lodgings in an inn by the river. On the 17th he was off early but constant rain made the trip disagreeable.

II

The morning that Ross left Sens, news reached Paris that Marshal Ney, far from capturing the Emperor, had changed sides at Lons-le-Saunier three days ago and, except for a few loyalist officers, had taken the whole of his army with him. The King when he heard said: 'Is there no more honour?' Nevertheless, as planned, he reviewed his troops at the Champ-de-Mars and went through the ordinary duties of the day.

It also became clear that as he advanced Bonaparte had seized the semaphore stations and had had them send out the falsely reassuring news of yesterday. Nothing is more calculated to create panic than optimistic information that is found to be based on lies.

In the afternoon a grim and subdued Henri de la Blache called to see Demelza. 'Jodie tells me that Ross has gone to Auxerre. He is sure to receive intelligence on the way about the manner of Ney's treachery and Napoleon's approach. So he'll turn back. In any case he is an Englishman and a non-combatant so he is not likely to be at risk. All the same, and Jodie agrees with me, I think it is time you all obtained passports to leave France. I shall stay here, of course, for my place is with the King; but Jodie will leave also – for her own safety. Tomorrow morning early she will call for you and take you to M le Comte de Loucourt, who will provide them.'

Comte de Jaucourt, who will provide them.

‘D’you think Napoleon will reach Paris, then?’

‘I think so – after today’s news. Yes.’

‘When?’

‘When? Well, we are not sure where his forces are. Probably already north of Dijon. He still has to confront the army of Melun. There is a stronger stiffening in it of the older aristocracy, but after the tidal wave of sentiment which has engulfed the other armies . . . I think we should be certain only of about a week.’

‘I dearly wish Ross had not gone.’

‘So do I. But never forget if this comes to war, it is civil war, between Louis Bourbon and Napoleon Bonaparte. Whatever might happen in the future, France is not now at war with England or Austria or Russia or Prussia. Ross is a civilian foreigner. And I have a strong feeling that Bonaparte will go out of his way to placate foreign opinion.’

‘He did not do so last time.’

‘You mean twelve years ago? But then he was at the height of his powers, and he knew, having gained all the concessions from England that he could, that his next move was to resume the war. At the moment, if he comes to power again in France, he must have at least a year’s peace to consolidate himself.’

Demelza looked out at the rain beating on the windows. ‘Lady Fitzroy Somerset sent a note this morning advising us to leave. She says she is leaving tomorrow.’

‘Jodie will call for you in the morning.’

‘I would not go without Ross,’ said Demelza.

‘Of course not. When he hears the latest news, he’s sure to return tomorrow. But to have the passports will be a help.’

‘Twill be nasty for him riding a long way in this weather.’

III

To follow the road from Sens to Auxerre you kept within sight of the River Yonne all the way. It was flat rich country but sparsely populated, and what people there were lived in hovels. About ten o’clock the rain cleared and the sun peered out with a watery, etiolated eye. To balance this benefit Bayonne’s lameness became worse. Ross dismounted to see if he could find what was wrong. The animal was perfectly docile, and held his head in a dejected way as if ashamed of his shortcomings. There seemed nothing wrong with his shoes. It was the right hind leg and after a careful and discreet prodding Ross came to the conclusion that the trouble was probably rheumatism made worse by the cold

conclusion that the trouble was probably rheumatism made worse by the cold and damp.

They were already through Joigny, but he found a farrier in the next village. The ragged little Frenchman shrugged his shoulders and said: '*Il est vieux.*' True enough. With the sun warming his damp shoulders Ross thought the description applied to him as well. He asked the farrier about the prospect of hiring or buying a mount of some sort, but there was apparently nothing to be had this side of Auxerre.

Ross went on, riding half a mile on the limping horse, then dismounting and limping the next half-mile on foot. The camp where the Sixth Corps was stationed was north of Auxerre so the distance now could not be great.

The previous time he had visited this camp he had remarked to himself on the casual attitude of the guard, the general untidiness of the soldiers. He had discussed with Rougiet the difficulty of maintaining proper discipline in any body of troops during a period of prolonged peace; and this more particularly the case with France whose army was still swollen beyond any necessary peacetime needs.

A difference this time: the sentries were smartly at attention and brusque to the point of discourtesy. He had to produce the letter he had had from Brigadier Rougiet before he was allowed beyond the guard-room. Then it was half an hour before an orderly came for him.

At least there was little difference in the warmth of Gaston Rougiet's welcome, though perhaps it carried an overtone of anxiety.

'Welcome, welcome, my friend. You are too good to have come again. Was the weather atrocious? Pray sit down and take a glass of champagne and tell me all the news of Paris.'

This was a permanent camp, the officers' quarters brick built, and comfortable chairs, and fires burning.

They talked a few minutes; Ross told him that his horse had gone lame, and Rougiet sent an orderly to get an army farrier's expert report. But it could not be long before the one subject uppermost in both their minds was spoken of. Rougiet said: 'Believe it or not, do you know where his advance forces had reached by this morning? Avallon.'

'Is that far from here?'

'Fifty kilometres. And do you know where Marshal Ney's troops are now? Tonnerre. That is thirty-five. They could be here tonight, if they wished to be!'

'Then I must not stay.'

'I have heard they have arranged to meet here in the morning. It will be a grand moment. No doubt, in spite of past disagreements, they will embrace as brothers. You can lie easy here tonight.'

‘And this camp?’

Rougiet shrugged. ‘There are only two brigades here at present – mine and Baron Novry’s – and the 14th Regiment of Lancers – and two batteries of artillery and a few engineers. About seven thousand all told.’

‘And their sentiments?’

‘Bonapartist to a man.’

Rougiet was watching him intently.

‘And yourself?’ said Ross. ‘Or need I ask?’

‘You have known since we first met of my dislike of what the Bourbons have brought to France.’

‘You also admitted your dislike of what Bonaparte had brought France to.’

‘Indeed. But he is too great a man not to have learned by his mistakes. I believe the government he will set up in Paris will be a better one in all respects than the one he left behind twelve months ago. At least it cannot fail to be better than the one we have now!’

Ross tried to ease his aching ankle. He had walked farther today than he had done for years.

‘I can see your point of view. Though from what I have seen I cannot fault the King as much as his relatives. And has he not had an impossible task, trying to reconcile the old with the new – bringing back the kingship and the courtiers of twenty-odd years ago, trying to form some sort of an accommodation between an old and a new regime?’

‘You cannot turn the clock back,’ said Rougiet. The light showed up the vivid scar across his face – a relic of Jena, he had told Ross. ‘The Jacobins turned equality into a blood bath, but Bonaparte stopped that, and under him an element of equality, a degree of fairness and evenhandedness and justice within the law was established. But the evil stupidity of these émigrés who have returned, claiming their old rights, their old estates, without an idea or a principle in their heads which did not exist before 1793 . . .’

Ross accepted another glass of champagne. ‘And if the return of Bonaparte leads to a resumption of war?’

‘It should not, my friend. Bonaparte will not be seeking war with anyone this time. But if war is forced upon us we shall show that we can still fight!’

‘No one surely has ever doubted that.’

‘I trust we shall never again be on opposite sides.’ Rougiet’s brooding face suddenly lightened into a smile. ‘If we are, I trust we shall avoid each other. I think you would be a brave enemy, but I prefer you as my friend.’

‘Amen,’ said Ross.

IV

They dined and wined and grew more expansive towards each other.

‘This injury of yours, this ankle – you got it fighting us?’

‘No, the Americans. Almost before you were born.’

‘Rubbish. I am thirty-eight. But it lames you?’

‘Not seriously. The wet weather does not suit it. Nor does a lame horse.’

‘Understood. Well, Martin tells me the report on your horse is not good. He is very old – he should be put out to grass – or just put out. If you hired him you were cheated.’

‘There was no other.’

‘Ah. In this crisis horses have become the new gold of France. You will scarcely find a nag. As for the countryside, where it lies in the path of the Emperor – everyone knows that he will pay for any useful mount. And we who are already mounted know that it would be treasonable to lend or give a horse away at this time.’

Ross continued to eat his supper with a disregard for what he was being told. But when it was finished he said: ‘Does this mean you are expecting me to walk back to Paris tomorrow?’

Rougiet laughed heartily but with a heartiness that hid embarrassment. ‘No, my good friend, that will not happen, I assure you. But I trust you understand my plight – as I understand yours. You came in answer to my invitation; but in the course of a week the universe has changed! Could you bear to return by diligence?’

‘How?’

‘There is one leaving here at nine tomorrow. You would be a fifth passenger. There are two ladies and two gentlemen – all non-combatants – one a priest. They all – for sentimental rather than political reasons – wish to leave Auxerre before Bonaparte arrives – like you, in fact. It will be slow, the diligence, but it should be sure.’

‘How slow?’

‘First night in Sens. Then an early rise and you should be in Paris Sunday afternoon.’

Ross glanced out of the window. It was going dark but you could see the rain beating on the window panes. His ankle nagged.

‘Very well,’ he said.

V

There had been no difficulty about the passports. Jodie had gone with her and had got one for herself under the name of Mme Josephine Ettmayer.

‘If it becomes necessary to travel, then it will be safer to travel under my married name. We have perhaps another week; I do not think we can rely on more.’

‘And the King?’

‘Is staying. That means Henri and his regiment are to stay. I fear greatly for his life, for he and his kind will resist to the end. Do not forget that the Palace of the Tuileries is still marked with cannon shot from the massacre of the Swiss Guard only twenty-odd years ago.’

Demelza stared at the rainy street. It all looked so ordinary, so matter-of-fact. People were about their normal business as if nothing had happened and nothing were expected to happen. Could all this casual busy life be destroyed in a few days by civil war in the street, by corpses sprawled on the cobbles, by blood running in the gutters, by children caught in a cross-fire and running and falling . . .? She shivered.

Jodie said: ‘Shall the Embassy provide you with transport out of the city?’

‘We have no plans. When Ross left on Thursday the emergency seemed to be over! We expect friends coming from England for Easter! My son and his wife should come also from Brussels. I have no idea at all what Ross will do!’

Jodie said: ‘I think your friends and your son may be turned back – even if they should leave. It will be a miracle if by Good Friday Bonaparte is not back in his place . . . Demelza, I have been wondering.’

‘Yes?’

They walked on a few paces, Jodie a little ahead, holding her yellow silk scarf more closely to her throat. Then she stopped.

‘Carriages are at a premium. I do not think the Embassy will have enough transport to evacuate itself if the emergency should come to that. All my closest friends they are in a panic today, and I do not think I can rely on any one of them to lend *anything* on wheels! But I have a carriage. I shall be leaving tomorrow – not later than tomorrow evening. At a pinch it can convey six. I can leave my personal maid behind, and then there will be room for you all! Ross is a big man but Henry is a small one.’

Demelza’s troubled eyes considered her friend. ‘That is some kind. I think Ross will be only too happy to – to leave Paris. I shall because of my children. ’Twill depend on what he says, but thank you, Jodie, if you really think you can take *five* of us.’

‘It will be better and safer for us all ’ said Jodie

It will be better and safer for us all," said Ross.

They returned to the rue de la Ville l'Évêque, but Ross was not home, nor did he come back all that rainy day. The wind was gusting among the tall narrow houses and the torn clouds seemed to clutch at the chimney pots. Although accompanied by her two younger children and the sturdy Mrs Kemp, and waited on by the two French servants, Demelza had never felt so much alone. In almost all the crises in which she had found herself in her life she had discovered some native commonsense to help her make choices, to arrive at decisions; and usually, it seemed, what she had done had worked out well enough in the end. Here in a strange city, whose language she was only groping to speak, a city in the grip of a revolutionary change, surrounded by people whom she trusted and distrusted in equal parts, bereft of her husband on whom during this visit she had relied for all guidance, she was lost. For once her children, kept in by the rain and at a loose end to entertain themselves, irritated and vexed her. She blamed herself, but knew that under the irritation with them was an irritation, laced with worry, with Ross.

She blamed him for leaving her here like this. The world was going topsy-turvy: the King – King Louis Stanislav Xavier the Eighteenth, the monarch of all France – was about to be deposed, it seemed, and the usurper, adventurer, supreme soldier and traditional nightmare enemy of England was driving up from the south to take his place. Almost all her adult life – or at least for the last twenty years of it – Napoleon Bonaparte had been the one menacing enemy. For years England had lived under threat of an invasion from him. Nelson had died defeating him. So had Geoffrey Charles's idol, Sir John Moore. So had thousands and thousands of other ordinary decent Englishmen, fighting on the sea or in Holland or Spain or in India or Egypt or Italy or the West Indies, always, always fighting this great but wicked Frenchman.

And last year he had been finally, ultimately vanquished, and all the world had rejoiced. And the great shadow had lifted off their lives. And no longer could nursemaids frighten their children into obedience by threatening that Boney would get them. And it did not matter that Jeremy was still in the army, for once the peace was signed with America there was no one else to fight.

Now this. And he would be here within a week. And somewhere – more or less in his path – Ross was risking his life by merely being an observer. Why did he? What was he doing, standing in the way of an approaching army? What good would it do the Government or this mission they had sent him on if he should end up as another dead body trampled into the mud? Why did he not think more about his wife and children? Where *was* he? It was *Saturday* now and he had left on *Thursday*.

She left the flat, putting on a purple cloak with a heavy hood and walked

through the rain to the Embassy.

Charles Bagot saw her first. ‘My dear Lady Poldark, come in. Come in and dry yourself. A large contingent of the King’s Bodyguard has just left the Palace for Melun under the Due de Luxembourg. Colonel de la Blache is with it. This should raise the army protecting Melun to over twenty thousand men. There will be a battle there. I think your husband is likely to be home at any time now. When he comes I urge you all to leave. We are here simply as a skeleton staff – Lord Fitzroy Somerset, myself, Mr McKenzie and two secretaries. Fortunately the Duchess got away in good time.’

Demelza said: ‘Is there any way we *can* leave, Mr Bagot?’

Bagot frowned and bit at his finger. ‘It’s unfortunately impossible for us to provide transport. The two carriages that we had have both gone. Perhaps—’

‘Mlle de la Blache has offered us room in her coach. She is leaving tomorrow.’

His face cleared. ‘Then take it by all means. She is, of course, very much a Bourbon, and I think should not be here if power changes hands. But if she leaves tomorrow she will be safe – and you should be safe with her.’

‘Provided my husband returns in time.’

‘Oh, I would think that a certainty! He can only have been delayed by the confusion in the countryside which must result from a situation like this. But even if he were not to come . . .’

‘What then?’

‘You should still go. I think he would wish you to. After all he is a distinguished man and a soldier and well used to looking after himself. I think you were better out of Paris, if not for your own sake, Lady Poldark, then for the sake of your children.’

Chapter Fourteen

I

Bella had been out in the rain yesterday with Mrs Kemp and had succeeded in finding a shop where they sold music. She had bought a book of simple songs but of course had no musical instrument to play them on, nor could she read music well enough to pitch the correct notes. So Demelza found herself trying to sing the simple tunes for her daughter so that she could learn them. It wasn't easy, for Demelza was no expert, and it needed Mrs Kemp to tell her when she went off the note. In the end Bella memorized three, and this contented her for the time being. It was a change from the 'Marseillaise', which she had rather done to death. One, which was probably based on some fable, ran:

*Autre Fois le Rat de ville
Invita le Rat des champs
D'une Façon Fort civile
A des reliefs d'Ortolans.*

Demelza never thought of that time without thinking of the simple tune and the words – there were other verses but she forgot them – and, later on, if Bella even began to hum it she was sharply told to stop.

Normally on the Sundays when they were in Paris they went to church, in the chapel in the Tuileries, but of course today that was out of the question. Under no circumstances could she leave the rue de la Ville l'Evêque until Ross arrived.

Often in her life she had considered herself the luckiest of women – even more so recently, in their last few days in London, the first two weeks in France. Now she wondered if in one respect she was not among the unluckiest. Over and over again in their life he had gone away – not just to London which did not so much matter – but on some diplomatic or semi-secret mission abroad, and usually there had been no letters, or if one were received it was two weeks out of date. And then at any given moment of the night or day she had not known whether he was dead – on some barren hillside or sick in a foreign hospital or

whether he was dead – on some barren island, or sick in a foreign hospital, or enjoying supper with some beautiful girl in Portugal, or being tossed in a Biscay gale . . . or just coming over the moors twenty minutes from home; and in half an hour would be drawing off his boots and smiling at her and all would be well again.

Other women no doubt suffered the same sort of uncertainty, the same sort of deprivation. But perhaps, she thought, other women were able to grow a protective shell as the years went by. Or else they just did not care as much. The Duchess of Wellington must have had an anxious life with the Duke, but although Demelza had never seen them together, from what she heard their lives had in no way resembled hers and Ross's.

Gaston Rougiet was known for his Bonapartist sympathies. What would his attitude be towards this intrusive Englishman? There had been warm smiles and impulsive invitations and visits to the opera – Demelza still remembered the brigadier's admiring glances, his extreme courtesy towards her, his halting attempts to be complimentary to her in a language of which he could only speak a few words. And Mme Rougiet had been almost equally charming. But in the present crisis? *Vive l'Empereur!*

'*Autre Fois le Rat de ville,*' sang Bella, '*Invita le Rat des champs.*'

Was Ross or Rougiet the town or the country rat?

And where was the ominous Duke of Otranto and his creature Tallien? What would she do if they called on her at her apartment today?

At last now there were differences in the streets outside. Normally they hummed with life on a Sunday. Today, though it had stopped raining, nothing stirred. The pools and puddles reflected only hurrying clouds and patches of blue sky, winking, basilisk, cold, lizard-like. Paris was waiting.

Demelza let the curtain fall and moved away from the window, stiff with standing and watching for the man who did not come. She made a half-hearted attempt to play with Henry, who had been clutching at her skirts half an hour ago but had finally abandoned her in disgust. She had asked Mrs Kemp to begin packing – strange, how in so short a time they had already accumulated so many things. There were the clothes she had bought, and the shoes; and skirts and cloaks for Bella; and toys for Harry and Ross's new suit. At any moment a tired horse would come clapping over the cobbles and Ross would be in the room saying: 'I have a carriage, pack what you can, we leave at four.' Or: 'No, there is no reason to panic: we shall sit it out here. Dwight and Caroline will probably be a couple of weeks late, that's all.'

The bell rang. Demelza flew to the window: no horse. Etienne opened the door. Jodie. She had come in her little carriage but had left it round the corner.

She threw off her hat and sank into a chair. Her dyed auburn hair was ruffled

and looked as if it had not been brushed today. But even in distress she was an elegant woman.

‘Ross?’

‘Not yet.’

‘No news? Of course there will be no news until he turns up . . . Demelza, things go worse. I have been round to some of my friends – they all leave: some with just enough to last them three days, certain that by then the crisis will be past and they can return. Others are taking whatever they can, anticipating a new exile. But some have no transport or are too feeble to remove again – they must remain here and depend on the tyrant’s mercy. The King swears he will stay to the end, but I do not know. They found Fouché yesterday and tried to arrest him.’

‘Tried to?’

‘He was recognized in the street not far from his house. Two of the men I used to employ have been watching the district. They send a messenger to the King, who orders his arrest. He is stopped in the street by the police but he insists that a man of his importance must be formally charged in his own house. This they proceeded to do, whereupon he raises a host of technical objections, and while they are arguing these a servant faints, by design. With attention briefly diverted, the good Duke glides inside a moving panel, and when they break it down they find he has gone down a ladder into the garden, climbed a wall and is gone.’

‘So what is to happen now?’

‘. . . Will you do something for me, Demelza?’

‘Of course.’

Mlle de la Blache smiled. ‘My dear, you are too generous with your promises. First hear what it is. When I leave this evening it will be in a coach. But it is not a recognizable coach, and it will be driven by Benoir, who has been my man for ten years and is incorruptible. I will like it to appear to be *your* coach and for me to travel as your companion, as Mme Ettmayer. I do not know how far pickets will be out to arrest such people as myself, but it is likely there will be some. As an Englishwoman travelling with her family – or as an Englishman if Ross returns – you will not be molested. But the de la Blaches are known for their sympathies. And with my record in Paris, I am a special target.’

Demelza was at the window again. ‘To look at the Duke of Otranto you would not think he could be so active as that.’

‘He is fifty-two. Self-preservation is a vital spur.’

Demelza said: ‘I will leave with you as you suggest. Mr Bagot said at the Embassy that the safety of my children must be the first consideration. And that’s true . . . Perhaps even yet Ross will come.’

Jodie said: 'Thank you. I pray he will. Have you paid your servants?'

'No. I do not have much French money – and only a few guineas in English.'

'I'll pay them now. Money is no obstacle. Could I ask you to tell them you are leaving this evening and tell them to go home? I will come for you but I would prefer they did not see me leave with you.'

'Very well.'

'We shall not go until dark. I will send word. I am waiting to hear from Henri.'

The door opened and Bella burst in, holding Henry's hand.

'Has Papa not come yet? *Bonne après-midi, ma'mselle. Comment allez-vous?*'

'Bella,' Demelza said, 'we are leaving Paris this evening. I have told you of the crisis. We will be safer now in England. We are just waiting for Papa.'

'Papa,' said Henry. 'Papa not come yet? No Papa yet? Why is he so long?'

'I wish I knew, my lover,' said his mother. She looked at the gilt clock wagging its admonishing finger on the wall. 'It is dark by seven. I want to delay just as long as possible in case he comes.'

'I will send the word. But – alas – bring only a small bag – as I shall – just your most valued things. What is left should be safe here – though I do not know the mood that will prevail. Perhaps you could leave some things at the Embassy . . .'

Demelza nodded. 'I'll do that as soon as you go . . . Though it is not important – clothes and things – they are not important.'

'One other point, my dear.' Jodie got up. 'If I may ask this of you. If Ross should not turn up, do not leave a note for him telling him what you have done. Just put: *Please go to the Embassy*. Then leave your note of explanation there. It will be safer if no one here could pick it up.'

II

At eight Demelza received the note from Jodie. 'I have just come from the Palace. Bonaparte is forty miles from Paris. I will call for you at 9.30. Give the children a good meal before they leave and make them wear their warmest clothes. Eat something yourself if you can, for it may be a long night. Do not forget that I am your companion, not your friend; it is *your* coach. I trust Ross is with you by now. Ministers are packing up and preparing to leave, but as yet the King remains adamant. When we arrive I will not come up myself but will send Benoir. Be ready if you can.'

Demelza had been to the Embassy again and spoken with Fitzroy Somerset.

The distinguished young soldier looked ill at ease. Known for his liking for hunting and shooting and good food and pretty women – and the stark choices of battle – he gave the impression of being tired of diplomacy and trying to think for the British nationals still left in Paris – several hundred only out of the twenty-one thousand who had been here at the beginning of the month.

‘Of course I will give your message to Ross personally. Try not to worry about him; I have a great respect for his judgement and skill and I’m convinced that you yourself are being wise and prudent to leave while you can.’ He offered her a glass of wine, which she reluctantly accepted. ‘What a man!’

‘Please?’

‘I mean our enemy – Napoleon Bonaparte. One dislikes and detests so much of what the man stands for, but indeed he works miracles. He has been in France only nineteen days and has travelled a distance which would take an ordinary traveller five weeks. They tell me he rides ahead of his troops in a carriage now – well ahead of them and arrives in villages with scarcely more than a half-dozen for escort, and *everyone* welcomes him. Not a shot has been fired, not a spot of blood spilled, and he has reached Fontainebleau! By merely arriving he has electrified the nation, and they worship him.’

‘And the King?’ said Demelza.

‘Louis has only meant well. His is the better case. But Corporal Violet has returned, and there is no stopping him.’ Fitzroy Somerset put down his glass and passed a finger over his bottom lip. ‘Unless we stop him.’

‘That – that will mean war.’

‘Let us hope not, but . . .’ He smiled suddenly as if the prospect of action were more welcome to him than the vacillations of diplomacy. ‘We can only see. Be sure Ross will get your message . . .’

She had written:

Sunday evening

Dearest Ross,

I am still hoping and praying that you’ll not ever have to read this letter, as you will have turned up before I have to go; but in case you do not then this is to say I have been pressed to leave Paris by everyone – by Jodie and Henri, by Fitzroy Somerset and Charles Bagot, by the Daulnay sisters and by Captain Bernard – and I am going for the sake of the children. I have been some worried these last days when you did not return, but if it wasn’t for Bella and Henry I would stay on and on and never go, wishing only to be near you and know you were safe.

But Jodie has offered us a lift in her coach and I have accepted, so if all

goes well, as I pray it will, we shall be in Calais by Wednesday and safely in England sometime on Thursday.

If I hear nothing from you before, I shall go to London and wait news of you there. Jodie says she will lend me money if I need it, but if need be I shall not be afraid to appeal to Lord Liverpool for help.

I have paid off Meurice and Etienne and so I think there are no serious debts in Paris. I have left a few things at the British Embassy that we could not bear home – perhaps someday we shall be able to retrieve them. But have no fear for us. Only take care for yourself. We shall wait in London for you.

Your loving Demelza

In the flat when she returned she left a large printed notice and tacked it on their bedroom door: *Please go to Embassy. All information there.*

III

It was twenty minutes to ten when the coach arrived. There were too many horses clopping for it possibly to be Ross. Benoir was a stockily built middle-aged man with tight-cropped hair and the fanatical black eyes of a Breton. Demelza had seen him about Jodie's house, and he smiled and took the one case they had packed and offered Harry his hand to go down the stairs. Well-fed and thickly clothed, the two children did not seem to mind the new adventure, once they had been reassured that Papa was safe and would soon be following.

The coach was a large black berlin, with two postilions as well as the driver to command the four horses. In spite of its size there would not be much room inside, and Demelza was surprised when she climbed in to find a small elderly tight-faced man sitting beside Jodie.

'This is Sieur Menieres,' said Jodie. 'It was necessary – we thought it necessary – the Palace thought it necessary that he should leave tonight. Unfortunately he speaks no English so I can only translate his apologies for the inconvenience.'

M Menieres broke into a flood of quietly spoken French. He carried in his lap a small black deed box with a heavy padlock. He bowed as well as he could to Demelza and Demelza smiled back, wondering how they could have accommodated her tall bony husband in this confined space.

'We are lucky to have this transport,' Jodie whispered to her. 'The government have put all horses in requisition. We should be out of Paris before midnight. Mme Kemp, are you comfortable? Please, there is more room than this. Bella, come and sit by me and sing to me. It will be perhaps quite a long

ans. Dena, come and sit by me and sing to me. It will be perhaps quite a long night. Are you cold, my dear?’

Demelza had shuddered. ‘No, not cold.’ She held on to her arms inside her cloak to stop the shivering.

The coach creaked into motion, moving slowly out of their street, past the great pillared temple and then along the treed boulevards where Mrs Kemp had so regularly walked the children; then they turned north up the rue du Faubourg Poissonnière towards the St Denis Gate. There was little street lighting at the best of times – comparing unfavourably with London. Specks of cold rain in the wind were falling from full-bellied clouds.

But by this route they avoided most of the narrow streets and tangled alleys of the old town.

‘The King is leaving after all,’ said Jodie, breaking the silence that had fallen inside the coach. ‘He must go within the next few hours if he wishes to escape. He will have with him four companies of bodyguards. They will be commanded by the Prince de Poix. I do not know yet whether Henri has been instructed to go or to stay.’

‘Is Papa really safe?’ asked Isabella-Rose. ‘Have you heard from him? Really heard from him?’

‘No, my lover. We do not know.’

‘Then I cannot sing if he is in danger.’

IV

Once out of the city the land was drenched in darkness. The berlin with its two carriage lamps outside and its one small lantern within seemed an oasis of civilization and luxury in a barren and alien land. They lurched and jolted over the cobbled road and through dark empty villages at a pace not much faster than a walk.

‘We shall spend the night at Bourget,’ said Jodie, pulling her cloak around her. ‘I have made arrangements for Henri to send a message there. We could go further but we could not expect to change horses at this hour. Besides, I wait instructions.’

‘Instructions?’

‘Yes. What road to take and how to proceed.’

‘From?’

‘From the Court. We have to consider M Menieres. But now we are out of Paris I think we shall be safe.’

They reached Bourget two hours later. a long straggling village in

impenetrable darkness. They stopped at the first inn and Benoir hammered at the door. There was no answer. They waited fifteen minutes, and at the fifteenth summons a sleepy stable man came out to say they did not have a single room vacant, but he recommended Le Lion d'Or farther along the street. Jodie was furious, for she had sent word ahead to reserve rooms. The stable man shrugged and shook his head and said everyone was leaving Paris; they had people sleeping on the floor.

Le Lion d'Or was no better, nor La Voile Verte at the end of the village. A fourth ramshackle inn called simply Norbert could offer them one room only with four beds. They took it, and M Menieres and the coachmen agreed to sleep on mattresses in the kitchen.

By now the dozing Henry was fully awake and fretful, as was his older sister. But a magnificent hot soup was conjured up out of nothing and everyone ate of it round a scrubbed white circular kitchen table, and drank comforting red wine. Even the children had a glass or two.

Demelza longed for port, but she drank as much wine as she could to dull the pain of the flight and her worries for Ross. And presently she was dozing off, with Jodie in one bed and Mrs Kemp in the far one and Bella next to her and Harry curled up in a warm ball beside her.

The messenger arrived at seven, having spent an hour searching for them at the other inns. Jodie read the letter he brought.

'The King has got away,' she said. 'He left three hours after we did. He is making for Arras. Then Lille. Some of his ministers remain in Paris. We are directed to make also for the Belgian frontier.'

'But that is not England!' cried Demelza. 'I told Ross we were going direct to England!'

Jodie looked haggard in the morning light; it was as if years of tension were catching up with her. 'I *am* so sorry. I did not know when we leave. I am not altogether my own mistress in this matter. I thought we should make directly for Calais until Sieur Menieres joined us. But it will only be a delay of a day or two. And do you not have a son in Brussels?'

Demelza's knowledge of the relative positions of these French and Belgian towns was not detailed. 'Is that near Lille? I would like to see Jeremy, but the most important thing is that I should be able to get in touch with Ross and he with me. Maybe I could get a coach from Lille to Calais?'

'Let us first see to our present movements.' Mlle de la Blache screwed up her eyes to peer out at the grey daylight. 'I think the rain has stopped. We are much too near Paris as yet. This letter also warns me that some of Bonaparte's Polish lancers are abroad north and east of Paris. I do not know if they have orders to

cut off the King, but it would be bad for us if we were stopped by them. Particularly is it important that M Menieres should not fall into their hands.'

Demelza looked at her two children who were still sleeping. Mrs Kemp had gone downstairs to see if she could find hot water for washing.

'Who is he?' she asked. 'Who is this – this what do you call him – Sieur Menieres?'

Jodie put a hand through her hair. 'He is a lawyer, my dear. Sieur is a legal term. But also – and I suppose you may as well know this since you have been in my confidence in all else – but also he is the King's jeweller.'

Demelza began to fasten her bodice. It was cold in the room; a draught blew under the door, and the windows, though closed, let in the chill air. 'That box he carries and tends so carefully? Is that of special value?'

Jodie sighed. 'It contains most of the crown jewels.'

Chapter Fifteen

I

Ross arrived at Sens at six o'clock on Friday evening, and slept at the inn there. Sens is less than a hundred and twenty kilometres from Paris. This distance took him thirty-two hours to travel.

The heavy rains had turned the roads into a sea of mud; there was an army of twenty thousand men gathered at Melun to bar the progress of the Emperor Napoleon; the countryside was in a state of extreme unrest, undecided how to declare its allegiances; and the diligence broke an axle ten kilometres outside Sens, far, it seemed, from any sort of help or repair. The rain beat down relentlessly.

Everyone waited patiently for two hours, while the coachmen went in search of a replacement axle. One of the coachmen came back to say they had gone as far as Bray and help was promised within the hour. In the meantime they had found a farm only a mile down the road where rest and refreshment could be had while they waited. It was a wet and muddy walk and the two ladies, who were both elderly, made slow and sedentary progress. The priest complained incessantly and the third man, a distinguished-looking lawyer called Hassard, helped Ross to help the women. The farmhouse was huge and draughty and in poor repair, but they had bread and cheese and pots of strong steaming coffee and presently a bottle of plum brandy. So morning turned to afternoon and no coach appeared. The ladies dozed in front of the fire and the priest read his breviary. Hassard paced up and down, stroking his thin silvery imperial.

Ross had no knowledge of the urgencies that beset Paris but he knew that yesterday, soon after he left, Bonaparte would have reached Auxerre and presumably been united with Marshal Ney; and, such had been the speed of his advance so far, that one could not rely on his taking time off to admire the cathedral or the abbey of St Germain. The chances were strongly on his spending the night in the camp at Auxerre – recently vacated by intruders like the Englishman Poldark – and that today he would be on the move again. Which meant that – assuming not unreasonably that the axle of his coach would be in a

meant that – assuming not unreasonably that the axes of his coach would be in a better state to withstand the jolting of the roads – he might by now not be far behind.

In the early afternoon, seeing an old wagon draw up outside the farm, Ross went out to the driver and found that the man was an itinerant pedlar who called this way monthly, offering for sale almost everything: tinder-boxes and metal flints, iron hoops, faggot twigs, skimming pans and sabots, tippets made of rabbit skin, and woollen stockings. His accent was so thick Ross could hardly understand him, but he eventually worked out that the man lived in Melun and hoped to reach there before nightfall. There was just room on the front seat beside the driver, and the hood over the front of the wagon, like a woman's bonnet, gave protection from the rain. When the wagon left Ross left with it.

A dismal journey and a cold one, for the rain came from the north. From Angletierre, as Joseph ironically pointed out. In taking the lift Ross had known that this would not be a direct journey; other farmhouses had to be serviced; but he hadn't estimated the length of each visit and the bargaining that went on before the smallest piece of merchandise changed hands. But having accepted this form of travel he had no chance of changing it. What did buoy him up was Joseph's cautious statement that he could find him somewhere to sleep tonight and that Joseph's son had a horse he would be prepared to hire out or sell.

Dusk was not far away as they neared Melun, and here the roads were crowded with troops, many of them bivouacked beside the roads, some still plodding through the mud or trying to cook in the shelter of leafless trees; others with horses pulling artillery into position; officers riding up and down, or more often clustered in anxious consultation wherever rising ground gave them a better view of the way ahead. Regimental bands were playing. This was the last line of defence. Tomorrow would decide the battle for the soul of France.

Full dark by the time they reached Joseph's cottage, where his slovenly wife was not pleased to see a guest. However, Joseph said he had a cousin in the next lane who could provide a meal and a bed, and if he came round in the morning he would find him a horse.

Ross was escorted to a slightly larger cottage where Joseph's cousin, evil smelling and pock-marked, leered an insincere welcome. But the food was passable and the bed smelt only of mice. Ross dozed throughout the night. His ankle was paining again and he lay with his purse looped under his arm where it could not be detached.

In the morning the rain had stopped. Joseph greeted him with the news that Bonaparte was at Fontainebleau – eighteen kilometres distant – so the battle was imminent. Unfortunately, his son had gone into Nangis yesterday and had not yet returned; so no horse was available. But he could be returning at any moment

returned, so no horse was available. But he could be returning at any moment. This emergency, this crisis, the return of the Emperor, the little corporal, the father of them all – it was to be expected that life should be disorganized. Joseph had fought in the early campaigns, the great, the victorious campaigns of Marengo and Austerlitz, been invalided out, had this comfortable little living in Melun. His work took him away from home just enough not to be under the thumb of his wife – it was not as good as being in the Grande Armée, but it was agreeable.

The son did not return until midday. He was a shabby but good-looking young man, his face hectic with excitement.

‘There is no battle! All was prepared, all the artillery at the ready, all the cavalry waiting to charge, and suddenly before them appeared an open carriage, with Bonaparte sitting in it and a small escort of cavalry. And the cavalry dismounted and embraced their old friends in the waiting army, and then it was all *Vive Napoleon! Vive Napoleon!* The whole army has gone over to him!’

It was an old moth-eaten nag, but it bore Ross towards Paris. Nothing now stood between the Emperor and his capital except a few hours of waiting. Ross knew what he had to do: pick up his wife and children and, as Bonaparte entered Paris by one gate, leave by another. He had discharged his mission as far as he had been able, and it was no fault of his if events had cut his visit short.

It was a pity, for he had been enjoying his time: the stimulus of meeting so many people, most of them French officers, the struggle with the unfamiliar language at which he was every day becoming more adept, the challenge of fresh minds and outlooks, the trips out of Paris and the social life of Paris, they had all suited his restless inquiring nature. And Demelza, he knew, had also been relishing the experience. He enjoyed seeing her admired – especially for her liveliness and freshness and naturalness – by women as well as men. And the new gowns they had bought brought out her charm and good looks. It amused him when people thought her his second wife. And Bella had got over her calf-love affair with Havergal and was learning all the time from her stay. And Mrs Kemp and Henry had come to no harm at all.

A great disappointment not to spend Easter in Paris with the Enyses and Jeremy and Cuby. It would have been a lovely week for them all. But the one-time master of Europe was loose again, and all other plans had to be shelved until he was put back on Elba.

He crossed the Seine and entered Paris from the direction of Charenton. It meant traversing some of the old part of the city, and he noticed how quiet it was for a Monday afternoon. Shops were shuttered but cafés were crowded. Already a few tricolour flags were out; in several places he saw tradesmen taking down

the royal signs and putting up the bees and eagles of the Empire. In the squares men stood on tables haranguing the people who passed by. A group of workmen were sitting on benches chanting '*Vive l'Empereur*'.

Demelza must be worried by his late return, and though he had eaten nothing since breakfast he pressed on and reached the rue de la Ville l'Evêque at four. He looped the reins of his tired horse over a hitching post and went up the stairs three at a time. The door of the apartment was locked and no one came in answer to his knocking. Half irritably, half anxiously, he fumbled his key out of his purse and let himself in.

The windows were shuttered and no fires burned. He saw the notice.

Downstairs. 'Sorry, my friend,' he said to the old horse grimly. 'A few streets more.'

The tall outer doors of the Embassy leading to the courtyard were shut and bolted and looked as if they could repel all strangers; but after he had dismounted he detected a movement in a curtain at an upper window above the stables. He was not in a mood for the delicate approach and presently, in answer to his vigorous pealing of the bell, one of the doors was reluctantly opened. The guard led him across to the front door of the Embassy and an under-secretary let him in. He read Demelza's letter while he was taking some soup and a glass of wine, and Fitzroy Somerset stood, back to fire, watching him.

'I advised her to go. Everyone advised her to go. The attitude of Bonaparte to aliens, particularly to the English, is unpredictable. It would have been an impossible situation had your family been interned.'

Ross nodded, reading the letter through again. 'What time did they leave?'

'Late last night. Or it may have been early this morning. The other consideration was transport. We have no horses here, and if Demelza had not gone with Mlle de la Blache she might have been stranded until too late.'

'Yes, I see.'

'And you?'

'I? I have a flea-bitten nag which may carry me a few miles more.'

'And money to buy a change when you need one?'

'Enough.'

'Then I'd advise you to go. Tonight if possible. Napoleon can enter now in his own good time. If the worst comes to the worst we could offer you sanctuary here. But if you have a horse and it will carry you I would advise you to use it.'

Ross finished his wine. 'The nag must be fed. That will take more than an hour. Did Mlle de la Blache give any idea of the route she would be taking?'

'I did not see her. Probably the ordinary coach road to Calais.'

'I might catch them up. Though not, I think, on this nag.'

Fitzroy Somerset came away from the fire. 'It's a sorry situation. I wonder what the Duke will think of it.'

'That he has his war to fight over again,' said Ross.

'I cannot imagine him staying long in Vienna. You know that the Allied Powers have declared Napoleon an outlaw? Unless he can persuade them to rescind that declaration it must mean war . . . But all his – all the Duke's great Peninsular army is dispersed – some of it in America, much of it disbanded! If it comes to a battle he can only command a motley collection of armies and men.'

'What shall you do?'

'I?' said Somerset. 'I shall get out of here as soon as I diplomatically can. I want no more ambassadorial tasks! I shall rejoin the army wherever it is and whenever I am permitted.'

II

Ross took the horse back to the mews behind his apartment and left it to be fed and watered and rested. He could not decently expect the beast to be ready for another couple of hours.

Then he went upstairs, but the rooms were cold and empty. He opened one or two drawers, seeing that most of his own clothes had been left and quite a few things belonging to Demelza and the children. So they had been travelling light. Then, unable to contain his patience, he went out again and walked to the de la Blache residence, which was only about half a mile away, on the rue d'Antin.

The door of the *porte cochère* was ajar, and he strode in, crossed the courtyard and knocked at the inner door. It took some minutes of perseverance before there was movement, and then the door opened two inches, clacking on the chain.

'Mme Victoire.' It was Jodie's rather saturnine housekeeper.

'*Oui, monsieur?*' She recognized him, of course.

'Your mistress, Mlle de la Blache – she has gone?'

'Oh, yes, monsieur. *Hier soir.*'

'At what time did she leave?'

The housekeeper shrugged. '*Neuf heures – neuf heures et demie.* I do not remember exact.' As he still stood there she reluctantly unhooked the chain and he followed her into the hall. The place was in great disorder.

'Has someone else been here since she left?'

'Three men from the *Service de Sûreté*. I am here alone now except for Marcel, who is nearly blind.'

'What did the men want?'

‘They would not say, except that they wished to interview Mlle de la Blache.’

Ross glanced around. ‘My wife and children, as I’m sure you know, travelled with Mlle de la Blache when she left. Did she give you any details of the route they would take?’

Victoire’s sullen face showed a glint of surprise. ‘Monsieur? Oh no, monsieur. Lady Poldark and her children were not in the coach. Madame left with one gentleman only.’

Ross stared. ‘But I have my wife’s letter here saying Mlle de la Blache was taking her with her! And the children.’

‘I heard nothing of this, monsieur. And it was talked of freely in my presence. I saw them go. They left, just the two of them, in madame’s berlin. I watched them to the end of the street and then came in and locked up and went to bed.’

Ross continued to stare at Victoire. She had no charm but her honesty was evident.

‘Who was this man who went with your mistress?’

‘Sieur Menieres. He is a known figure at Court and I have seen him here before. It was decided only a few hours before they left. A message came from the Palace requesting that madame should take Sieur Menieres with her. Perhaps that led to a change of plan. But I never heard Lady Poldark’s name mentioned. Perhaps some friend of madame’s was able to oblige her. Madame de Maisonneuve perhaps, or Madame d’Henin. Everyone has left who could leave. Those remaining must look forward to resigning themselves to submission to the tyrant.’

‘But I have it in my letter . . .’ Ross stopped. There was no point in continuing to argue. ‘Did these men – these men from the police – ask you where Mlle de la Blache had gone?’

‘Naturally. I said she had left Paris. I did not know how or with whom or where she was going. I said I was not in madame’s confidence.’

Outside darkness was falling. Ross began to walk back to the apartment. His ankle was not as painful as yesterday. Perhaps it meant the wet weather was over.

So if he picked up his horse and went off, what then? Demelza and the children must have left somehow, otherwise they would be in the apartment. There could have been some sudden change of plan. Ross knew Madame d’Henin slightly but had never heard of Madame de Maisonneuve. Useless to return to the Embassy. What of Henri de la Blache? With the King gone and the resistance before Melun a débâcle, Henri might well be back in the Tuileries, superintending the evacuation of the Palace. Worth a try? It was no more than half a mile out of the way.

Ross approached the Palace from the rue de Richelieu. The streets were still

Ross approached the Palace from the rue de Richelieu. The streets were still very quiet and deserted, but as he neared the courtyard of the Carrousel he could hear the murmur of voices, and soon he was threading his way through a great throng of people, many of them soldiers, who talked and muttered and stamped their feet and stood in groups smoking.

He got virtually to the steps of the Palace before he realized what they were waiting for. A great shout went up in the distance and travelled towards him in diminishing waves like a Cornish sea. The cause of the shouting was coming nearer, bringing the sound with him. There were lights all over the Palace now, windows thrown up and candles guttering.

An open coach was approaching. Surrounding it was a glittering cavalcade of mounted men but not proceeding in the dignity of a formal cavalry procession; most of them had drawn swords and were waving them triumphantly in the air, and they were all shouting at the top of their voices. It was quite clear what they were shouting.

The carriage creaked to a stop. The coachmen jumped down. People appeared in the doorway of the Palace, waving and bowing. A score of the mounted men jumped from their horses and rushed towards the carriage. A small stocky man stood up in the carriage and raised his arm in languid welcome. He was engulfed, and after a few seconds reappeared on the shoulders of his followers. Everyone round Ross was shouting as if demented.

The stocky man was carried across the courtyard to the open door of the Palace. He was put down and assisted up the steps and, after waving a couple of times, disappeared inside. He seemed to Ross to be quietly, confidently smiling.

Chapter Sixteen

I

The berlin left Bourget at eight on the morning of the 20th and took the road for Senlis. They hoped to be in St Quentin before dark.

Jodie said: 'I do not think Ross will ever forgive me for allowing his wife and children to become involved in French politics, but believe me when I ask you to come with me I have your good at heart.'

'Well, yes.'

'Your good but also my safety – I have to admit that. But I had no idea in the world that I shall be asked to take M Menieres.'

Demelza peered out at the slow-moving countryside. A sword of sun lit up the muffled clouds, promising at last a fine day. Bella was playing snap with Henry. M Menieres sat upright in his corner, his deed box on his knee. Mrs Kemp, who said she had not slept a wink, dozed in her corner and was unlikely to pick up the whispered conversation of the women opposite.

'When it was realized at last that Bonaparte was likely to take Paris, there were two objects it seemed essential he should not capture – the King and the crown jewels. King Louis might well be used as a hostage, though there are some who think he might also be an embarrassment. But there are no two opinions about the value to Bonaparte of the crown jewels. Once before he pledged them to finance a campaign: he could do so again.'

'*Autre Fois le Rat de ville,*' Bella hummed, forgetting her depression about her father, '*Invita le Rat des champs.*'

'This', said Jodie, 'is what you may call the meditated risk. If the King is betrayed and captured, the jewels will have fallen into Bonaparte's hands as well. We still do not know and shall not know if the King is safe yet, but it seemed to Henri and others that it was wiser to slip the jewels out unobtrusively and so divide the hazard. Time will show if this is wise.'

Silence then in the coach except for Bella and Henry in their corner. The countryside looked desolate and cold and deserted. The houses they passed were shuttered and silent, no one worked in the fields. Jodie said: 'Every one who is

shuttered and silent, no one worked in the fields. Jodie said: 'Everyone who is loyal has fled to save their loyalty. Those who favour the Emperor have rushed in to Paris to greet him. I wish these horses would go faster!'

They reached Senlis in the middle of the morning and all got down and stretched their legs and took light refreshment while the horses were changed. At least the innkeeper was there – a sullen man with the inevitable pock marks – and one ostler who saw to the horses. Here the pretence was kept up of this being Lady Poldark's coach and Mme Etmayer her companion, M Reynard her clerk. The innkeeper waited on them himself and disclaimed knowledge of where the rest of his staff had gone. Pretending that the inquiries were coming from her mistress, Jodie asked after the health and whereabouts of three friends of hers who lived in substantial houses in Senlis, but they were all gone. The houses were shuttered and empty. The coach set out again on its next stage, to Estrées-St-Denis, where they had dinner and the horses were changed again.

Soon after leaving this little town the carriage creaked to a stop and Benoir jumped down and tapped on the window.

'A troop of cavalry is approaching, madame. Do not draw the blinds for that will attract attention. But I would suggest that the children are given prominence at the windows.'

'Can you not see who they are?'

'Not yet. But I have a suspicion they are the Emperor's men.' He was gone.

The coach went on its way. Above all the customary noises of their own horses, the clink and rattle of the coach, the rumble of the wheels, there could presently be heard the peculiar multiple sounds of many horses approaching. It was a bobbling, gurgling, clopping sound, and the children needed no urging to press their faces to the windows. Sieur Menieres drew back, trying to persuade the shadows to swallow him. The berlin slowed to a stop and drew in at the side of the road. A company of horsemen went past – about twenty – overtaking them, going the same way as themselves. The fleeting sun glinted on helmets and breastplates and sabre hilts. The leader called something to Benoir and he replied, but they did not stop. Bella lowered the window and put her head out to watch them go.

After a minute Sieur Menieres came out of the shadows and said something to Jodie. Jodie said to Demelza: 'Polish lancers from Napoleon's guard.'

II

They did not reach St Quentin as planned but spent the night at Roye. When they stopped for refreshments about five o'clock a traveller coming from the other direction

stopped for refreshments about five, a traveller coming from the other direction told them that all persons attempting to enter St Quentin had their passports scrutinized, and there were long delays because the police were not accepting as valid passports issued by the royalist government of Paris: a new permission had to be obtained.

One advantage of Roye was that Jodie knew the *maire* and when he was finally located he proved overwhelmingly helpful. Bedrooms with an adjoining sitting-room were found at the leading inn and M Sujet said that if they would stay there he would obtain valid passports for them by the morning. The innkeeper too was an ardent royalist and soon saw through the pretence of Lady Poldark being the owner of the coach, though with great delicacy he asked nothing except to give them the best meal his hostel could provide.

They had not been in the inn ten minutes before Isabella-Rose discovered a small dusty harpsichord in one of the downstairs rooms. She had not been able to touch a musical instrument for more than two months, and she besought her mother to ask permission that she should try it. Demelza was very tired with the journey, and tired too of facing the endless self-criticism as to whether she had done the right thing leaving Paris without Ross. She said impatiently: 'In the morning, in the morning,' but Bella the irrepressible went down and by means of sign language and a few halting words got the innkeeper's agreement. Soon the sounds of the old harpsichord, played to Demelza's surprise with becoming delicacy, floated up from below.

Supper was served upstairs in their sitting-room – so many flavours that Demelza although she was not hungry found herself eating everything that was put before her, so that her stays grew tight. It was still only nine o'clock but everyone was ready for bed. And then there was a peculiar noise outside the inn and M Menieres moved quickly to the window. Jodie followed him.

'It is the lancers,' she said.

A maid came in to clear the supper table and another to make up the fire. Among the clink of dishes and the rattle of coals new voices could be heard. As the maids left, the second one leaving the door ajar, heavy footsteps sounded on the stairs. There was a polite tap on the door.

'*Oui?*' said Demelza.

The innkeeper half entered with an apologetic bow. Behind him two men in scarlet uniforms with silver breastplates were made to look even more formidable by the tall brimless sheepskin hats they wore. One, the senior officer, was very blond with the palest blue eyes Demelza had ever seen and a pallid complexion; the second was brown haired and moustached and dark eyed and alert.

The senior officer bowed to Demelza in a manner that suggested he

The Polish officer bowed to Demelza in a manner that suggested he appreciated her good looks and spoke to her in rapid but halting French.

She turned to Jodie, who said respectfully: 'The officer, ma'am, says he is under the command of Colonel Baron Termanovski. He requests that you tell him the purpose of your journey and where you are bound for.'

Demelza said: 'Tell him I am English, my name is Lady Poldark and that I am returning with my children and servants to England.'

Another interchange. 'The officer asks if you have a husband?'

'Tell him my husband has – has remained in Paris but he thought I should return to England.'

'He asks why?'

'Tell him that with a new régime in France he thought it safer for us.'

'The officer says you are in no danger. Bonaparte does not make war on women and children.'

'Pray thank him. But does he not sometimes intern them?'

'I'll not pass that on,' said Jodie. '*Nous vous remercions, monsieur. Pour tout.*'

The Polish officer was still appreciating Demelza. He looked as if he would not have minded breaking Bonaparte's undertaking. After a moment the dark man said something to the officer, who spoke again.

'He asks to see our passports, madame.'

'Do we tell him the truth?'

'Yes.'

'Tell the officer that they were – they have been issued – been made out of date by the changes in France and that the Mayor of Roye has taken them away to get them reissued.'

'Very good,' said Jodie before she passed on the message.

The fair man was looking round the room. Mrs Kemp was perched stiffly in a corner with the sleepy Henry on her knee. Sieur Menieres was sitting in front of the fire reading an old copy of *Moniteur*. A corner of one of the pages was shaking slightly. Bella was nowhere to be seen.

'*Qui est-ce?*' asked the Pole, pointing at Menieres.

Demelza did not wait for the next translation. 'He is M Reynard, my husband's secretary, who is accompanying us to England.'

After translating this Jodie took up the next question.

'He asks why we have come as far east as Roye if we are going to England. May I suggest, madame, that I tell him we are taking this route to avoid all the other coaches making for Calais?'

'Please do.'

The Pole laughed, showing white, wolfish teeth, and said something in his

own language to his companion who shrugged his shoulders and did not join in the joke. The officer strolled slowly round the room and peered at the dozing Henry. By pointing he asked if he were Demelza's child. Demelza nodded and permitted herself a slight smile.

'*Mes compliments.*' He went round and looked at Menieres, who was still pretending to read the paper, then pointed to the small black deed box.

'What is that?'

Sieur Menieres did not move.

Demelza said: 'Tell him it belongs to my husband – just some of his private papers and small personal belongings.'

'It is locked. Pray unlock it.'

Menieres turned over his newspaper.

Demelza said: 'Tell him I do not have a key. Only my husband has the key.'

'Surely your secretary has a key.'

'Tell him no. Only my husband has the key.'

The fair Pole hesitated. He was clearly debating whether to break the padlock but he was not willing to risk damaging the point of his sword. He said something to the sergeant, who turned to the fireplace and picked up the poker. He tried it on the padlock but the end was too blunt to go in and give him leverage.

Demelza said: 'Pray ask the officer what right he has to break into my husband's private property? Did he not say that women and children had nothing to fear?'

The officer looked at her with his pale eyes and half smiled, licked his lips lasciviously. He shrugged and smiled again while the other man tried to get the end of the fire tongs into the padlock.

Just then, through the open door, came the sound of music from downstairs. But it was not being played with the restraint and tentative touch noticeable before supper. So far as any weight could be brought to bear on the poor old instrument it was being applied. And then a girl began to sing – in the powerful musical-unmusical voice that only Isabella-Rose could produce.

But what was she singing? Not the genteel cadences of the little song about the country rat and the town rat. It was the song first called *Chant de l'Armée du Rhin* but long since adopted as the national anthem of revolution and republicanism, the song that Etienne, the unrepentant Jacobin, had taught her.

Aux armes, citoyens!

Formez vos bataillons!

Marchons! marchons,

Qu 'un sang impur
Abreuve nos sillons.

The two Poles had stopped to listen, and an appreciative grin crossed their faces when they heard men's voices joining in. They talked together in their own language. It seemed there was a difference of opinion between them. Then the fair officer spoke curtly to his subordinate, ending the matter. He turned again and looked at the two women standing in a defensive attitude before him. The dark man put down the fire tongs, brushed his uniform, and left the room.

The officer said something to Jodie but it was in Polish. Then he bowed to Demelza once again and followed the other man out, shutting the door behind him.

III

In the room when they had gone no one spoke. Then Sieur Menieres put down his paper and began to shiver as if with a shaking palsy. Jodie sharply rounded on him, hissing at him to pull himself together. Then she turned to Demelza.

'You were *magnifique* – superb!'

Demelza brushed the compliment aside. 'Bella!' she said. 'She's down there. Judas God, what a thing for her to do! The *danger*—'

'Heaven bless her,' said Jodie. 'I think she may have saved us! Leave her, my dear. So long as she continues to play the *clavecin*—'

'No! Those are *soldiers*! And Poles! How do I *know*?' Dreadful possibilities were raging through Demelza's mind. She tore herself away from Jodie's hands, grabbed the poker and went to the door, flinging it open. Jodie ran after her, grasping her arm again.

'Pray go slow. If we draw their attention again . . .'

She could have saved her breath. Demelza was out on the landing. There she stopped and knelt, peering through the bars of the banister. From here you could just see into the room where the harpsichord was and Bella sitting at it. At least you could see a curl of black hair, a bow of ribbon, part of a slim adolescent back – all the rest was blocked off by the broad shoulders of soldiers.

Jodie came and knelt beside Demelza, put a restraining hand on her hand again.

The singing went on for about five minutes which to the watcher upstairs seemed an hour. Then the pale-eyed officer issued a sharp order and the men round the harpsichord broke up and a smiling Bella emerged from among the

group, as yet unscathed.

The men chatted among themselves and one or two said suggestive things that made the others laugh. But one by one they downed their mugs and put on their tall hats, hitched up their belts and moved away. Outside presently there was the clatter and clink of horses as they swung up into their saddles. At a word of command silence fell, and at another word the cavalcade of twenty horsemen moved slowly off, clopping and stumbling over the pebbled street in the direction of Amiens.

Bella made a move back to the harpsichord and then, startled, saw her mother's fiery face peering over the banisters. She bounced lightly up, three steps at a time. Demelza resisted a temptation to hit her.

'Wasn't that fun, Mama! Wasn't that fun! And – and d'ye know – they all kissed me!'

'I noticed it,' said Demelza.

Chapter Seventeen

I

After witnessing the arrival at the Tuileries Ross walked back to the apartment. Last night he had spent dozing and starting awake, aware of the armies behind him, anxious to get back to Paris. It had been rest more than sleep. Despite his strong frame and physically good constitution, he was heavy with fatigue and thwarted by a fierce perplexity.

It seemed unlikely that Demelza could have left in Jodie's carriage without Victoire having some knowledge of it. Yet if she had gone with someone else, why had she not left a later note in the apartment? They were not here, they were gone, that was the only concrete fact. By what gate, by what route, in whose carriage there was no way of knowing.

And no one to ask. The doors of the British Embassy were bolted and barred as if expecting a siege. What purpose to trek back there and rouse everybody to be told over again: 'We are sure they are safely away. Go you likewise.'

Henri de la Blache had also disappeared. Hopeless to march into the Palace – even if one were allowed – looking for one of the most ardent of the Bourbon camp. Perhaps he was dead, making a last defiant gesture. Though there had been virtually no fighting. The revolution had taken place like a change of wind, like an act outside human control. Henri could well be under arrest; or perhaps he was just mingling unnoticed with the crowd. How pick out culprits when half Paris was in the streets?

In a few days, when things were settling down, when the new régime had gathered up the reins of office, then might come the reckoning.

Certainly nobody would be interested at present in the whereabouts of Sir Ross Poldark, a Cornish mine owner and mine captain elevated above his true importance and much against his inclinations.

Apart from the soup at the Embassy, he had eaten nothing since breakfast, and he was hungry as well as tired.

There was not much to eat in the apartment, but he found a *flûte* of bread,

some butter and a piece of Brie, and began to wolf them down. The bread, being yesterday's, had lost all that crisp lightness which makes it the best bread in the world to eat new, but the cheese was just coming ripe and beginning to run. A bottle of red wine was unopened, and he drank it in thirsty gulps.

He thought again of the undeserved importance people had tried to thrust upon him. They had tried to persuade him to become a magistrate years and years ago. That chap Ralph-Allen Daniel at Trelissick, back in about '94. He had refused – one of the few sensible decisions of his life: said he wasn't prepared to sit in judgement on his fellow men – so they'd given the job to George Warleggan, who had relished it, no doubt still did. Sending lads to be transported for stealing a rabbit. It suited him.

Then no sooner had he turned that down than they were inviting him to stand for Parliament. First Sir Francis Basset, then Lord Falmouth. Falmouth hadn't chosen him for his high abilities or beautiful nature. It had suited his book because in a petty revolution in the rotten borough of Truro George Warleggan had succeeded in ousting his candidate, and Falmouth, bent on the earliest possible retaliations, had seen Ross as the only man with sufficient popularity among the twenty electors likely to succeed in regaining the seat.

So, that was one side. (Ross drank the last of the wine and reached for a half-used bottle on the next table.) The other side was, having refused to be made a *JP*, why had he been willing to be elected an *MP*? Chiefly because of Demelza's defection, her infatuation with the young sailor-poet Hugh Armitage, her unfaithfulness in thought – and he suspected deed – her straying away from him in sympathy and understanding and compassion and love. God, how it had hurt at the time! It had burned in him like an acid, corroding the linings of his stomach and heart. The effects of it, even after Hugh's death, had gone on for years.

Perhaps it had been salutary in a way to discover how much, among all the thousands of women in the world, he depended upon one woman for his happiness – and she something he had picked up casually as a starving brat, barefoot and ragged and with lice in her hair, to work in his house and kitchen. And for so long the other shadow on their lives had been the existence of his first love, Elizabeth, to whom once he had been deeply, it seemed irretrievably, attached. Now she was indeed a shadow, a shade, like Hugh Armitage, long gone, long dead; yet thoughts of them both still brought pain, a dull reminiscent glow among the ashes.

He finished the cheese and looked around. There was nothing more. He yawned, with a terrible sense of lassitude. If he left now, where would he go? He did not feel like another night in a cottage with his purse wedged under his arm.

At least Demelza and the children must now be safely out of Paris and therefore out of any danger from civil war or Bonaparte's malice. He could not help them by following, because he could only guess at their route. The sun rose about six. Day would be breaking soon after five. If he slept now, rose at four, it would give his nag a longer rest as well as himself. There was no knowing how scarce horses would be on the routes to Calais, but if this animal were cosseted and conserved it might even see him all the way. Once Napoleon was in command of Paris his first task would be to appoint a cabinet, and it would take days to draw up the new Constitution he had promised. Then there would be plenty of provincial problems to deal with. Bordeaux was traditionally royalist, and others of the smaller cities. North of Paris, apart from Lille to the east, there was no town of importance, certainly nothing to demand his early attention.

Ross went into their bedroom and took off his clothes for the first time for two days. They had been wet and had dried and been wet and had dried again. He put on an old dressing-gown and lay down on the bed.

For a few moments his thoughts continued on the lines they had been following over supper. After he became an MP he had gone on a number of overseas missions, some of minor importance, some, it seemed to him in retrospect, of no importance at all. He had neglected his mines and his farm, and to some extent his wife and family. Had he stayed in Cornwall all the time, with his banking and mining connections, he would by now have been a rich man. Finally – or finally so far – he had been over-cajoled into taking a title he didn't want and didn't deserve.

What would his father have said? 'What are you taking that for, boy? Poldarks don't need handles. We're as good as any just as we are.'

And his mother? His beloved, dark-haired mother who had died so young that even his memory of her face had faded. She might have said different. Like Demelza, she might have been glad he had taken it. But women, as Caroline had said, were like that.

But now, finally, his mission, though it had been developing well, had been aborted by events. Who wanted to know the temper and inclinations of the French army when in three weeks they had made their temper and their inclinations brilliantly, abundantly clear?

Suppose he went to see Prinny and said: 'The purposes for which I accepted this title just haven't come to any good, Your Highness. How about taking it back?'

At this stage he went to sleep.

He was normally a good but a very light sleeper. If he set himself to sleep for five or six hours he would waken easily within the time. But he had reckoned without the long dragging fatigue of the last few days and the effect of a bottle and a half of wine.

When he woke it was full daylight and someone was knocking on the door.

He got up, stopped to pull on his breeches and a shirt, redonned his dressing-gown and went to the door.

Two gendarmes stood there and behind them a man in a civilian suit.

‘Sir Ross Poldark?’ this man said.

‘Yes?’

‘May we enter?’ This in English.

Ross stood aside without comment. He was afraid it was something to do with Demelza. They came in.

Then the civilian produced a document. ‘We have a warrant for your arrest.’

There was another man on the landing but he was holding back.

Ross looked out of the window. It was a fine day, with a hint of cold sun.

‘On what grounds?’

‘On spying for the Bourbon cause.’

‘This is nonsense. I am an English soldier attached to the Embassy.’

‘I know, sir, what you pretend to be. If we are wrong no doubt there will be a full apology for our mistake. But that can all come out before an examining magistrate.’

Ross rubbed his chin, which had not been shaved for two days.

‘I am attached to the Embassy. I claim diplomatic immunity.’

‘Well, sir, if you were in the Embassy it would be an arguable case. But here you are on French soil.’

Ross cursed his own lack of sense in yielding to fatigue last night. But this could not be much. An attendance in some court – the matter would soon be disposed of.

‘Allow me to dress.’

‘Certainly, sir.’

There was another step at the door. It was the fourth man. Jean-Lambert Tallien. In the morning light he looked as yellow as a well-worn guinea. He had taken off his eye-patch, and the defective eye looked downcast at the floor.

‘Good morning, Sir Ross.’

‘M Tallien.’

‘I am sorry to find you in this situation.’

‘I am sorry to find you in this situation,’ said Ross.

'I am sorry that I had forgotten you,' said Ross.

'Yes.' Tallien nodded. 'Quite so. To forget me was not wisely done.'

BOOK TWO

Chapter One

I

April is a wayward month – so often all the burgeoning blossoming greenery is savaged by cold and angry winds – but April 1815 turned out to be a pleasant gentle time in Cornwall, with sighing breezes and rare warm showers. All the countryside was benign. Most of the trees were still black, unwilling to expose their foliage before it was safe, but the hedgerows were rampant. The Cornish hedge which was going to surround the new Carrington house was multi-coloured with tiny flowers, and the fields were yellow with celandines and dandelions.

The house was to be built of granite and killas and roofed with Delabole slate. It was to be of an unusual shape, worked out between Clowance and Stephen with Mr Jago's co-operation. You would go in at the side, through a porch with granite pillars and a slate roof, into a longish hall with stairs leading up to the bedrooms. Off to the left would be two doors, to the parlour and to the dining-room; both of these would be square lofty rooms with bow windows, so that from both rooms you had the best possible view over the sloping fields and the clustered elms to Falmouth Bay. When they could afford it they would have a terrace built with a balustrade so that on fine evenings they could stroll out and watch the gulls circling and the ships dressing and undressing their sails.

In the fine weather Clowance divided her time between the house, which was now waist high, and the boats. With three vessels in service, there was nearly always one in the harbour, loading or unloading or receiving orders or in for some minor repair. In April she had gone across twice with Stephen in the *Adolphus* with a cargo of slate to Dieppe, and as the summer advanced she was looking forward to more such trips, which were exciting and stimulating. Like her mother, she had never been to France before, and like her mother had begun taking lessons in French. This was so much more fun than the social life of Penryn and Flushing, sewing and needlework, quadrille parties, or reading a borrowed copy of the *Spectator*.

But events had taken an ugly turn. In mid-March Harriet had shown her a leader in *The Times* which began: 'Early yesterday morning we received by express from Dover the important but lamentable intelligence of a civil war having again been kindled in France by that wretch Bonaparte, whose life was so impolitically spared by the Allied sovereigns. It now appears that the hypocritical villain, who, at the time of his cowardly abdication, affected an aversion to the shedding of blood in a civil warfare, has been employed during the whole time of his residence at Elba, in carrying on secret and treasonable intrigues to facilitate his own escape and return to claim the Empire that once was his.'

Local papers soon became more explicit, and Clowance began to worry about the safety of her family. The Enyses, she knew, had gone also. It was not until mid-April that a letter from her mother reached her.

Dearest Clowance,

Alas I have poor news for you. As you will know, Napoleon took over Paris and most of France on the 20th and 21st of March. Your father was visiting an army camp in Auxerre and appears to have been taken prisoner by the French, though on what pretext we know not. I left Paris, very reluctant, but because of Bella and Harry. I was offered a lift in one of the last coaches to leave, all the ladies had left the embassy a week before and it was nigh impossible to find horses. I thought my coach, which belonged to Mlle de la Blache – I suppose you will remember us speaking of Charles de Sombreuil, they were engaged to marry at one time. But I thought she was going to Calais, and I was intending to wait for your father in London. Instead, after many scares and trials, we have reached Brussels, and I write from there now.

Jeremy and Cuby have been real good and for the first night we all five slept in their tiny apartment. Now we are staying at the Hotel des Anglais. I wrote to the Cornish Bank and they will send a draft.

I know nothing of your father – where he is or how he fares, and you may understand how worried to death I am. Jeremy and Cuby have been trying to encourage me to go out with them and mix in some of their society – it is a lot English – but I have not the heart. Bella sometimes goes.

The Duke of Wellington is expected here shortly; I think next Tuesday or Wednesday. We have seen nothing of Jeremy for the last three days as he has been away at a place called Ninove, where some of the army is stationed. It is said that the Duke of Wellington does not think there will be a war – instead a sort of compromise – is that the word? – since Bonaparte has come back preaching peace and liberalism. Pray Heaven his liberalism will result in him

releasing your father.

I have not heard of Dwight and Caroline and their children, I do not know if they had already reached France before the change of government, it was a sorry Easter, when it should have been such a happy one. At least I have seen Jeremy and got to know Cuby better. That, at least, is something that has gone well. They live for each other, and they are both worth living for.

The Bourbons are not at all popular in Belgium, nor is their new ruler, the Prince of Orange. Jeremy says many of them would prefer to be under the rub of the French!

Next week we shall leave for London. I feel I shall hear any news more quickly there, and I can knock on Lord Liverpool's door and ask him how he can get a prisoner released!

My dearest love to you both from Jeremy, Cuby, Isabella-Rose, Henry, and your loving Mother, D. Love from Mrs Kemp too. She has been stalwart and steadfast in all things.

PS Monday. Have just heard from Lord Fitzroy Somerset, who was not permitted to leave Paris until the 26th. He writes me from Ostend on the 30th to say that news of your father reached him through the Duke of Otranto, who says he is being 'temporarily detained and questioned', but that he is not in prison, simply in 'guarded custody'. I hope for the best but the Duke is an evil man whom your father did not hide his dislike of, and he is now the Chief of Police. But your father has done nothing wrong, and I do not see on what grounds they can hold him.

PPS Can you send this letter to Nampara so that the Gimletts may see it? Or go yourself if that is convenient. I am writing to them separately in a day or so, but my pen runs quickly dry on such a subject.

When she put it to Stephen he said: 'Go if ye have the mind. Why not?'

'Tomorrow, then? I'll see there's plenty of food in before I leave.'

'Tis of no consequence. I can eat at the inn.' Stephen was in a good mood because he had just contracted for a cargo of clay to be shipped from Par to Oslo in the *Chasse Marée*. It had been a coup to make the deal, and resented by some of his competitors; he had pared his profit to the bone to break into a useful market. Moreover, he hoped the return cargo, which was mainly to be timber, would contain some high-quality pine for the floors of the new house. But his mood did not prevent him saying: 'Don't you see anything of that Ben Carter, will you.'

'Stephen,' said Clowance; 'I am *married* to you. However, if you do not trust me I will not go. Your son can carry the letter.'

Stephen winced. 'I know, dear heart. I'm sorry. It was half in jest. Seen you

Stephen winced. 'I know, dear heart. I'm sorry. It was half in jest. Soon we shall be able to joke about it all.' Later he added: 'I'm not sure I like ye riding all that way on your own. You are crossing lonely moors and the tin mining of Gwennap and St Day. The Enyses would not let you return on your own in February.'

'That was because of the snow. And although there are lonely moors you are never out of sight of a house in Cornwall. So long as it is daylight there is no risk. But if you feel anxious for me, why do you not come too?'

'I'm off to Truro. I'm seeing the bank again. They want to see me.' Stephen hitched his coat. 'Anyway I do not take kindly to Nampara. It recalls things I better prefer to forget. Chiefly my fight wi' Ben – but other things too. Y'know . . .'

'So be it,' said Clowance. 'I'll leave tomorrow and be back on Friday.'

On the way over she made a detour to pass through Grambler village and call on Jud and Prudie. It was pretty certain that in the nature of things Jud would shortly topple off his stool for the last time, calling down the wrath of God on everybody as he did so; but it hadn't happened yet. He seemed to have achieved a condition of stasis in which there was virtually no sign of progression or regression from one year to the next. He could still smoke his pipe – which he did continually – and drink his gin – which he did continually – so that one imagined his organs as continuing to function though black with nicotine and pickled in alcohol. His voice was still strong so that his complaints could be heard far beyond the confines of his cottage. His pessimism was unimpaired. His dislike of his wife did not waver. His legs, he said, were like jelly. If anyone was patient enough to listen he would describe the condition of his legs. The bones, he said, were festerated. His kneecaps were diseased and soggy and burned all the time like apple-ginger jam. His feet, he said – well, his feet were petrified puddings of swollen matter best chopped off and had done with. Best chopped off with a carving knife and wooden feet fitted so that he could have some peace and comfort in his last days.

Under the strain of keeping up with Jud's drinking, glass for glass, Prudie had aged noticeably, and the lank black hair which had stayed well into her sixties was now a white horse's tail that has been stained with tar. Her face was as red as ever, her nose as often as ever adrip. But under the competition of Jud's trumpeted complaints she said less about her own feet than in the days when she had worked at Nampara. Perhaps it was because she was on them so seldom. She now occupied permanently the one comfortable chair in the cottage and apart from stirring to prepare a sparse meal or to go for another jar of gin, she stayed there all day.

It crossed her mind not infrequently to think that her lamentations on Jud's

It crossed her mind not infrequently to think that her lamentations on her father's apparent death twenty-five years ago had been much overdone, and when it crossed her mind she told him about it. However, having climbed unaided out of a coffin once, Jud was in no hurry to be lifted into another one.

In spite of their complaints, and the dirt and the smell when she visited them, Clowance had inherited some of Demelza's sense of responsibility towards them, and when she went on her way, drawing deep clean breaths of air into her lungs, she felt a sense of duty fulfilled.

Nampara was woefully empty. The Gimletts were glad to see her but upset by her news. She had dinner all on her own in the dining-room, feeling like an old lady. After dinner she walked up to Wheal Leisure and found Ben. His grim face lit up when he saw her, his eyes glancing swiftly behind her to see that Stephen was not there, then focussing gratefully on her face and what she had to say. Like the Gimletts he was sorry to hear of her father's imprisonment but his faith in 'Cap'n Poldark's' ability to get himself out of tight corners was such that Clowance was cheered by his reaction. In the purser's office, which was no more than a large lean-to shed with a few chairs and a table, he unfurled and spread out a plan of the mine workings and explained to her where development was taking place and how the lodes were yielding.

'She's a keenly mine now,' he said. 'Never like Grace – she'll never pour riches into your pockets the way Grace done – but she's yielding all the time, and if the copper price will but keep up we shall do nicely.'

'Are doing nicely,' said Clowance.

'Are doing nicely,' said Ben, and straightened up sharply.

Their heads had been close together and her nearness was unsettling. For the first time Clowance felt a stirring of attraction. That night lying in bed – in her own bed – and listening to the hollow jarring of the distant steam engines – she wondered about it. Her sexual feelings had been almost dormant when she was young. Too dormant. She had larked about with Ben and Matthew Mark Martin and never thought of them in any physical way at all. Until Stephen was washed ashore she had hardly known what sexual urges were. Then they had come on her fast enough.

Now, as an experienced young married woman, she found Ben attractive in a way she had never done before. She could well understand what the girls of the village thought about him. Why *didn't* he marry one of them? It was no contribution to her happiness to feel that because she was ineligible he would make do with no one else. It was such a *waste*. She wondered that her mother, who was so gifted in such matters, had not contrived to find someone for him.

But tonight she had something else to think about. There had been trouble at Place House.

‘Tis that Saul Grieves,’ said Ben. ‘He’ve been friendly along with Katie, I reckon she thought ’twould be a wedding. She brought him home t’see Mother an’ all. A bit up in the world was Saul Grieves. Was at the King’s Head at R’druth before he come here. Thinks himself up in the world. Never took t’im greatly meself. Now he’s gone.’

‘Gone where?’

‘Gone sacked. When Mr Valentine Warleggan and Mrs went to Cambridge in January they left Saul Grieves in charge of the house. When they come back in March they found ’e’d been thieving things. Lucky he were not sent to gaol.’

‘Thieving things? Stealing? From the house?’

‘Oh yes. Oh yes. Seems he’ve been gambling, taking time off to go gaming in R’druth, got his self into debt, started taking things, selling ’em, small things, which he thought they mightn’t notice. But the worst thing to befall was that Katie got drawn in.’

‘Katie? But she wouldn’t—’

‘Not knowing, like. But this Saul Grieves gives her a scarf, a scarf the hue of an orange, says he have bought’n for she at R’druth Fair. Not so. ’Twas one belonging to Mrs Warleggan he’d thieved out of a drawer.’

‘Have they accepted her explanation?’

‘It seems so. But Katie cann’t forgive herself. She say she should’ve known. An’ she think Mrs Warleggan still d’hold it against her.’

‘I’m sorry, Ben.’

‘Yes. An’ ’tis not just that, y’see. Katie was much taken wi’ Saul Grieves. She d’tthink she’ve been let down, betrayed both ways. I never seen her like it! She come home last week beside herself wi’ distress and weepin’.’

He was scowling out at the sea, which was flat and grey today. Only the currents made scrawling patterns on it like a child’s first experiments on a slate.

‘There’s no way you can help, Ben. But maybe I could go and see young Mr Warleggan, make sure if I can that Katie isn’t being blamed.’

Ben did not look at her. ‘That’d be a rare kindness. D’ye mean on this visit?’

‘I can call in tomorrow morning on my way home. It is scarcely out of my way, and he *is* my cousin.’

‘If,’ said Ben, ‘if you did so happen to see Katie, ’twould be another kindness just t’ave a word with she. She seem to bamfer herself with vain regrets.’

II

Since the Enyses were away she had had it half in mind that she might call and

see Valentine and Selina anyway.

The grey mild moody weather of yesterday had been dismissed by a fresh westerly breeze, hurrying cloud and sun across with an occasional freckle of rain. It was just such a day when Clowance's mother had ridden this way years before Clowance was born to make the acquaintance of Sir John Trevaunance on behalf of Ross, who was shortly to stand trial for his life.

Not much had changed in the appearance of the house since then, except that the scars of the long abandoned copper smelting works were almost healed over and a new excavation, only recently begun and nearer the house, showed raw earth in piles, and brick and stone and a dozen men toiling.

When she reached the pillared porch she was about to slide down from her saddle when the doors opened and Valentine came quickly out to hand her down.

'Well, well, Clowance it is! We saw you coming along the valley. I said to Tom, can it really be, and alone and unescorted, my very own cousin? And look who is here to greet you!'

In the doorway Tom Guildford was standing. He came forward smiling his sweet smile, and kissed her on the lips in uninhibited fashion. She felt herself flushing.

'Clowance! *What* a pleasure! And the more joyous for being so unexpected. Have you been visiting your old home?'

They went in. Selina was not about. Tom, whom Clowance had first met through Valentine, was staying a few days with the young Warleggans, and they exchanged news. They knew nothing of Demelza's scares and trials or presence in Brussels nor of Ross's internment. It was a sorry business, said Valentine, but there was a strong peace party in England. 'I'm told the officers of the 51st at Portsmouth drank a toast to Old Nap last week; and Whitbread in the Commons has said that Bonaparte has been welcomed back to France as a liberator, and that it would be monstrous to declare war on a people in order to impose a government they didn't want. D'you know, I believe he's right. They say there's going to be an entirely new constitution in France which will effectively hobble Old Nap if he becomes too warlike. I wish 'em luck and predict there will be no war.'

'All the nations of Europe', Tom said, 'have pledged themselves to depose him. I do not see how they can break such an undertaking.'

'You do not?' said Valentine, and laughed. 'Don't you remember it's only a couple of years ago since they broke all their previous treaties – with Bonaparte! One fraud is no greater than another. They would change sides and drop their arms tomorrow if it should suit their interests!'

Selina came downstairs, as willowy and as ash-blond as ever, with her sleepy

Siamese cat's eyes and contained manner. She insisted Clowance should stay to an early dinner. They talked and laughed until the meal was ready. Clowance thought she detected a coolness between husband and wife. It would not be surprising, she imagined, since Valentine took a delight in teasing people and Selina perceptibly lacked a sense of humour.

They were starting a new mining venture not far from the house – perhaps she had noticed it? – on the strength of some old maps and some new samples. It was all thought up first by Unwin Trevaunance and a man called Chenhalls, but they'd been sent packing. It was their own venture now and they had high hopes. Copper price was good at present. Wheal Leisure a few miles along the coast was doing very nicely. Wheal Elizabeth, she was to be called.

After dinner, when the servants were out of the room, Clowance told them she had heard about Saul Grieves. It was easier this way, with Tom Guildford present, rather than mentioning it privately to Selina. Valentine said he wished now he'd brought the lazy rogue up in court; he deserved to be hanged or sent to the hulks; but Selina, who was partial to the man's good looks, had said just turn him out, get rid of him, the loss is small.

After Selina had made her ritual indignant protest, Clowance said: 'And Katie?'

Selina looked obliquely at her. 'Oh, the scarf. That was indeed ill done. She should have known better.'

'Perhaps she did know better,' said Valentine. 'She was completely under his thumb – and maybe not only his thumb!'

'Ben Carter, her brother, is worried about her,' said Clowance.

'Rightly so,' said Valentine. 'She should have gone too.'

'On the whole I think not,' said Selina, as if it pleased her to disagree. 'Katie has been with us since we came here – in 1808. She is a clumsy, simple girl but very loyal. I do not think she would willingly have connived with theft.'

'Is she still with you, then?' asked Clowance innocently. 'I have not seen her today.'

'She's in the kitchen. At the moment I have put her back in the kitchen, just as a punishment. But if all goes well I'll restore her as a parlourmaid when we return for the summer.'

'Do you think', Clowance said, 'I might have a word with her before I leave?' At Selina's surprised look she added: 'Ben asked me to see her. I am told she is taking this very much to heart.'

Selina glanced at Valentine, who looked down his long thin nose and said: 'Little cousin, you may do so if it pleases you. I beg you not to remove altogether her sense of guilt.'

Tom said: 'When you leave, Clowance, I'll come with you.'

'Oh, Tom, no, please! There is no danger in riding alone.'

'No danger, but is there pleasure? At least afford *me* the pleasure. I shall come with you to the verges of Penryn and leave before your husband sees me . . . Is he at home or sailing the seas?'

'He's at home.'

'Anyway, I have to visit my uncle, and today would be exactly right, in the middle of my stay. If you don't want to talk to me I promise to follow behind.'

'Oh Tom,' said Clowance, laughing, 'of course you may come if you wish. So long as you are not coming out of my way.'

'I assure you, I am not coming out of my way.'

Chapter Two

I

They left just before three. The wind had slackened and backed, and thin cloud like a gauze scarf had drifted up to wreath the sun. But it did not indicate real rain until tomorrow. As they left, as they reached the top of the rise before they turned inland, Clowance cast a backward glance.

‘Do you miss it?’ Tom asked.

‘What? The sea? No, I have it on my own doorstep! But yes, well, it is a somewhat different sea – by no means docile but – different. I suppose I miss the cliffs and the surf and something of the wildness.’

‘But you are happy?’

‘Yes. Oh yes. And we are building a house!’

She told him of it as they jogged along, horses at walking pace, all the afternoon to spend. He told her of an offer he had had from the East India Company, to go out to Bengal as a legal adviser.

‘Shall you take it?’

‘It’s the place to make money. I should probably come back at forty a nabob. And I have no family ties, as you know.’

‘Then?’

He checked his horse, which, encouraged by the slow progress, had wanted to stop and tear off some grass.

‘I have a fancy for the English bar. And if mere vulgar money were being considered, that is not an ill-paid profession – for the successful!’

‘How long have you to decide?’

‘Some months. The man I would be replacing is not due to leave Calcutta until September. They would probably need an answer by July.’

‘And what shall decide you?’

‘Probably my feelings for a young lady called Parthesia. Better known as Patty.’

Clowance also checked her horse. ‘Oh? Oh . . .’ She looked across at a smiling mine chimney. ‘Do you love her?’

smoking mine chimney. Do you love her?

'No.'

'Does she love you?'

'She affects to. It would suit her to marry me. And we like each other. I think it would be an agreeable match.'

'Is she pretty?'

'Not as pretty as you.'

By accident or design Nero moved ahead of the other horse so that there was no conversation for a minute or two.

Then Clowance said: 'I'm sorry, Tom. I shouldn't have said that.'

'Perhaps I should not have said that either. But surely what has long been acknowledged between us need not be hidden for the sake of circumspection because you are now married. We are both grown up enough to see facts as they are, without embarrassment.'

They rode on a while in silence.

Clowance said: 'So that is another decision you will have to make shortly.'

'Indeed.' Tom added with a glint of humour: 'Probably by the beginning of the Michaelmas term.'

Later he told her of the riots there had been in London last month, as a result of the proposed Corn Bill. There had been sixty thousand signatories against it and a mob had gained entrance to the house of F. J. Robinson, in Burlington Street, the mover of the Bill, and systematically wrecked it. The Earl of Pembroke, on his way to the Lords, had had his carriage broken to pieces. Lord Darnley's house in Berkeley Square and Mr Wellesley-Pole's in Savile Row had been severely damaged and the military had had to be called out.

'Your father should have been there,' said Tom. 'He was telling me that day when I called to see you that his Radical friends trusted above all in *peaceful* reform; but I suppose they can be goaded beyond the breaking point.'

'The crowd can,' said Clowance.

'Yes, and with a pretty good reason. The price of a quartern-loaf in London is already three times what it is in Paris. Mr Baring made a splendid remark in the Commons against the Bill, which as you know would prohibit imported corn. He said – if I can remember it, he said – that the theory behind the Bill was that you must cut your population to suit your supplies of home-grown corn, instead of regulating the supply of corn by the needs of the population. This, he said, is not lengthening the bed to fit the man but shortening the man to fit the bed!'

The sun was fading altogether now and the backing wind was bringing up its own supplies of herringbone cloud.

'Perhaps you will go into Parliament, Tom.'

'The law is often a way in. But the difficulty I have is that I sway between one

THE LAW IS ONE WAY IN. BUT THE DIFFICULTY I HAVE IS THAT I SWAY BETWEEN ONE view and another. I should not know whom to attach myself to.'

Just before they separated Clowance told him of Katie. It was in strict confidence, she said.

'You may wonder why I concern myself so much, but Ben and Katie's mother used to work for us at one time. And before that their father, Jim Carter, worked for my father, and he was caught poaching and went to prison, and my father heard he was ill and went to Launceston prison and got him out. But Jim was too ill with fever and died. My father was godfather to Ben – or Benjy Ross, as he was called then. Jinny remarried – a man called Scoble. But these two, Ben and Katie, seem to have been a part of the Poldark family. I know my mother would be concerned.'

'But in what way concerned?' asked Tom. 'From what I heard it sounded as if it was all over.'

'Not quite, alas. I went to see Katie, as you know, to tell her that she was forgiven and that she'd be put back on her parlourmaid duties in a few months. But she tells me she's with child.'

'Ah,' said Tom and flicked at the tall grass on the hedge. 'More or less inevitable, isn't it? Do Valentine and Selina know?'

'No one knows yet. I am the first person she's told. She has only become sure this week.'

'And Grieves is the father?'

'Oh yes. She is not a light girl. Indeed strictly brought up. I was quite astonished. Jinny is a stern Methodist. Katie told me in February that – does this weary you?'

'Not in the least.'

'She told me that she and Grieves were alone in the house one evening and he teased her into taking a glass of wine. Like her brother, she had never tasted liquor. One glass led to another, I suppose, and then . . .'

'It does,' agreed Tom. 'So where is Grieves?'

'Gone near a month. No one knows where. Perhaps he could be found, but she swears she would not marry him at any price. She hates that he cheated her over the scarf and is a proven thief. She says she hates him now for having seduced her.'

'What will happen when the Warleggans find out? I'm sure Valentine wouldn't flicker an eyelid.'

'Selina is rather strait-laced, but perhaps I can get round her . . . Katie feels the personal disgrace.'

'She cannot be the first in your village.'

‘Oh no! Near half, I’d guess, become pregnant before they marry. But they *do* marry, that’s the difference. I hope she will not do anything silly.’

‘You told her not to.’

‘I told her not to.’

They had come to the parting of the ways.

‘How is Betty?’ Clowance asked. Betty was Lord Devoran’s wayward randy daughter. It was curious that one never asked about Lady Devoran, who still lived, but in complete seclusion; if you called you might see her peering round a corner at you.

‘I’ve yet to find out. I chose to stay with Valentine this time because the company is better. I’m not sure how my uncle will regard this neglect.’

‘Ask him,’ said Clowance, ‘if he ever sets mantraps on his property.’

‘Why?’

‘No matter. It was just a thought.’

To separate they did not dismount, but Tom somehow manoeuvred his horse into a proximity that enabled him to give Clowance a smacking kiss.

Clowance nearly lost her hat. She said: ‘Tom, you *are* nice. It has been good to meet you again.’

‘Let us make this a twice yearly assignation. It will keep our friendship warm.’

II

Going home in a degree of personal contentment only uncomfortable because of concern for her father, Clowance was surprised to find Andrew Blamey waiting on her doorstep. She kissed him and welcomed him in and made him a pot of tea and they drank it in friendly talk together.

‘I put in just to say goodbye, little cousin. Off tomorrow by the noon tide, loading at Par and carrying to Norway. We’ll be more than a month away, I suspicion, even if all goes well, which it seldom does with the *Chasse Marée*. Damned Frenchies can build well when they want to, but not when they knocked the old *Chasse* together. Last trip even just from Swansea . . . “A leaky ship with her anchor down, Hurrah, me boys, Hurrah!” ’

‘I think perhaps that’s where Bella gets her aptitude from.’

‘What aptitude?’

‘Liking to sing comic songs, not always in tune.’

‘Thank you, Clowance. You are too kind.’ He stirred his tea and stretched his sturdy legs towards the fire.

Clowance said: 'Do you ever regret leaving the Packet Service, Andrew?'

'No choice, little cousin. The bailiffs were after me.'

'That doesn't answer my question, big cousin.'

His heavy sandy eyebrows wrinkled. 'I sent Jason and Fred Barton up to furl the mainsail, and the strap supporting the upper block gave way. Down they came, yard and all. It was the greatest good fortune no one was *crippled*. That shouldn't happen on any vessel decently crafted . . . We were off Land's End. Luckily the wind was taking off and the sea was light.'

'You told Stephen?'

'Oh, yes. He pays the bills, doesn't he? Not too pleased about it neither . . . Clowance.'

'Yes?'

'What do you think of young Jason?'

'I've . . . hardly met him.'

'D'you like him?'

'So far as I know him. Don't you?'

'Not much. A bit above himself, you might say. Stephen's pushing him up the ladder, wanted to make him mate under me for the next voyage. He hasn't the experience. A lad of that age should be the ship's boy. It's the way things go, always have gone, at sea; begin at the bottom, cooking, cleaning, brass-polishing, scrubbing. There's six of us on the *Chasse Marée*, and there was some grumbling on the last trip. The older men don't like it.'

'I suppose Stephen wants to do the best for his nephew.'

'Dear yes, my handsome. But I don't think it will do. Heigh-ho, I mustn't bother you with my troubles. Where is Stephen now?'

'I don't know. Still in Truro perhaps.'

'Oh no, I caught a glimpse of his jib this morning coming out of the chandlers – Priors, that is – he was luffing up towards the Royal Standard, but he was wearing a grim face, and we've not been seeing quite eye to eye recently, so I did not hail him.'

Clowance poked the fire and put on some coal. 'Why have you not been seeing eye to eye?'

'Well, chiefly over Jason. I told him last Monday what I thought, so he's taken Jason off the *Chasse Mareé*. I'm sailing one crewman short, will pick one up in Par. I've made Fred Barton mate. He's forty-eight, married with two children; he's been at sea since he was sixteen. He deserves the extra money.'

Clowance thought Stephen might well have wanted Jason to sail with Andrew to keep him from being too much in evidence when she was about.

Andrew had been watching her expression. He suddenly laughed. 'You're a

dear, good girl. I wish you had fallen in love with me.'

'I always thought that was a joke.' She smiled wide-eyed at him. 'Wasn't it? About it not mattering us being cousins . . .'

'Truth and jest – you can't always separate 'em, can you? Anyway . . . What's the time? I must weigh anchor.'

'Stay till Stephen comes.'

'I still have to take leave of my parents. My dear mama continues to extend all her usual indulgence towards her one ewe lamb.' He got up.

'What were you going to say, Andrew?'

'When?'

'A moment ago. You broke off.'

'Did I? So I did. But you should not have noticed. Ah well . . .'

'Well what?'

'Little cousin, you are very persistent. Well, to tell the truth—' He broke off. 'Have you noticed when folk say "to tell the truth" it means they are going to tell a big lie – or else that they have been lying before? To tell the truth then, really the truth, since I know you are happy wed to Stephen, and lost to all your other suitors including me, my eyes and my fancies are straying elsewhere.'

'Oh?' Clowance looked pleased. 'In a particular direction?'

'In a particular direction.'

'May I know the fortunate young lady?'

'You may. You do. But slightly. Whether you consider her or me fortunate in this matter is another kettle of fish.'

'Come *along*,' said Clowance, getting up. 'Who is it?'

'Thomasine Trevethan, George's younger sister. You've seen her once or twice at Cardew. George Trevethan is twenty-six. Tamsin is twenty.'

'But how lovely, Andrew! What should be wrong with it? Does she not care for you?'

'I believe she cares. Yes, I know she does. But her father owns the gunpowder mills up the valley. They're a family with money. I have reason to know they do not think the master of a tramp schooner that he's got no interest in – no financial interest in and no money outside his meagre pay, is any sort of catch for their only daughter.'

She went with him to the door in the half dark of evening and watched him tramp off towards the steep steps that led to the harbour. He had borrowed a skiff which would take him down the creek and across to Flushing.

There was a moon somewhere but the gathering cloud and mists off the sea had so far obscured it. 'And like a dying lady lean and pale,' Clowance had read somewhere, 'who totters forth wrapped in a gauzy veil.' That was what the

moon would be like tonight, rising slowly, overlooking the dulled silver platter of the bay, the tendrils of smoke climbing up from the roofs of the town. Lights winking here and there. When the evening comes and the busy world is hushed. Even footsteps, voices, the barking of a dog were absorbed into the empty air.

Where was Stephen? Of course she should have known he was home because the fire had been in, though smouldering on its last embers when she returned. What was there to eat in the house? Eggs, bread, butter, milk, the remains of a flitch of bacon. Should she go down to the quay, buy some mackerel or a piece of hake? She was not hungry and he might have eaten out. Better to wait until he came. He must have expected her today, but there was no note.

Somehow she must persuade him to be more generous towards Andrew. He was not at all an ungenerous man but perhaps possessive, reluctant to share any power he had come by. It would not help that they had had words over Jason.

But she could see how the Trevethans would feel. A young man, son of one of the most respected of the packet captains – though at one time there had been ugly stories about *him* – a young man in the service but suddenly giving it up for a less esteemed position as master of a tramp schooner – with some reputation in the town for drunkenness and debt. Not quite the best catch for the only daughter of a well-to-do middle-class family with social ambitions. Clowance did not very much care for George Trevethan who, she thought, rather sucked up to the Warleggans and laughed at everything he said himself as if there were a hidden joke. Thomasine she only remembered as small and fair and rather pretty, with a retroussé nose.

But she must work on Stephen. Andrew would be away at least a month; lovely if something better could be arranged for his return.

She made herself another cup of tea, nibbled a biscuit and read the *Cornwall Gazette*. But it was getting late, and she was tired after a long day. The candle flickered in some draught she could not locate, and her eyes pricked. She undressed and lay on the bed in her nightgown and dressing-gown, sure that she would keep awake if she didn't actually get into bed. But almost at once she drifted into a deep dreamless sleep.

She woke with a start to hear someone moving cautiously about the room. She sat up instantly.

'Who is it? Stephen?'

'Aye,' he said, 'I thought not to wake you. These floorboards creak like old bones. Go back to sleep.'

She knew at once he had been drinking. No one else would have known, for he had far too hard a head to show the obvious signs.

'You're late. Is everything all right?'

'Late!' he said. 'You're a fine one to talk! Where've you been all day?'

Late: he said. You're a fine one to talk: where've you been all day!

'At Nampara, of course. I said I'd be home for supper – I had dinner with Valentine and Selina, that's all.'

'I was waiting for ye! Then I went out again.'

'Is something the matter? Make a light, will you.'

'Nay, go to sleep. 'Twill keep till morning.'

She had a box by the bed so she scraped the tinder and presently lit the stub of candle. As the light grew he was standing by the dressing-table in his shirt sleeves. His jacket was on the floor. He looked ill.

She got quickly out of bed. 'Let me get you something to eat.'

'I've eaten,' he said roughly. 'Had a bite at the Royal Standard wi' one or two lads. Stopped on for a game of billiards.'

It was not only a bite he had had.

'Stephen. Come and sit on the bed beside me. I'm sorry I was late but I really did say I'd be home for supper. Has there been some trouble while I've been away?'

'Aye, ye could call it so.' He would not let her lead him to the bed but sat in the tall wooden armchair which stood between the bed and the window. She sat on the bed and knelt up, looking at him.

'Is it one of the ships?'

'Not so easy as that. It all happened yesterday afternoon. I could've done with ye when I came home. But you were off at Nampara!'

She waited, knowing he was trying to lay some blame on her for whatever had happened but carefully not rising to the bait.

'Something happened in Truro?'

'That's it. Good guess.'

'Then *tell* me, Stephen! What can I say until I know?'

His hand bristled as he rubbed his chin. 'It was yesterday afternoon. The bank'd asked me to call. When I went in, there was Warleggan himself and that fellow Lander, his chief clerk or whatever he is. They said they wanted to see me because they had been going through me ledgers and books, et cetera, et cetera, and found discrepancies in 'em. Discrepancies! Why, most o' me books and accounts since I joined 'em had been under Lander's sharp eye! I told 'em so. But they said they had only worked on the figures I gave 'em and that some of the figures they had found were false. False! What the hell was I to say to that? Inaccurate by a pound or two, maybe. But genuine mistakes – and all small things! They wouldn't find one to get that hot about. 'Twasn't even as if they were all in my favour! Small things one way, small things the other. Ye know I'm not one for cheeseparing, for counting the pennies. But I might've been cheating the bank – deliberately cheating them of hundreds of pounds! Their

creating the same – deliberately creating them of hundreds of pounds. Their faces! Holy Mary, their faces. Like I was a criminal. Clowance, I can't tell ye what 'twas like . . .'

'So what happened then? Does it mean you will have to employ a clerk in future? Because if so—'

'Future? There isn't one! Not in Warleggan's. They've said, they told me they're going to withdraw all the accommodation they've offered me and invite me to find another bank! They've given me two weeks. Two weeks!'

Clowance drew her feet under her. But it was her heart that was cold.

'And can you?'

'Find another bank? What hope? 'Twill soon get known that Warleggan's have withdrawn and're calling in their notes. And when they hear why – and Warleggan's are sure to make it sound as bad as they can – who'll want to take on someone who's been found out a swindler?'

Clowance got up and ran down the stairs, brought up a half-used bottle of brandy and two glasses. He might have already had too much, but she needed it. She was feeling sick. They sipped together. The spirit took her breath away.

'If that happens . . .'

'Bankruptcy.' He put his head back against the chair. 'Bankruptcy. I can't cover me debts. Can't begin to.'

'Three ships.'

'Buying and selling are different things. Specially if it is under pressure.'

'How much – do we owe?'

'There's a permanent three-thousand-pound overdraft on the security of the ships. And I've also taken out a tidy number of accommodation bills – these aren't secured by a commercial transaction but are just – credit.'

'How much would that be?'

He made an irritable gesture. 'Can't be sure. Mebbe eight hundred pounds.'

She finished her drink and nearly choked.

'But they cannot *do* such a thing, Stephen! We have been friends of theirs. We go to their home! We hunt with Harriet! Surely – aren't you making too much of this threat? Perhaps George was angry, said more than he meant, will cool off in a few days . . .'

'Strange thing is,' said Stephen, 'through it all – and Lander did most of the talking – 'twas as if George sort of liked doing what he was doing. Once or twice I caught his eye and ye could see as if there was malice there. I been wondering – d'ye think he led me into this, encouraging me to borrow from him so that one day he could ruin me? D'ye think 'tis a way of getting revenge on you and your father? The old Warleggan-Poldark feud?'

Clowance shook her head. 'George has always been specially nice to me –

before ever I met you. I don't think even he could be as devious as that . . . But it always has been a danger, hasn't it. So many people warned us when we first went to him.'

'When *I* first went to him,' Stephen said bitterly. '*You* warned me. But I didn't expect to suffer for an old feud!'

'Are you trying to blame me now?'

'No, of course not.' But he was a little, trying to offset some of the responsibility.

'What will you do now?'

'What I've been trying to do last night and all day today. Find somebody, someone who might help give me a breathing space!'

'And is there anyone?'

'Never in this world. Of course today I went back to Carne's, where I was banking before – before Warleggan's – but they were not interested. I might get eight hundred pounds from 'em but they'd want one – or maybe two – of me ships. I've tried – these two evenings I've tried at the Royal Standard – ye know most of the Packet captains, the agents, the merchants, the chandlers, meet there. Often when ye launch a new vessel, whether for trade or – other work, folk will take a share, not unlike opening a mine – like the two shares I own in Wheal Leisure – they'll take a share in a ship or ships. I thought maybe if I could divide up into, say, sixty-four parts of, say, a hundred pounds a part, it would take care of all our troubles. Maybe even fifty pounds a share would see us through. But d'ye know what I got? Captain Buller said he might take one share. And Jim Prior said he'd take two shares if I could get a bank to guarantee ten.' Stephen poured himself another drink. 'It's different ye see than if you are just starting. Like laying foundations; people will come in. But they all know I've got the backing of Warleggan's – why do I need their money now?'

'What will you do next?'

'There's little enough *to* do. George Warleggan has got me in a trap and it will not be easy to get out. I might likely go to prison!'

'There's the Cornish Bank in Truro,' said Clowance.

'Ye mean your father's bank?'

'It is not his bank, Stephen, or all would be well. He is but a small shareholder. But I am sure they would step in if – if there was any danger of – of prison. If my father were here . . .'

'That would not be easy neither,' said Stephen. 'I can't just go up to my father-in-law and say kindly lend me four thousand pounds to keep me out of gaol!'

There was silence for a long time. Clowance said: 'Come to bed, my dear.'

Perhaps things will look better in the morning.'

Stephen half laughed. 'Don't believe it. Warleggan's are the power around here. If they draw back, repudiate me, there'll be no one willing to take me on. If I sell my three ships and am still five hundred pounds short, maybe the Cornish Bank will step in to see me clear of the worst. With you my wife they could do no other. But aside from that I reckon all is lost.'

III

Tallien said: 'You have already denied, Poldark, that you know anything of Mlle de la Blache's work as a spy. We find that hard to believe.'

'Why should you? I met her only when I first arrived in Paris in February.'

Tallien fingered his eye-shade. He was less sinister with the downcast eye hidden.

'That we know to be untrue. You knew her in England before you landed in France with the Bourbon uprising of '95. We have reason to suppose you met in Paris in '03. As you have frequently been used as an agent by the British Government, it is likely that you have been in touch with her ever since.'

Ross got up and walked to the barred window. It was a room, not a cell, but it was a small room.

'I came to Paris in 1803 with a doctor friend and made an effort to trace Mlle de la Blache, because I had a ring given me by her fiancé Charles de Sombreuil, before he was murdered by your jackals and at your express command. I failed to find Mlle de la Blache because she was not then in Paris. She was married to Baron Etmayer and living in Vienna. Are there any more charges you can trump up?'

'Oh, any number,' said Tallien. 'One merely of common assault, which you may have forgotten.'

'Clearly you have not,' said Ross.

Tallien looked at the guard by the door. They were alone except for him.

'The guillotine disposed of many people better than you, Sir Ross. More worthy than you, Sir Ross. Who were a greater loss to the world than you would be, Sir Ross. Unfortunately the Old Lady has gone out of fashion. In the end she became too greedy. You will be surprised to know that towards the end I spared many lives. Many lives I spared, especially women. Now Mme la Guillotine is reserved for thieves and criminals. The firing squad has returned to deal with the traitor and the spy.'

His eyelids at their heaviest, Ross looked at the man sitting in the one

comfortable chair. You could smell his lavender scent. ‘Has this conversation any purpose?’

‘Yes, it is to ask you for the names and descriptions of all the people you met at the de la Blache house.’

‘I know of none. My wife and I went there as friends, spent a few evenings together, remembering old times when Charles de Sombreuil was alive. I do not know if she was a spy, but if so she gave me none of her confidences.’

‘Come, think again. Two acknowledged spies meet together and discuss what – the weather, in typical British fashion – or perhaps the performances at the opera? Is that it, eh?’

‘Something like that. Mlle de la Blache also helped my wife with her shopping.’

‘And no doubt to leave Paris before you returned?’

‘On that,’ said Ross, ‘you are better informed than I am. I only know my wife and family left Paris about the 19th – fortunately, it seems.’

‘Oh I am sure we would have allowed *her* to go free. Such a pretty woman.’

‘So by what right do you prevent me from going free?’

‘Monsieur, we know you to be a spy!’

‘I have repeatedly asked your guard to allow me to see my Ambassador.’

‘Alas, he fled from Paris at the end of last month with his tail between his legs. No doubt he has rejoined ex-King Louis. England has not recognized the Emperor, so is not represented in France now. Your Embassy is closed.’

‘Then I request to see the Emperor.’

‘Alas, he is too busy attending to affairs of state and attempting to create some order out of the chaos left by eleven months of Bourbon misrule.’

‘Does he know I am being detained here without trial?’

‘I have no idea, monsieur.’

‘I think he must be aware – and you must be aware – that if he wishes to maintain friendly relations with England it is impolitic to imprison one of their nationals, especially one attached to the Embassy.’

‘I do not think the Emperor would wish to be bothered with such trifles.’

‘All the same I do not think he would approve of his minor officials – such as Fouché and yourself – keeping a British national in internment out of petty spite.’

Tallien lit a cigarillo. He did not offer one to Ross.

When the smoke had cleared he said: ‘Do you complain of your treatment here?’

‘I complain of my imprisonment!’

‘But you are housed and fed, provided with an hour’s exercise a day and the

Paris newspapers.’

‘I complain of my imprisonment.’

‘Do you want a woman? One can be supplied if you wish.’

‘Thank you, no.’

‘Well, I can understand anyone would be a trifle hard to please who had had Lady Poldark in his bed.’

Ross did not reply. He took a couple of gentle breaths to keep his temper. He heard Tallien get up but did not look round. Presumably this sally was the end of the interview.

At the door Tallien said: ‘You realize, monsieur, that you have only to tell us everything you know of Mlle de la Blache and you will be set free.’

‘May I ask what has happened to Colonel de la Blache?’

‘Like his sister, he has escaped – leaving lesser men to pay the bill.’

Ross sighed. ‘I have told you repeatedly what little I know of the de la Blaches. If I told you more I would have to invent it. This condition you make is really a ruse on your part to exact a cheap and stupid revenge. I would have thought any honest Frenchman would have been ashamed of it.’

Tallien blew smoke. Suddenly Ross would have liked his pipe but he would not say so.

‘I have consulted with my colleagues,’ Tallien said. ‘The feeling is that if you refuse to co-operate you should be moved from Paris. The proper sort of accommodation is not available here. You will be moved next week. But of course you know,’ he added with a sly smile, ‘freedom is always open to you.’

‘You know it is not,’ Ross said.

Chapter Three

I

Demelza returned with her family to England in April. She had wanted to leave before, but Jeremy and Cuby pressed her to stay, arguing that they stood as good a chance of learning something of Ross's situation in Brussels as in London. She might have heeded their opinions if conditions had been less confused, but everything had been thrown into the melting pot. King Louis was at Ghent, some new man called Stewart had been appointed British Ambassador at his depleted Court. And it was indeed depleted, for of the four thousand French men and women who had accompanied him in flight only two hundred had been allowed into the Belgian Netherlands.

The single berlin containing so much valuable human and jewelled cargo had been held up for three hours and had eventually only been allowed into Belgium after an interview between Jodie and the commandant of the frontier post.

As soon as she had seen Demelza and the children safely installed with Jeremy, Jodie, not knowing of her brother's whereabouts or survival, had left with Sieur Menieres for Ghent.

Fitzroy Somerset, relieved of his diplomatic duties, had been appointed military secretary to Wellington, who was trying to make something of his polyglot army. Somerset had a longish talk with Demelza in which he sought to reassure her that, as soon as things had settled down, Ross would, like him, be allowed home. It didn't altogether convince her, but she could do no more than hope, and eventually head for England.

On their one brief meeting at Geoffrey Charles's party Demelza and Cuby had established a sort of half-friendly, half-hostile understanding. At the time Demelza was offended that Cuby should be preparing to marry Valentine Warleggan for the money involved, and so was refusing her own son Jeremy whom she appeared to have bewitched. Demelza had expected to meet a calculating little gold digger; but the first sight of her at that party had shown her to be very different from such an image. She registered at once as a girl of quality, not just social quality, but a personality, a character, a strong character, a

quality; not just social quality, but a personality, a character, a strong character, a charming young woman. Demelza could see what Jeremy saw in her. She still disliked her for causing her son such bitter unhappiness, but recognized her worth.

They had not met since then. And since then Cuby had by fortunate mischance lost Valentine and been persuaded by Jeremy to elope with him, and now had been Jeremy's wife for about four months.

It was a situation which could have been fraught with constraint but the circumstances salved it. Demelza was too concerned about the wisdom of her flight and about Ross's safety to worry over smaller things, and Cuby was just beginning to be sick in the mornings, which fact created a bond. Cuby said to Demelza one day: 'I want you to know how lucky I feel myself that things have turned out as they are for me, and how very proud I am to be Jeremy's wife.'

The further threat that hung over all their heads was the imminent prospect of war. Jeremy had been promoted to lieutenant and was much away, though he contrived to be home most nights. He reported that the Bourbons were generally unpopular and that if it came to a battle against their old leader he doubted whether the Belgian and Dutch troops would stand and fight. The other nations – Russia, Prussia, Austria – had promised troops, but they had problems of their own keeping down various territories they had conquered. It was not even sure yet that the Duke would be put in full command of the armies. Prince William of Orange was still titular head, and if he remained so we didn't stand a chance.

And England, he said, was wickedly tardy in sending troops. So many regiments had been disbanded, so many were still in America and Canada, and the English were being very slow to be persuaded that their short peace might not last. How lucky he was, Jeremy said, to be with a British regiment already in being, and the famous 52nd 'Light Bobs' at that.

Demelza wondered at her son's good spirits. She had known Jeremy longer than anyone else and she knew him to be imaginative and not particularly brave. Yet his interest and eagerness were not assumed. Perhaps it was the company he was keeping, turning his thoughts away from the bloodshed to the possibility of glory. She watched Cuby when she looked at Jeremy and saw that she was certainly not the instigator of any enthusiasm for war.

The family was leaving via Antwerp and the long sea crossing to Dover. When they assembled to take the coach Jeremy and Cuby were there to see them all off. Demelza's younger son had stood all the changes of scene, of room, of food and of temperature with the imperturbability that was to be a feature of his later life. His occasional bouts of tetchiness had come from boredom rather than any physical malaise, and the relentless, invaluable Mrs Kemp had been helped by Isabella Rose in keeping him interested and amused. After her adventure with

by Isabella-Rose in keeping him interested and amused. After her adventure with the Polish soldiers Bella had been quite circumspect; and she had never understood why the rather formidable Mlle de la Blache had hugged and kissed her and thanked her when taking her leave.

Now another leave had to be taken. There were embraces all round. Never having had to take so many decisions without Ross, and now about to part from her elder son who might, too, at any time find himself in dire danger, Demelza was feeling lonely and emotional. But she hid it – most of it – and Jeremy, also moved, as usual joked about it; and Cuby smiled at them with her dimpled, hazel-eyed smile and Harry shouted and Bella waved and they rumbled away down the narrow street and were lost to sight.

II

It was Ibbetson's Hotel to begin, but this was expensive, and after a few days they moved into Ross's old lodgings in George Street. Almost the first person to call on them was Caroline Enys.

'My dear!' she exclaimed as they embraced, 'I had so *hoped* I might find you! And Ross? Is he safe?' She listened. '*Damn* them! They have no business to detain anyone. It is outrageous! You must go to the Prime Minister or the Prince Regent! It can only be a matter of days surely.'

'It has been nearly a month already!'

'I cannot believe they would have had the audacity. Everyone else has been allowed to leave, so far as I know . . . No, we never crossed the Channel. We had just arrived in London when the news reached us that the infamous wretch had escaped. I was for going whether or no, but Dwight said let us wait a week, and of course we had the children with us, so it was as well we did. He's gone home – there was no point in his staying – and taken Sophie and Meliora. The little brats were bitter disappointed. I am staying with Aunt Sarah, partly out of self-indulgence, partly so that I could learn as soon as possible what had happened to my dearest friends.'

'Caroline, I try to preserve a calm front for the sake of Bella and Harry, but I am some sore inside. I ask myself, did I do the right thing to leave, might it not have been better if he was to be interned if we had not been interned with him? It was a monstrous strange journey I took from Paris to Brussels; someday I will tell you of it, but all the way I regretted leaving the apartment empty for him to come back to. I have the most disagreeable forebodings. While in Paris Ross, as is his way, did not hide his dislike of two evil men who have now come to power again and I believe can do him ill – even if it only means internment but for how

again and I believe can do him in— even if it only means tormenting, but for how long? It might be for years . . .’

Caroline patted her hand. ‘Come, come, this will not do. I am not accustomed to see you so near tears. Look, where are the children now?’

‘Out with Mrs Kemp.’

‘They will be happy enough on their own tonight. Do you come to sup at Hatton Garden this evening with my aunt and with me; and I believe there will be one or two other people there—’

‘Caroline, I am in no mood for jollity. It is real kind of you—’

‘All the more reason for you to come! From that letter I received from you after you had been in Paris a sennight I took the impression that you were greatly enjoying yourself. I suspect that you had a fair round of gaiety in Paris until the monster escaped, and I suspect that for the last month, ever since you left, you have been moping in your lodgings, worrying about Ross and criticizing yourself unnecessarily. This has to stop. You will make yourself ill. It shall stop tonight. A chair will come for you at seven. You will be brought home at eleven. You know how Mrs Pelham enjoys your company. Do not spoil her pleasure.’

Demelza laughed. ‘Ross says you are the most strong-willed woman he knows.’

‘After you,’ said Caroline. ‘But I combine my will with arrogance, which makes it more overt.’

Demelza wondered if there were ever a night at the house in Hatton Garden on which a party did not take place. Mrs Pelham was one of the most hospitable of women and had the means to indulge her fancy. Tonight was very small, a mere eight, but as usual elegant and enjoyable. That is, it would have been enjoyable if Demelza had not been the object of so much sympathy and kindness. She was encouraged to tell her story, which she had done so many times that she had come to hate it, and the observations on it had all been made, with suitable variations, before. It was so good of everyone to want to help her with comment and comforting advice, but what she wanted was to see Ross come in at the door. Old Colonel Webb, taller, it seemed, and more ramshackle than ever, was there, and Miss Florence Hastings, whom Demelza had met at Bowood, and Lord Edward Petty-Fitzmaurice, whom the Poldarks had last seen at Drury Lane Theatre. Demelza thought these two had come together and that perhaps there was to be a match; but in this she saw herself to be mistaken. Another man called Henry Crediton, another Member of Parliament, was in attendance on Miss Hastings.

Conversation for a while was exclusively about the situation in France and the prospect of peace or war. Most of it went over Demelza’s head: Bonaparte’s abolition of the slave trade, which the Bourbons had not been willing to accede

to – was this not a stratagem to ingratiate himself with the British? Bonaparte's schemes to recover his wife Marie-Louise and their son from their custody in Austria. The power that the two old Jacobins Carnot and Fouché now exercised. (Demelza listened sharply and painfully to this.)

Lord Edward was touching her hand. 'Lady Poldark, my aunt would much like to meet you again. Would you be able to take tea with us tomorrow afternoon? And bring your daughter – your younger daughter, that is. So different in colouring and looks, isn't she, from Clowance? . . . How is Clowance? I would like to see her again.'

'She's married – as of course you know.'

Yes, you told me. A disappointment for me.'

It was the first time he had ever mentioned his proposal to Demelza.

'I'm sorry.'

'So am I. Clowance has a very special quality which many of us lack. I know she would have been very good for me. At least I would have been very good to her.'

'I'm sure you would, Lord Edward. Perhaps I should explain . . .'

'What?'

Demelza nervously crumbled a piece of bread. 'She told me of your – interest. We did not, of course, know it was more than that. My husband and I have never tried to influence our children – those who are old enough – in their – their choices. It is perhaps an unusual way to behave but it is the way we thought right. When Clowance told me, I said to her that she must be altogether free to come to a decision without giving special thought to your position in life and the – the privileges that would come to her. Perhaps I was wrong.'

'No, I'm sure you were right, Lady Poldark. I'm only sorry that my offer was turned down, and I hope she is very happy now in her new married life.'

'Thank you.'

'Are there children yet?'

'No, they have only been married – what is it? – about eleven months.'

'I see. Well, I trust you can come to tea tomorrow? I know it would give Aunt Isabel great pleasure.'

III

The Earl of Liverpool said: 'I am sorry to have kept you waiting for an interview, Lady Poldark, but Government business is so pressing and I 'specially wanted to see you myself.'

‘It does not matter,’ said Demelza. ‘I have nothing to do in London – except wait for news.’

‘Quite so. Well I much wish I had more definite information, but you will appreciate our present difficulty. We do not recognize Bonaparte, so we have no representative to put through the necessary inquiries. Virtually all the other embassies and legations have been closed, so we cannot ask anyone else to intervene. Agents are our only source of information and they tell us that Sir Ross has now been moved to Verdun.’

‘Verdun? Where is that?’

‘About a hundred and sixty miles east of Paris. There is a famous fortress there, but also a camp, where many English were interned when war broke out again in 1803. Apparently he is being treated well, though in fairly close confinement. I am totally at a loss to know why he is being imprisoned in this way when almost all the foreigners who wished to leave France have been allowed to go.’

‘Mlle de la Blache, who aided me to leave the country, said that they might make the excuse of treating him as a spy.’

Lord Liverpool blinked several times. ‘His mission was – confidential, I agree, but scarcely more. But why should they seek the excuse?’

Demelza told him.

‘I see. And Fouché is now Chief of Police again . . . I think an appeal to the Emperor himself would be the only way of circumventing that. It will be difficult to attempt at this juncture because very recently Bonaparte sent a personal letter to the Prince Regent declaring his peaceful aims, and the letter was returned to him with a stern note from Lord Castlereagh . . . But we will try our best, Lady Poldark, I assure you. In the meantime I can only ask you to be patient, in the knowledge that although your husband is not a free man he is not coming to any physical harm.’

‘Imprisonment, my lord, for someone like my husband, is a sort of physical harm.’

‘Yes, that too I understand. Well, be assured we will do our best. In the meantime what are your plans?’

‘I will hope to stay in London perhaps another two weeks, just hoping, hoping for some more news. Then, if there is none, I suppose I shall take the children back to Cornwall.’

Lord Liverpool got up. ‘I do not know how you are circumstanced, but while your husband is interned I shall personally see that the monthly payment he has been receiving while on this mission will continue to be paid into his account at Messrs Coutts who I believe are the London correspondents of the Cornish

Bank, of which he is a partner. There should be no difficulty in your being able to draw ample funds.'

'Thank you, my lord. And d'you think an appeal *will* be made?'

'Appeal?'

'To the Emperor.'

'Lord Castlereagh, as you know, is the Foreign Secretary. I will consult with him and see how we may best go about it.'

This sounded to Demelza like a diplomatic evasion. She said: 'D'you think the – the Prince Regent might help?' When Liverpool stared she stumbled on: 'I mean by letter. Ross said he was very interested in his mission when they met, when Ross was knighted.'

Liverpool fingered the back of his chair, frowned, then half smiled at his visitor.

'I don't think at the present time it would be diplomatically possible, my dear. All the crowned heads of Europe have taken this united stand not to enter into any correspondence with the usurper. It would be impossible to ask his Royal Highness to break that undertaking, however worthy the object.'

Chapter Four

I

The first week living under the threat of imminent bankruptcy had almost gone, and Stephen was no farther out of the wood. Over the last year he had made a number of business friends in the area and a host of acquaintances, and he had tried them all out; but although he was liked by most people it went no farther than that.

A difficulty was that he did not dare to state that Warleggan's Bank was withdrawing all credit at short notice, for, once the news got around, his creditors – of whom there were not a few – would be waiting on his doorstep. His approach was to say that he found the Warleggan banking methods too restrictive and he was looking for alternative finance. Whether that convinced his hearers or not, it did not open their purses. Clowance had had the idea of approaching Valentine – he had always been friendly with Stephen and so hated his father that he might take on the loan to spite him – but no sooner did the idea occur to her than she met Tom Guildford in Falmouth, who told her that the young Warleggans had left for Cambridge yesterday.

The only constructive move was from a man called Jack Pender – the son of the Mayor – who, being told by Stephen that he was thinking of selling one of his fleet, offered four hundred guineas for *Chasse Marée*. It was a poor price but better than it might have been. Pender had a couple of three-masted tuggers that fished and trawled in the Channel, and he was looking for something a bit bigger and faster. *Chasse Marée* had originally been designed for fishing and would fit well into his plans for expansion. The vessel in question was at present somewhere in the North Sea, but after a token show of reluctance to try to get the price up, Stephen shook hands on the sale. Unfortunately the money would not be paid over until the brig returned.

Nor could the *Adolphus* sail next week with a third cargo of slate for Dieppe while its captain struggled for solvency. More than half of the cargo was already loaded and by Saturday she would be ready to leave. An excuse could be found

for the delay, but such delay would cost him half his profit, and if she had to be unloaded in Penryn it would be another stone round his neck to sink him.

During this period Clowance had not seen Harriet at all, but a month ago Harriet had lent them two books on architecture belonging to George. (George had come by them accidentally at a sale while buying some mining books, and although he had no intention of ever reading them he was too thrifty to throw them away.) It was when the new house was being planned and the two books had been the subject of much study and discussion over the table in the Carrington home with the candlelight flickering. It was time to return them. In any case building on the new house had to come to a stop.

Stephen was in Falmouth. He had contrived a meeting with the manager of the Cornish Naval Bank. After all, what purpose, he said to Clowance, could a Cornish Naval Bank have other than to finance respectable seagoing ventures such as his own?

Clowance decided to ride to Cardew and leave the books with a footman. The sooner they were out of her possession the better. Nero was headstrong for lack of exercise and she galloped and trotted and galloped again until at length, climbing the steep hill to Cardew, he consented to fall into a dignified snorting walk.

Harriet was on the steps. It was the last thing Clowance wanted. Harriet raised an arm and smiled.

‘Welcome. I am just about to feed the hounds. Come in and join me.’

‘I was only returning these books,’ said Clowance, not dismounting. ‘I ought to get back.’

Harriet raised her eyebrows. ‘Something amiss?’

Faced with the blunt challenge, Clowance said: ‘Oh? . . . Er – no. I just thought I would bring these books back. We have – no further use for them.’

‘You weren’t out with us yesterday. It was very good for the last day of the season.’

‘Yes,’ said Clowance. ‘Well, we really could not manage it.’

Harriet pushed her hair away from her face. ‘My dear, are you coming or going?’

‘Going,’ said Clowance.

‘In that case something is amiss. Are you willing to come with me to meet the hounds and make me a party to it? Or do you wish to go away and sulk in silence?’

Their eyes clashed. Clowance hesitated. She had no quarrel with Harriet, except for the company she kept.

She said: ‘I’ll come and help you feed the hounds.’

II

Harriet said: 'You have to watch 'em. Some are greedy, some pick and choose. It is no good offering them a free for all.'

The oatmeal pudding had been made in huge coppers, with the grooms stirring the mixture for the best part of an hour over the fire. Once it was stiff enough the fire was kicked out and the pudding taken in buckets and turned out on a slate slab to cool. Volcanoes of oatmeal stood smoking until they were ready for the hounds to eat them. Then the hounds were released by the grooms by name, so that the greedy ones should not gobble up more than their share.

'Well,' said Harriet presently. 'I do not suppose you to be the sort of young woman to get some bee in your bonnet without good reason. If you are, then I think less of you, and you can be gone.'

Clowance told her.

For a while Harriet watched the hounds in silence. 'I know nothing of this.'

Clowance smiled in a wintry way. 'I did not suppose you would.'

'And what has Stephen done so far?'

'All he can. He is trying the Cornish Naval Bank this morning, but I do not suppose their answer will be any different from the others. If Warleggan's are withdrawing credit, who wants to take their place?'

'True, I suppose, so far as Cornwall goes.'

'Carne's, whom he was with before, are not interested. My father's bank have offered to step in if there's a risk of Stephen going to prison. That at least we have to be thankful for. But of course it would only be a – a salvage operation. Recently he's been trying to organize a joint stock company: but there's simply no time! If Sir George keeps to his threat we have eight days more only.'

Harriet scratched inelegantly under her arm. 'And in your view Stephen has done nothing to deserve this disgrace?'

Clowance said: 'I try to take an impartial view of Stephen. He is a strange man, and because I love him I may be blind to some of his failings. But . . . I do *not* believe him to be dishonest deliberate. I do *not* think he has in any way attempted to cheat Warleggan's Bank. When he came home, only six or seven months ago, saying that your husband was prepared to finance him to buy the *Adolphus*, he was so full of pleasure and pride that I cannot believe he would – would do anything to destroy his own position, to risk destroying his new relationship with Warleggan's Bank for some petty small profit! I just do *not*, Harriet, and therefore I take his part.'

There was silence for a while, except for the salivatory noises of the hounds.

'They like fish,' said Harriet. 'It seems to suit 'em, though we mix it with a

They like fish, said Harriet. It seems to suit 'em, though we mix it with a good proportion of old cow. These damned beasts run a long way in seven months and they need good food. Now of course they are just beginning their hols. Not that they'll be allowed to slack, you know. They've trotted a couple of miles this morning, and will go another half-mile now before being allowed to snore off their dinner in the straw. Forty couple of 'em need a lot of feeding. And three huntsmen and nine horses. Although John Devoran is the official master, George foots almost all the bill, and that's entirely on my account as he never hunts himself. By the way, we shall be having a little mock-hunt tomorrow, just exercising the horses. Why don't you come along?'

Clowance smiled wryly. 'I couldn't, Harriet. How could I?'

'George is in Truro,' said Harriet. 'Still, I see what you mean. Very well, go home and nurse your grievance. But when I see George, which should be Friday, I will ask for his side of the story. Very difficult for me to judge until I hear what he has to say. It is a pity it has come to this.'

'Yes,' said Clowance, 'a great pity.'

III

George said: 'Who has told you this?'

'Clowance, of course. Who else? She came on Wednesday, clearly with some disturbance on her mind. I persuaded her to disburse it.'

'No doubt Carrington sent her.'

'I do not suppose so. Anyway, open my mind to what it is that you have discovered against him.'

'It is chiefly my head clerk, Lander,' said George, and blew his nose. 'He finds Carrington's devious book-keeping impossible to deal with. Carrington is incapable, it seems, of making an honest entry. We cannot continue to conduct business with or for such a person.'

'Why did Lander not find this out at an earlier stage before Stephen had so much committed himself?'

'Carrington came one day last autumn blustering into my office, and I allowed myself to be taken in by his self-confident manner. He agreed to hand over the financial conduct of his affairs to us, and he has not done so.'

'Clowance tells me that since he was taken on by your bank he has virtually done nothing without Mr Lander's approval. Surely Lander is also to blame. In any event I would have thought this an occasion for a severe reprimand, not a withdrawal of credit and a calling in of bills which will force him into bankruptcy!'

bankruptcy.

George said irritably: 'My dear, you do not understand these things. Kindly change the subject. Ursula will be home this weekend, and her pony is sick. I want your advice as to the horse we should mount her on tomorrow. She's tall enough now to merit a sensible horse, but not a wayward one. There's no need to take risks.'

Harriet was brushing her shoulder-length hair. Her brilliant dark eyes watched George through the mirror.

'Is this – this change of mind towards Stephen – has it anything to do with the old feud?'

'What old feud? You mean, because Clowance is a Poldark? Certainly not.'

'Do you mean it never entered your head?'

'Certainly *not*. I do not run the most prosperous bank in Cornwall by allowing such petty quarrels to influence me.'

Harriet resumed her brushing. Her hair gleamed like patent leather. When she had done she put down her brush.

'I think it was more than a petty quarrel, wasn't it? From all one hears; even what one hears from you. And it was not improved by the abrasive meeting last summer at Trenwith, was it? I am relieved to know that this is not at all in your mind, for it will be much easier to reconsider your decision.'

George put on his coat. The collar did not fit as it should. After years of having been dressed by a London tailor he had recently gone to a local man of good repute – he was so much less expensive. But it did not do. It would have to go back.

'Reconsider what decision, my dear?'

'Your decision to bankrupt Carrington.'

George looked at his wife sharply. She shook her head at him. 'It won't do, George. It won't do.'

'What on earth are you talking about?'

'This cannot be allowed to happen, on what is really a very small excuse. I find Stephen Carrington an interesting man, and in some ways I rather admire his – roughness, his maleness, his self-confidence. Yes, I admire all those qualities. But I would not care a button really for Stephen. It is Clowance I will not see dragged down in such a degrading fashion. I am fond of her and wish to keep her as my friend.'

'This no doubt you will be able to do.'

'No, I shall not. And I have to remind you that she saved Castor's life when he became caught in that devilish mantrap in February.'

George finished criticizing the set of his coat and looked at Harriet.

'You cannot be serious that I should change the board's decision.'

‘Never more so, my dear.’

George took out his watch. ‘The Vivians will be here in ten minutes. They are never late. As you know I want to talk business with him after dinner, so—’

‘So I shall be saddled with the tedious Betsey, who at heart, I am sure, has the instincts and interests of a washerwoman . . . Then let this matter lie until this evening – or even tomorrow, so long as you will admit to second thoughts on the matter.’

‘Second thoughts?’

‘On the matter of bankrupting Stephen Carrington.’

‘Quite out of the question! The matter has been decided. There is nothing more to say.’

‘There is only one thing more to say, dear George,’ said Harriet, ‘and that is that it cannot be.’

IV

The argument was resumed in her bedroom late that night. The Vivians had been and gone – he the impoverished younger son of a peer with certain land and mining rights he could be persuaded to sell. Ursula had come and gone, arriving from school an inch taller in six months, still too fat but shedding the worst of it, bursting with talk of school and other irrelevances, unlike most girls not really interested in horses but trooping dutifully after her step-mother – at her father’s behest – to choose a mount for tomorrow’s ride; then staying on, staying up much too late, indulging herself and being indulged by George because it was the weekend.

Harriet had various ways of managing George, but this was not an occasion when any of the usual methods would serve. Usually she avoided a confrontation: after the terrible storms of her marriage to Toby Carter it had amused her lazy good temper to get her own way with George by elegant manoeuvre and a bare-faced tolerant insolence. The success of these methods she knew stemmed equally from her good looks and her blue blood. Not to mention her ability to bemuse and excite him sexually when she was in the mood. In business she knew him to be a hard and sometimes vindictive man; as a husband he was not half bad. She had never had so much money and so much freedom to spend it. But there were limits to her good temper.

She began almost as she had left off, quite casually, asking him if he were not really deceiving her and that this decision to jettison the Carringtons did not spring from the old feud, as she had suggested before dinner.

‘Not at all. Not in any way at all!’

‘Then I fear, dear George, that you will have to produce some better reason for your decision than you have already given! After all, they have been to this house many times – and two or three times at least at your invitation! They are more than casual acquaintances. You cannot tip them into the ditch and walk away as casually as you propose! Has Stephen insulted you in some way? Or Clowance? I seek an explanation that I can believe.’

George’s bull neck showed as he lowered his head, much as if someone had held up a red flag. ‘Harriet, it is no business of yours!’

‘Of course it is business of mine! Don’t be so silly.’

‘I have told you my reasons!’

‘And I don’t believe them.’

‘Accept that I *have* good reasons!’

‘Certainly I shall not unless you tell me them.’

George took a handkerchief out of his pocket and blew his nose.

‘I think I am developing a cold.’

‘Don’t change the subject.’

‘I shall take some tisane tonight. It is a good opening medicine.’

‘And what of the Carringtons?’

‘They are to be jettisoned, as you put it. Or he is. I am sorry if his wife has to be included, but there you are. It is not my fault that she married him. No doubt they will make out. A scoundrel like him will turn a penny somewhere.’

Harriet got up, grabbed George by the arm.

‘Tell me the truth.’

George shook his arm free. It was not often they were in physical contact with each other except in their rare sexual encounters. A contact which represented hostility was unknown.

‘Very well,’ he said roughly, ‘if you will have the whole truth, sit down and listen.’

She moved a pace away from him, sat on the end of the bed, pushing the curtains aside and holding them against her cheek.

He sat astride a chair, looking more than ever like the Emperor Vespasian. ‘Do you recall – perhaps you do not – that in the year after our wedding, in the following January to be exact, there was a coach robbery and a large amount of securities, bank notes, bullion and jewellery were stolen from the Self Reliance coach?’

‘Of course I remember. You were very angry. And did not my Aunt Darcy lose some trinket? A loving cup?’

‘Yes, a loving cup. It was of small value, I remember, but she seemed to hold

me responsible for having allowed it to be stolen! However, the total loss was indeed considerable – near on six thousand pounds when all was added up. *Listen to me!*’ he said sharply when she was about to interrupt. ‘The scheme was a very clever one, carried out with audacity and cool nerve which only educated people could have achieved. All four inside seats were booked ahead from Plymouth to Truro, and three were occupied. Whether a fourth ever intended to join them we do not know; he did not turn up. Somewhere on that journey from Plymouth to Truro they pulled back the felt lining and cut a hole by drilling through the mahogany framework of the coach into the box seat where the two bank boxes were stowed; they pulled these down into the coach, broke them open, put the contents into some receptacles of their own and replaced the empty boxes in the box seat. They then roughly replaced the large piece they had taken out of the woodwork of the coach and tacked the lining back into place. We have reason to suppose the thieves made good their escape at Lostwithiel.

‘Now,’ said George, ‘we have some description of the three thieves. Two people pretended to be the Revd and Mrs Arthur May. No such persons exist. The third was a Lieutenant Morgan Lean, who claimed to be in His Majesty’s navy. No such person exists. The false clergyman and his wife were both tall, he with greying hair and heavy steel spectacles; she was dark-skinned, had little to say to anyone, and pretended she was ill, so that they might draw the blinds. Lieutenant Morgan Lean was not so tall but broadly built and younger, with a white wig and heavy black eyebrows. They were all to some extent disguised, but clearly could not wear anything too obvious, or they would have drawn attention to themselves. Neither the coachmen nor the guards were observant enough to give anything more than the vaguest of descriptions. We offered a reward, as you know, of a thousand pounds but no one came forward. It seemed that the thieves had got away.’

‘Did you not advertise the numbers of the notes?’ asked Harriet.

‘We did. But we laid a trap. By no means all the numbers of the notes were known. Only twelve, in fact. We advertised the numbers of seven and kept five back. None of the seven has ever come to light, but one of the other five did. It was paid into our bank at Truro. It was the first break we had made, the first clue, the first advance. And do you know who paid it in?’

Harriet shook her head.

‘You, my dear.’

‘*What?* What on earth do you mean?’

‘I mean that it followed one of those gaming evenings when you were entertaining your young gentlemen friends, and someone clearly had lost money to you and paid you with this note.’

‘I’m damned!’ said Harriet after a moment, and rubbed the curtain against her cheek.

‘The names of all the young men who had been gaming at our house that week were therefore carefully noted. There was Anthony Trefusis, Ben Sampson, Stephen Carrington, Andrew Blamey, Percy Hill, George Trevethan, Michael Smith. When I asked you casually how the games had gone you told me that the chief losers had been Anthony Trefusis, Andrew Blarney and Stephen Carrington. So I set in train a number of inquiries which suggested to me that the likeliest of these was Stephen Carrington.’

‘So that is how the wind is blowing,’ said Harriet, staring at him. ‘But hold hard. Bank notes change hands. Stephen has been in trade for some time. He could well have received the note from someone else that morning!’

‘There was clearly no proof. But there was good reason for suspicion.’

‘And what has happened since? Supposedly something to foster it.’

George did not like his wife’s tone.

‘On the day of the robbery the coach was joined at Liskeard by a Mr Arthur Rose, an elderly lawyer, who insisted on travelling inside, since there was a spare seat. Whether the robbery was in process at the time I know not – possibly it was interrupted by him – but he noticed nothing untoward and left again at Dobwalls. But, unlike everyone else, he had an opportunity of observing the other three passengers at close quarters; also being a lawyer he was a keen observer; and later, when the robbery became known, he stated that he would be likely to recognize the thieves if he were confronted with them.’

‘Was he the—’

‘After the discovery of the bank note which had come to light as a result of the gambling here, I arranged an invitation for all the young men who had been present at our house during that particular week, and invited Mr Rose to come to see me on some other business. I thought this might help to solve the identity of one or more of the thieves.’

‘And he died on you!’ exclaimed Harriet. ‘I remember the party! You were expecting this mysterious Mr Rose and he never turned up!’

‘He was taken ill in the coach while being accompanied here by Hector Trembath. He died in Truro,’ George added bitterly.

Harriet laughed her low contralto chuckling laugh. ‘I often wondered about that night. You were in quite a taking. So it all ended in failure? But something, I suspicion, has come about more recently?’

‘Indeed. Something has come about. Last month Carrington was in my office, and as a legal document had to be attested Trembath was present. After Carrington had gone Trembath told me that in the coach Mr Rose said he had

noticed that Lieutenant Morgan Lean had lacked an eye-tooth – on the left side of his mouth. Stephen Carrington, as I am sure you will have observed, lacks an eye-tooth – on the left side of his mouth.’

The fire in the grate was burning low, and Harriet got up from the bed and put on a silk dressing-gown. Although early May, there was a chill in the house.

‘And so? What else?’

‘Nothing else. The fool never told me before. But it is enough.’

‘You would get no conviction in a court of law.’

‘Of course I could not! I am not seeking one!’ George said in irritation: ‘I know we shall never bring these men to justice now. Not, that is, without some singular piece of good fortune. But the evidence against Carrington is enough to convince me beyond the shadow of a doubt. There is the general description of the man, his age, his build, his colouring – eyebrows are easily dyed – the appearance of the bank note, and now the identification of the tooth. And finally the fact that he found money from somewhere to set up in trade and buy two trading vessels. I am utterly convinced – and that is enough.’

Harriet reseated herself on the bed. Her face wore its most non-committal expression; George looked at it and could read nothing there.

‘I have tried to be perfectly frank with you, my dear,’ he said, in a grudgingly gentle voice. ‘You asked for my reasons. Now that I have given you them I’m sure you will fully endorse them.’

Harriet said: ‘You suspected Carrington almost as soon as the bank note came to light.’

‘I thought him far the most likely. Also, unlike most of the others, his movements were not accounted for on the days in question.’

‘But if you have been suspecting him all this time, why did you agree to help him when he came to see you last autumn?’

George bit his lip. With women it was usually unwise to be too frank.

‘I was taken in by him. I had just quarrelled with Valentine. The robbery was in the background. I thought, there can be no proof, so let him be given the benefit of the doubt.’

‘And an eye-tooth makes all the difference?’

‘An eye-tooth makes all the difference. It may seem less than conclusive to you. To me it is as if everything, all the facts, have fallen into place—’

‘If this is what you suspect, why do you not tell him so to his face?’

George hunched his shoulders in irritation. ‘Impossible.’ It had never occurred to him and he considered the suggestion outrageous. You cannot accuse a man of such a thing! Had Rose lived it would have been quite different!’ He sneezed. ‘I have caught a cold. This weather is treacherous.’

‘But you needn’t have told me that,’ Harriet said, looking at him.

‘But you condemn him unheard.’ Harriet still rubbed her cheek up and down the curtain. It was a silly gesture, he thought. ‘Really, George, it won’t do. It won’t do.’

‘What won’t do? I have already told you it is done! Now I wish you good-night.’

‘And I have already told you,’ said Harriet, ‘that so far as Stephen is concerned you may do what you will with him for all I care – or could do so were it not that he is married to Clowance. And here I will not see bankrupted and deprived of her new house and made destitute, all for the sake of an eye-tooth! As I have told you—’

‘Pray do not mention that dog again!’

‘Castor. That’s his name. He has a name, George, and do not forget it. He is nine years old and I have had him since he was nine weeks, and I am indebted to Mrs Carrington for the fact that he is still alive!’

‘And I have told you it is done. Carrington receives no further accommodation from my bank. Good-night!’

‘George,’ said Harriet.

Something in her voice stopped him at the door.

She said: ‘I have an obligation towards Clowance. It must be discharged.’

‘Then discharge it in some other way.’

‘There is no other way. You must do this for me.’

‘I cannot and will not!’

‘Then you must humour me.’

‘*Humour* you?’ George stared at her, scandalized. Whatever did she mean? He had never been asked such a thing before. ‘I have to tell you once and for all that my mind is made up! There is no going back on what I have decided! If the young man cannot be hanged – as he well deserves to be – he shall certainly not be allowed to live comfortably subsidized by the man he has robbed! Alas, he will not starve in the gutter or go to prison for debt, as I had hoped. I had forgot their connection with the Cornish Bank. More’s the pity. But he’ll have to sell up! Seeing him sell up will repay me in a small way for all the money he stole. And I shall make sure – as I can make sure – that he will never work in Cornwall again!’

Harriet looked at her husband’s grey, hard face with some distaste.

‘And have you no concern for me?’

‘You? What do you mean? Of *course*, I have. But not to the point of allowing that gallows-bird to flourish, if I can clip his wings!’

‘But I have to be humoured, George.’

He thumped the open door with the flat of his hand and shouted: ‘Humoured? Humoured? Such a damned stupid silly word! I do not know what you are

humoured: such a damned stupid silly word: I do not know what you are about.'

'What I am about,' said Harriet, 'is to give birth.'

George sniffed and dabbed his nose. 'Well, I do not know what your idea may be, but you may tell me of it in the morning. So long as it is not—'

'My idea', said Harriet in her most austere voice, 'is that I am enceinte, gravid, pregnant, in pup, call it what you will. No doubt there are as many names for the production of a child as for the act which initiates it. If you—'

'Is this some *joke*?' George shouted again, thoroughly angry, and peering at her as if he were becoming short-sighted.

'Perhaps you may think it so. I do not. It has come as surprising to me since I have not conceived before. But after all it is a natural consequence of coupling. My age is against me for a first child – I am thirty-four – but older women have done as much as I shall be expected to do. What I am most furious and frustrated about is that it will play the devil with the hunting season. A Christmas child, I suppose. That will be a great bore.'

The door shook a little in George's hand. 'You are not *joking*?'

'Indeed not. I only wish I were.'

A rather long silence ensued. Harriet eventually got up and bent to throw a couple of pieces of wood on the fire.

'That,' said George, almost in a whisper now. 'That was the meaning of that word?'

'What word?'

'Humouring.'

Harriet smiled bleakly. 'Yes, George. I rather suppose it was.'

Chapter Five

I

From Lady Poldark in London to her elder daughter in Falmouth.

Dearest Clowance,

I have had a letter from your Father!!! It has come in care of the Prime Minister and is writ from Verdun, he says he is well and suffering no great hardship, I would send you the letter but I cannot bear to part from it. Of course he would say he was well just to reassure me, but I believe there is something about the letter that makes me believe him. In his nature being confined will greatly irk him but perhaps that is all, I pray that is all, he says he is getting used to French food and will be all the harder to please when he returns to Nampara! There is no term he says as yet to his internment and this deeply frets me, but at least I have a *letter* and that is *important* and he sends his love to you and all!!! It seems he reached Paris he says only a few hours after we left. I cannot forgive myself for not staying on.

I remain in London for a few more weeks but Isabella-Rose and Henry will go home when Caroline goes home. Travelling with her. Perhaps I should do the same, but I feel just at present I am a little matter nearer to your Father than if I was in Cornwall. It is not at all the same as when he was away on some Mission, then I could settle to look after the house and the mines and the children and the farm and everything knowing that he would come home as soon as he could, this is not at all the same, but at least I know he has so far come to no harm.

In the end I may have to return home without him. Things look ill between us and France and you cannot see into the future, I am anxious for Jeremy.

What do you think? At a dinner at Mrs Pelham's (Caroline her aunt) I met Edward Fitzmaurice, and he invited us to tea at Lansdowne House to meet Aunt Isabel again. She was some kind – I cannot tell you – and has invited me, when the children return home, to spend a few weeks with her at

Lansdowne House, as the Lansdownes are at Bowood, and she says she is *lonely*! So I have accepted.

Dear life, you must think my nature has changed to accept such an invitation, but I too am lonely and I welcome the thought to be with friends – even such high-bred friends – instead of the emptiness of your Father's rooms in George Street, also I look for all means to aid your Father, and if Lord Lansdowne comes back while I am there he may be able to help in some way.

One thing which is irking me a great deal is that, although post can be received in England from France, no postal communication is permitted to France from England. This is because Bonaparte is being treated as an outlaw, and while he controls France France too is being treated the same. I have spoke to Lord Liverpool and he says he will do his most to circumvent – I believe that was the word – these regulations, I have writ a very long letter to your Father and it is urgent that he know we are safe and well.

I did not tell you in my letter from Paris for it seemed so trivial but Bella met a young Englishman at an Embassy party and they were much taken with each other. He is a Lieutenant Christopher Havergal who says he served under Geoffrey Charles in Spain. He is about 21 and of course much too old for Bella, but Bella is so tall and well grown for her age that many folk in Paris took her for seventeen. We both know that Bella is too young for anything yet but that is not how she regards herself. Well, we let the flirtation run its course, for he was there but two weeks and then he was returning to Belgium; when he left Bella was full of the mopes for a few days – and you know how once in a while she can be like that – but then it all passed away and was seemingly forgot. But now he has turned up in London! Again it is for scarcely more than a week but he calls regularly asking if he may take Bella out and I sometimes let her go, though I make certain sure that Mrs Kemp goes with them. It is another good reason for Bella to return to Cornwall with Caroline. It is all some silly, and I fear Lieutenant Havergal though seeming so charming is really trifling with a child's affections. He is good-looking in a somewhat dashing way and would be much better occupied with some young lady of his own age. I do not really understand him at all.

This is all about me and about us and not about you but that is what a letter is for isn't it. Pray tell me in reply all your news even the smallest part of it. Did you go to Nampara and how did you find them and how is Stephen and how do you fare yourself? Although so far apart we are thanks be in the same country and there is nothing to restrict a letter or as many letters as we have the time and the patience to write.

Mrs Kemp is of course to return with Caroline and the children and until I

come home she will be in charge of them with the Enyses to keep an eye on them as often as they may. I do not need to ask you to go over to see them, and they will tell you far more of our experiences than ever I have been able to squeeze into a letter. Perhaps if your Father return quickly and there is no war I shall feel different, but for now I do not think I ever want to journey out of England again.

My dearest love to you both.
Mother

II

On a morning in early May Ross had a visitor. It was a brilliant day and having spent nearly half an hour looking out of his window at the sun glinting on the trees and the river, Ross turned and could not for a moment adjust his eyes to recognize the bulky figure in the doorway.

Then he exclaimed: 'Gaston!'

Brigadier Rougiet stepped into the room and the soldier closed the door behind him. He walked over and clasped Ross's hand.

'My friend, this is a pretty pass I find you in! I had no idea! I thought you were safely home in England long ago, *long ago*! How has this happened? Pray tell me.'

Ross told him. Rougiet rubbed at his long livid scar.

'But this is disgraceful! I still do not understand. You accepted my hospitality, that was all! Did you go elsewhere in France?'

Ross told him. He had never been entirely frank with Rougiet as to the mission Liverpool had sent him on, and he thought it was perhaps a bad time to confess it now. In any event there could hardly be proof of the despatches he had sent and nothing detrimental to the safety of the new France even if they were intercepted. The last of them had been in the Embassy post-bag while Napoleon was still in Lyon.

Rougiet scowled round the room. 'Are you comfortable here? You cannot be comfortable here! I am amazed. I know there is trouble between your country and mine – indeed between France and all the European powers. They seek to oppress us, they seek to dictate who shall lead us, they seek to turn back the clock. But no *war* has been declared. There is neither reason nor excuse for detaining a British citizen just because while he was on holiday in France he accepted an invitation to visit one of the army groups stationed near Paris! Your Embassy staff has gone long ago. I do not believe many if any of the citizens of

your country who were surprised in Paris or in other parts of France have been detained; though I believe their exits were sometimes delayed by passport formalities. Why, therefore, you? I must find out.'

Ross was about to reply but Rougiet got up and strode back to the door. When the soldier came Rougiet said: 'Bring some cognac. And some sweet biscuits . . . Well, find some.' He grimaced at Ross. 'I will make further inquiries. In the meantime help yourself, and I will return as soon as I am able.'

Ross was on his third cognac and feeling rather less discontented with life when Rougiet returned. But his friend was not beaming with triumph. He helped himself to a small glass of cognac, drained it and looked at Ross with a puzzled expression.

'This is not a military matter, my friend, it is a police matter. You have met General Wirion?'

'When I first came here, yes.'

'He says he simply obeys orders from Paris. He showed me the order. It is headed "The Minister of General Police to His Majesty the Emperor" and it is signed "The Duke of Otranto". Formal detention. Not even parole.'

'It was offered me,' said Ross. 'I refused it.'

'But such a pity! You would have been far freer, more comfortable.'

'I have hoped to be able to escape. No opportunity has presented itself so far.'

'I can see they are being very careful . . . But have you not been *charged*?'

'Presumably they can find nothing to charge me with.'

'All this is on the direct orders of Fouché. Have you met him?'

'I have met him.'

'He is acknowledged to be the cleverest policeman in Europe. Did you have some quarrel with him?'

'I did not hide my dislike.'

'Ah.' The big Frenchman refilled both glasses. He held the dark amber liquid up to the light. 'If it is some personal vendetta it will be more difficult, for he is, at present, a very powerful man. If one could get to the Emperor . . .'

'Gaston,' Ross said, 'I am greatly obliged for your interest in my comfort and welfare. But I charge you not to endanger your own position on my behalf. This is a misfortune that has happened to me and is in no way your responsibility. So leave it be; I am sure I shall be freed in due course.'

'Of course you will. But I am your friend – even though our countries are at loggerheads – and I must do what I can. Do not fear for *my* position. France has need of her soldiers, particularly her artillery, and no police chief is likely to do me any hurt.' Rougiet smiled as he sipped. 'I believe I have frightened the guard into bringing General Wirion's own brandy.'

They sipped in silence.

Rougiet said: 'Have you been questioned?'

'Oh yes. Twice. For six hours at a time.'

'Was any ill-treatment shown you?'

'No.'

'These police. You cannot always be sure. What did they ask you?'

'While we were in Paris I became friendly with a Mlle de la Blache. I had met her once in England many years ago.'

'Oh yes, I know her. She was formerly Baroness Ettmayer. For a time she was the mistress of Marshal Ney.'

Ross raised his eyebrows. 'I didn't know that.'

'For two or three years at least. Whenever he was in Paris they were seen everywhere together.'

'They now suspect her of having been a spy working on behalf of the Bourbons. She left Paris just before Napoleon arrived.'

'In that case I would not blame her! Fouché would have been swooping on her as soon as he had the authority.'

'Apparently my wife and children left Paris with Mlle de la Blache. This seems to have bred the suspicion that I was in some way involved in her activities.'

'These police,' Rougiet said again. 'They have strange and tortuous minds. If they try they can believe anything. I must somehow get word to the Emperor about this . . .'

'I saw him arrive in Paris,' Ross said.

'*Did you? Did you?* That must have been a great moment.' Rougiet passed a hand over his hair. 'Yet all Europe is against him. Even some parts of France murmur and are disaffected. But if it comes to war Bonaparte will prevail.'

'I trust it will not come to that.'

'So do I! So do we all! No one is more ardent for peace than the ordinary Frenchman. But everyone is against us.'

'Against Bonaparte.'

'Yes, but he arrived with a few hundred men on the south coast of France and in three weeks totally repossessed the country without a shot being fired! If that is not your democracy I don't know what is! It was the overwhelming will of the people! And he too now only wants peace. You will have heard, perhaps, that the Empress and his son, the King of Rome, have been forcibly prevented from joining him. It has been a great distress to him. He has left the Tuileries now, except for great occasions, and lives quietly in the Elysée, surrounded by his relations, his friends and his personal advisers.'

‘And Fouché?’ said Ross.

‘Ah, Fouché, no. He keeps to his office and weaves his own spider’s webs. Do you know it is said that when the Emperor arrived on the evening of the 20th and made his appointments, Fouché was at his desk by 2 a.m. the next morning. Your Mlle de la Blache did not leave a moment too soon! . . . Pah, I would not trust him an ell. He would as easily betray the Emperor as he did the King. He should have been guillotined years ago!’

The lovely spring morning was becoming tarnished by drifting cloud. It reminded Ross of the weather in Cornwall, light, frivolous, changeable. He wondered what Nampara would be like today. An azure sea hemmed in with surf, thundering over the sand? His house, the chimney’s smoke blowing eccentrically in the breeze, grass whispering, a horse neighing in the stables, men working in the fields? And his mine? His two mines? Why had he ever been such a fool as to leave it on this bizarre mission which had served no good purpose and ended in disaster? Was it ambition? But he had no ambition. Was it a sense of duty? But to whom did he owe any duty? Was it something in his perverse nature that hankered after a new and an unusual adventure?

But it had all gone so *well* for a time; it truly had. He knew that his strange pretty Cornish wife with all her earthiness and all her high-strung perceptions had enormously enjoyed the early weeks in Paris. It had renewed her. The heady entertainment, and the admiration that had come her way had brought her to bloom all over again.

If he had not taken that last trip to Auxerre . . .

Rougiet was eyeing him. You are far away, my friend.’

‘Yes.’

‘I was saying . . . But what does it matter? Maybe it is better unsaid.’

‘Pray tell me.’

‘I was saying to you – and it is a sombre thought – that the arsenals and factories of France are working at high pressure, the armourers have been called up, the National Guard likewise throughout the country, thousands of extra horses commandeered; arms are arriving from across the Rhine smuggled in barges and small boats, the Imperial Guard brought up to full strength. I need not explain to you that these preparations are not being undertaken with peace in mind – but they will only come into operation if the Germans and the English oppose us in Belgium.’

‘Why must you have Belgium?’

‘It has been ours for too long. We are almost the same people.’

Ross said after a moment: ‘I do not feel that England would fight so hard just to replace Louis. But there is strong feeling about the independence of Belgium

– even among the wings, who generally favour Napoleon.

‘It is too bad,’ said Rougiet, cracking the knuckles of his big hands. ‘But I have to tell you we shall very shortly have a hundred and fifty thousand picked troops in the Army of the North. There will be no chance for Wellington with the mixed and unreliable army he now commands . . . Still, there may yet be some chance of an accommodation, a compromise. I pray so.’

‘Amen. But if you had to fight such a battle how would you go about it?’

‘Oh . . . At the present we are making a few early concentrations in the area of Philippeville and Beaumont. But I must not disclose more to you. Nor could I, for I am not in the Emperor’s confidence.’

Ross saw that the brandy bottle, half full when it came in, was now empty.

‘There is also in this’, he said, ‘a man called Tallien. He was at that Embassy party where I first met you. Fouché was there too, you will remember.’

‘Tallien, oh yes. Fouché’s jackal.’

‘When I was arrested Tallien accompanied the gendarmes. He may be the cause of my imprisonment. I shook him up on one occasion because he was paying unwelcome attentions to my wife.’

‘So? An odious little lecher. He counts for nothing, of course, compared to Fouché. But Fouché protects him. Long ago the roles were quite reversed. For a time, in those wild days of the nineties, Tallien was President of the Convention. I am told that he protected Fouché then – that he saved him from the guillotine. Fouché, it is said, never forgets a favour and never forgets an injury.’

‘I can believe that.’

‘It is strange to think that Tallien cannot be more than eight or nine years older than I am, yet I was a mere youth at the time. Well . . .’ Rougiet stretched his legs. ‘Let us talk of happier things, eh? Your wife is safe and well? And your children? That is good. That is something . . . But we must spring you from this trap, my friend. Have a little patience and we will get you out.’

Chapter Six

I

On a fine Thursday, a week before Demelza left for Cornwall, Lieutenant Christopher Havergal called on her at Lansdowne House and asked her permission to pay his attentions to Isabella-Rose.

Demelza, who had been trying to concentrate on reading a book – a novel – recommended by Lady Isabel Fitzmaurice, picked the book up again, found a spill to mark her place, and then put it back on the table.

‘Your attentions, Lieutenant Havergal? I’m not sure what that . . . It can’t mean what I think it mean.’

‘It means that eventually I wish to ask Isabella-Rose’s hand in marriage.’

‘You – are not serious, Lieutenant?’

He coughed into his hand. ‘Yes, ma’am. Very serious indeed.’

Demelza perceived that he had had his hair cut and his moustache trimmed. His uniform too was new.

‘You are asking . . . my permission to – to – to . . .’ She could not say it.

‘Indeed, Lady Poldark. I am sorry if it comes as such a – a surprise to you.’

Demelza also observed that he was nervous. Nervous! Lieutenant Christopher Havergal, nervous!

‘I still don’t quite understand. Do you know how old my daughter is?’

‘Yes, ma’am. It is quite incredible. Everyone takes her for seventeen. But I do know how old she is. May I sit down and be allowed to explain myself?’

Demelza waved her hand weakly towards a chair.

He sat on the edge of it, coughed again. His moustache was still long enough to quiver when he coughed.

‘I am not suggesting, Lady Poldark, I could not and would not dare to suggest an early marriage. But perhaps in two years, when she is fifteen . . . Until then a betrothal . . . That is what I would like more than anything in the world. What we would like . . .’

‘So Isabella-Rose knows of this – this proposal of yours?’

‘Oh yes, ma’am. We talked of it before she left for Cornwall.’

Oh yes, ma'am. We talked of it before she left for Cornwall.

'And she would like to marry you?'

'Yes, ma'am. It seems to be . . . to be her dearest wish.'

No wonder the little monkey had seemed so bouncy when she climbed into the coach with Caroline.

'I am leaving for Flanders tomorrow,' said Havergal. 'Since Bella left I have been trying to summon up the courage to call. You will see I have left it to the last minute. It means so much to me that I have shirked putting my suit to the test.'

'But Lieutenant Havergal—'

'Pray call me Christopher if you will, ma'am.'

'But Christopher, what you ask is impossible! Although in some ways she seem so mature, she is scarce out of childhood! At that age one is – fanciful, light-hearted, just beginning life. To suggest she would know her own mind so soon, on such an important matter as this – oh, I am sure she thinks she does, but in three months she will see some other young man and transfer all her romantic ideals to him! It is – natural! Oh, I am sorry to say this, but may I ask you how often you have been in and out of love with some pretty girl since you were thirteen?'

He had very nice eyes when he looked at you directly; no wonder the naughty Bella had a fancy for him.

'Often, Lady Poldark. I have met many pretty girls – and – if it does not offend you to say so – have had three of them as my mistresses – one of them Portuguese. Many of them have delighted me, but none before has ever touched my heart.'

Demelza glanced round the enormous room with its high windows and its heavy furnishings. Her visit to Lansdowne House was not a great success. Lady Isabel could not have been sweeter, indeed seemed delighted with her company; but it came as strange at the best of times for Demelza to do nothing but sit and read or take a constitutional round Berkeley Square or make polite conversation at a tea-table; And this was not the best of times. Her whole life was disrupted, and the proper way, the only way, to counter such disruption was in *work*, sheer physical work such as digging, weeding, beating a carpet; or even milking a cow and carrying the pail back and forth from the dairy. Inaction bred the strangest fancies. She was not happy here but was staying until her allotted time was up.

'Forgive me, Lady Poldark,' this handsome elegant droopy young man said, reclaiming her attention; 'you will think it beyond the world presumptuous in me to say this, but I believe you do not yet quite realize what an extraordinary young woman your daughter is. Have you heard her *voice*? But of course you have! But

perhaps you do not realize what an extraordinary fascination and range it has! She must do *something* with it! Perhaps she should go on the stage – or into opera. She would be invaluable, unique, in some branch of the world of entertainment, the musical world. She has a great future in front of her!’

‘Married to you?’ Demelza was ashamed of the question but it bubbled up in her.

‘I think so, ma’am. I think so. Of course we have this little trouble with Boney to settle first. Who knows, I may not survive? And then our betrothal would be irrevocably broken. But if I survive, and when it is over, I have no intention of making the army my permanent career. I shall live in London and pursue some other career.’

‘You have money?’ Dear life, she thought, what’s come over me? ‘Tesn’t right, ‘tesn’t proper. Shades of Jud!

‘Enough money to live on,’ said Havergal. ‘Some expectations. I read for the bar but did not progress far enough. It could be taken up again. You will see, Lady Poldark, that I do not pretend a special eligibility. But I sincerely believe that if Bella were married to me I could bring her talents to the notice of influential men who would know how to make the best of them.’

Demelza picked up her book. It would soon be four o’clock and Lady Isabel, having taken her rest, would be ready for tea; bright-eyed and chatty and deaf and rather sweet and rather boring.

‘Christopher,’ she said. ‘In the first place I could not possibly let you become betrothed to Isabella-Rose without her father’s consent, and that at present is impossible to obtain. You see. In the second place, although I find you likeable and personable I do not think you have quite played fair with us by engaging the affections of a little girl who is still too impressionable to know her own mind —’

‘Lady Poldark!—’

‘Oh, I know what you are going to say. It was mutual between the both of you. I well can guess how Bella would need no leading on. But you are – twenty-one, is it?, almost twenty-two – you are good-looking, a dashing officer, a – a young man of experience; how could she fail to be swept off her feet? You have not played quite fair with us and you must – must understand the – the consequences. I cannot and will not give permission for any such betrothal like you suggest! It is not possible and pray forget it!’

He sat with his long fair hair falling over his face. Then he looked up and grinned at her – a really wicked grin.

‘So be it, ma’am. Perhaps the permission I sought was too much to expect. Were I in your position I believe I might feel the same. So let us leave it a while.

I will go now. But I trust that if, in a year or two years, your daughter and I should meet again and be of the same mind, you would not find me so personally distasteful or dislikeable as to forbid us your approval?’

She looked at him, part hostile, part won over.

‘I cannot say, Lieutenant Havergal. Nor can I speak for my husband. I do not suppose he will at all approve. But what may or may not happen in the future I have no idea. I can only ask you pray to forget about anything you have said to me for a long time to come.’

II

The Royal Standard was the principal hotel in Falmouth. It had a billiards room with fine views of the harbour and a large coffee room, also on the first floor, which was the meeting place for the seafaring folk of the town, though generally speaking it was the captains and masters and agents and factors who met there, not the ordinary seamen. Stephen went regularly and had made it his business to be popular; he had an easy friendly manner, didn’t push where he saw he was not wanted, and stood his round. Occasionally he now took Jason with him.

On the Thursday on which Christopher Havergal was putting his proposition to Demelza the room was crowded to its limits, for the weather had turned unfriendly: hazy cloud with a strong south-easterly half gale which was keeping around sixty sail embayed in the Carrick Roads. Chiefly it was a West Indian convoy, and not only were the crews ashore but the passengers, putting up at various lodging houses of doubtful excellence and crowding the narrow streets during the daylight hours as they sought some distraction from the delay.

With only two days to go before the axe Stephen was not the best company, but in Jason’s presence he always put on a show; pride in his son’s admiration for him impelled him to make the effort. He had not told Jason of the impending crash, but during the evening the young man got a fair idea that trouble of some sort was impending.

‘What’s amiss, Fa-Uncle?’ he said in an undertone after Captain Buller had left. ‘Why ask him?’

‘Because the *Queen Charlotte*’s being refitted for taking on the New York run – now the war’s over. He’ll be signing up crew early next month, and there’ll be plenty applying. He’s got a good reputation and the money’s good.’

‘I don’t want to join the Packet Service,’ said Jason. ‘I don’t want to work for anyone but you. I know I wasn’t needed on the *Chasse* – or Blamey did not want for me to be mate – but I’m willing enough to sail as an ordinary seaman on the

Adolphus.

‘Aye, lad,’ said Stephen. ‘I’ve no doubt ye are.’

‘There’s something serious wrong, isn’t there. *Adolphus* has been ready a week an’ she’s not yet victualled.’

‘Nothing to be gained by taking on stores while we’re all wind bound. Look at the masters in this room. Everyone’s held up.’

‘Yes, but if the wind came off at dawn tomorrow they’d all be away by the first tide. We could not be.’

‘Mind your own business,’ said Stephen, and gulped at his ale. But his voice was not sharp.

They listened together to two captains talking at the next table.

‘. . . the breeze died away and we was befogged and becalmed for nigh on ten days. Man, ye wouldna’ believe it but ye could hear sailors talking in other vessels and never see sight o’ them. Then when the fog lifted we might ha’ been part of an armada. Fourteen of ’em we counted gathered there like a flock of sheep by the calm . . .’

Jason said: ‘I heard you were thinking o’ selling *Chasse Marée*.’

‘Who told ye that?’

‘It was a word just dropped. Are we doing badly, Father?’

‘It is not our fault. I need time, Jason, and I can’t buy time.’

‘Time for what?’

‘No matter. You will find out soon enough.’

‘A hundred and fifty-eight barrels of tar,’ a voice said near to them. ‘Fifty-nine hogsheads of tobacco. Five hundred and fifty mats. Eighty wainscot logs. Clapboards. Laden to the gunnels, we were, and who should come up but this French privateer?’

The Carringtons listened in silence to the story.

Jason said: ‘So we’re at war with France again.’

‘Not yet. I don’t know. We may be. But Harrison’s talking about the winter before last. I’ve heard this story before.’

Jason said: ‘But it said in the paper last week. It said Parliament said there was a state of war. And it said in another part of the paper that no ships are to go to Ostend except in convoy because o’ the French privateers.’

‘The lad’s right,’ said a beery old man, leaning over from the next table.

‘They’ll be issuing Letters of Marque from this side of the Channel before you know. Wish I was younger. I’d go after some pickings.’

Jason looked at his father who, never down for too long, laughed and slapped the boy on the back.

‘Wish we could too. Maybe after the next few weeks, after the dust has

settled, we'll go adventuring on our own.'

'What is wrong with *Adolphus*?' persisted Jason.

'Ah . . . There's the rub, boy, there's the rub. Drink up, we must be going.'

Another conversation drifted to them from a large hairy, good-tempered man who might have German or Scandinavian blood.

'I picked up with the *Neptune* in December just before we got the Trade Winds, and for twenty-two days we never lost sight of each other, so even balanced was our rate of sailing. I was just ahead all the time; we were carrying topmast studding sails, but alas on the twenty-first day King Wind said we could carry them no longer and carried them off. Ha! ha! ha! No captain likes to be outdone, me least of all. So the next night we had supper together, McGennis and me. A Liverpool man but no worse for that. Ha! ha! ha! He told me he was homeward bound after a successful trip . . . Thank you, Tonkin. Here's to your health . . . A successful trip. Best part of it, he said, was when he was looking for wood and produce in the Gaboon River. Traders came aboard and offered him thirteen slaves. He took 'em. Carried them across and sold 'em to the Portuguese slave traders. Made more, he said, by this than all his commissions and adventures besides . . .'

There was what passed for a brief silence in the noisy coffee room.

''Tis a felony now, carr'ing slaves,' said a strongly Cornish voice. 'The law were brought in a few year ago, my dear. 'Tis profitable, I agree, but not if you get ten years' transportation for et.'

'If you get caught, true enough,' said the big man. 'But McGennis was not caught.'

'In Bristol,' said Stephen, 'I'm told they have a device of selling their ships to the Portuguese. Not really selling but a device, ye understand. Then they change their names and sail under the Portuguese flag. 'Tis dangerous, but the profits are huge.'

'I'd have no hand in it,' said a man called Fox. 'It would be moral blood money. A man who still trades in slaves is no better than a pirate.'

Jason said in an undertone: 'I wouldn't care. If we don't do it, someone else will. Tell you what, Father. One day we'll sail off in the *Adolphus* together, you as captain, me as mate, see what we can find. That would be real good. Come home wi' gold. If you're in trouble, Father, money trouble, that's the way out of it.'

Stephen looked at the stocky young man beside him. A chip off the old block.

In spite of the vagrant life he had led and the ill luck that had come his way in his earlier years, Stephen had always had a pride in himself, an arrogant belief in his own ability not merely to survive but to become a success. He was confident

in his own maleness, in his physical strength, in his good looks, in his ready tongue. There was a unique person called Stephen Carrington and there was no one quite like him. His mind was quick and adaptable, his body was something to be proud of, he walked with the hint of a swagger. And this boy was very like him. This boy, his blood, looked up to him with pride and admiration. And in a few days' time he would learn that his father had lost everything, was to be bankrupted at the whim of George Warleggan.

Well, there was no way out. Of course he was still alive, could somehow begin over again. Scrape together a few hundred pounds from among his friends, lease a small cutter or a schooner, start smuggling crude tin stuff to France, make a bit, add a bit, build up again a step at a time. (Though with the enmity of a Warleggan to face it would be an uphill struggle in this county.) Perhaps go back to Bristol, take Clowance and the boy. (Though he had quite a few enemies there.)

So all his abilities and adaptabilities really counted for nothing. The trap had been set and he had fallen into it. He had been riding high, and the higher the rise the bigger the fall.

Some folk would derive a sour satisfaction from it. Not excluding his father-in-law, he suspected, having no doubt from the beginning disapproved an association with the Warleggans. In spite of Clowance's trenchant rejection of the idea, the old feud seemed the most likely cause of his new ruin. (There was nothing else he had ever done to offend the Warleggans, except to steal money from their bank, a matter on which they could not have the inkling of suspicion.)

The two men left the hotel together. The south-easter met them, whistling round the corner. It was one of those relentless winds that do not take off even at night.

Stephen put his hand on Jason's shoulder, a feeling of warmth and comradeship coming over him. 'I've a difficult time coming, lad. That's why I was wanting you to sign up with Captain Buller. But no matter; I expect we'll get along somehow. Carringtons usually do.'

Chapter Seven

I

Jeremy had been away five days on manoeuvres and returned on the Friday afternoon to kiss Cuby repeatedly and to tell her he had planned a picnic for the Saturday.

‘Have I spoken of Captain Mercer? I forget. He has invited us to a picnic in Strytem, where he is stationed. It’s about twelve miles from Brussels. I have hired a carriage and if we leave at nine we shall be able to spend most of the day with them. Do you mind?’

‘I’d greatly like it. Is he in your regiment?’

‘No, the Horse Artillery under Sir Augustus Fraser. I met him at the Forties Club.’

‘Ah yes. I see.’

There was a brief silence. Jeremy’s membership of the Forties Club was virtually the only bone of contention between them. It was a gaming club open only to officers under the age of forty. They played faro, whist and lansquenet, for low stakes or high according to the whim of the players. The principle of the club was that money never changed hands: it was all done by IOU. Once a month there was a dinner and a reckoning. On one occasion Jeremy had shocked her by saying he was two hundred and fifty guineas in debt. Two weeks later, just before the dinner, he had reduced it to forty guineas, but that was not to say he could have been sure of any such outcome.

Cuby’s father had died when she was three months old and thereafter her life had been ruled by her brother – who was nine years the elder and who – well set up to begin – had nearly bankrupted himself building a magnificent Nash-designed crenellated mansion overlooking Porthluney Beach, and then compounded his error by trying to recoup his losses on the race course. His plan to marry Cuby into the rich Warleggan family had come to nothing, and it was very doubtful now whether he would be able to survive as a Cornish landowner. When, rarely, a sleepless night came to Cuby she would lie quiet beside Jeremy, hands behind her head, staring up at the ceiling and wondering what would

nails behind her head, staring up at the ceiling and wondering what would happen to her family now.

So, reacting to the sort of life in which she had lived all her youth, when outgoings were always greater than incomings, where essential building or repairs were stopped because no one could pay the bricklayers' wages, where the footmen in the house looked down at heel for lack of a shoe repair or wore a coat splitting at the seams because it had been made for someone else, where the marvellous horse that was going to win the Derby came in fourth or the run of amazing good luck at faro unfortunately changed to an amazing run of ill luck before the winnings could be pocketed, Cuby had, for the first and only time in their married life, exploded at Jeremy.

Afterwards there had been a wildly rewarding reconciliation, when they had kissed and made up, when he had brushed her damp lids with his own and stroked her breasts and kissed her eyelids, and had promised fervently that his gambling and his extravagances should be strictly curtailed.

'Do you mind, my sweetheart?' he asked, mistaking, or choosing to mistake, her hesitation. 'It will not be too much for you?'

'Of *course* it will not be too much for me, boy,' she said, using as she sometimes did out of deep affection the name she had first given him. 'Except for this nasty sickness, which your mother assures me will go away soon, I am very well. I must not be treated as if made of porcelain! For months and months and months yet it will make *no* difference to my activities. It is *natural* for a woman to have a baby. There is nothing *peculiar* about it. It is not an illness, a complaint, a disease. It is just a natural outcome of – of loving.'

'I am delighted', said Jeremy, 'that it will make no difference to your activities,' kissing her in the small of the neck and then on her hair and then blowing gently into her ear. His fingers stroked her face. 'The natural outcome of loving. What a good expression. Do you not think we should break our five-day fast?'

'Gladly, but it is still daylight.'

'I have no objection to the daylight.'

'And you have not eaten.'

'There are other hungers I would rather satisfy.'

The doorbell rang.

'Oh, *curse!*' said Jeremy, rising from beside her. 'Do not stir. Do not flicker an eyelid, my sweetheart, until I come back. I will send this savage intruder away.'

But when he opened the door a young man in civilian clothes stood there, in the company of a tall young woman. The young man was sturdily built, full lipped, dark haired and browed

upped, dark haired and brown.

‘Goldsworthy!’

‘My dear Jeremy! What a pleasure! I trust that we don’t call on you at an inappropriate moment? We have but an hour since arrived in Brussels. You have never met my wife, Bess? Bess, this is Jeremy Poldark; how happy I am that we have run you to earth!’

II

The Gurneys were in Brussels just for a week and had taken rooms in the rue du Musée. They had brought their young baby and a nurse and two servants. Brussels at the moment was the social capital of Europe, with Wellington giving repeated balls and much of the British aristocracy there to frequent them and to give soirées and luncheon parties and suppers themselves. Jeremy, used to regarding Goldsworthy as a juvenile and eccentric innovator and surgeon before his time – he was only twenty-two – was surprised that he had come to savour this hectic scene. Probably his new wife, Elizabeth, who was ten years his senior, was the instigator of the trip; though Gurney was no blushing violet. He was, he announced, thinking of moving to London, where all the important men of science congregated.

‘Cornwall is a backwater,’ he said, ‘for what I want to do. Trevithick is there still, but there’s talk of him going to South America. Woolf is active and there are a few other good men about, but I believe if you want to make the impact you have to go to London. I can practise as a surgeon there just as well as in Padstow. Not,’ he added, ‘that I shall lose touch with Cornwall. Once you have lived there, nowhere else is quite the same . . . And you, Jeremy, how long will you stay in the army? How long before we can go into partnership, constructing the next horseless carriage?’

They stayed to supper, with Cuby and Jeremy occasionally exchanging sweetly lustful glances when the others were not looking. Jeremy invited them for the picnic the following day, and they accepted.

At nine the following morning they set off in an open landau and rumbled over the cobbles and out of the city onto the country lane leading to Ninove. Swallows flew high as they passed through rich farmland, patched with woods in which the leaves were brilliantly bursting, a luxurious countryside, unscarred by war.

But a countryside preparing for war. Villages were full of cavalry or horse artillery or men marching behind gun carriages. ‘Ninove is Lord Uxbridge’s headquarters,’ said Jeremy. ‘He’s the commander of Wellington’s cavalry. It’s

headquarters, said Jeremy. He is the commander of Wellington's Cavalry. It is only three or four miles from here.'

All the same, undeterred by thoughts of battle, undistracted by – or uninterested in – the sights of a rich and fertile land, Goldsworthy Gurney spent the trip talking to Jeremy of his plans for a horseless carriage. He was still concerned about adhesion wheel grip on the roads. From his earlier ideas of levers or propellers which acted on the ground like horses' feet to get the carriage moving, he had turned to the introduction of revolving chains fitted with projections which by moving round, as in launching a dinghy, would help the carriage on its way. He had also been experimenting with a new piano which would, he hoped, harmonize with the organ he had built, and which many people said had a specially fine tone. Eventually they could be played together by a single performer.

The two ladies got on as best they might, which on the whole was pretty well. Mrs Gurney had been a Miss Symons of Launcells, and was suitably impressed that Mrs Poldark had been a Miss Trevanion. Cuby was relieved that her new friend knew of John Trevanion only as an ex-Sheriff of Cornwall and not as someone hopelessly in debt.

The carriage turned off the more acceptable road and jolted and lurched among the muddy ruts of a Flemish country lane. Three perilous streams were crossed by bridges on which the plankings were loose. The horses did not like it at all and had to be led.

When they reached Strytem, which was no more than a hamlet buried in tall elms, the moustached Captain Mercer was there to greet them. Two extra made no difference, and he led the way into a large ruined château where his troop was billeted. Inside it was handsome but dark, and soon the party set off followed by a cart containing the food and wine, and tablecloths were laid on the green sward by the banks of a slow-flowing river. There were fourteen of them, including four ladies, and they sat in the sun and laughed and talked and ate and drank in the greatest accord.

Ghent, said Captain Mercer, was crowded with Bourbons, from servants and hangers-on to princes of the blood. It was also a mustering point for British regiments arriving from England and then passing on to new camps and billets. No one, he said, had any idea what was happening as far as a strategy of war was concerned, but all the Belgians, and most of the French royalist officers attending on the King, were convinced that these splendid troops passing through to fight Bonaparte would, if it came to a battle, be thrown back into the sea.

Jeremy, in fact, knew a little more than Mercer, having been out all week on manoeuvres and having seen the Duke at close quarters. This had been just east

of the village of Waterloo, and at Halle where the roads from Ath and Mons united.

‘I do not suppose for a moment’, he said, ‘that the Duke will fight unless he has to. At present we are such a miscellaneous crew! There’s maybe twenty-five thousand British troops in Belgium but less than a quarter are veterans. Most of ’em are less qualified than I! We’re desperately short of cannon and cannot match the French cavalry. Of course we’ve got the Hanoverians, and the Brunswickers, who are good; but who can rely on the Belgians, most of whom are Bonapartists at heart?’

They left at seven after a day spent in the green heart of spring, making their way back across the bridges until they reached the main road. Here they had twice to draw in to the side while a troop of cavalry clattered past. Then they went through a village in which the Life Guards were taking their ease. Their tall lanky figures in brilliant scarlet tight-fitting jackets contrasted with the brown smock-frocks of the peasants moving among them in the evening light.

In Brussels they dropped the Gurneys off at their rooms, and Cuby made an appointment to meet Bess in the morning to go shopping. Then they drove home.

‘Do you find him tiresome?’ asked Jeremy. On the way home Goldsworthy had talked of the properties of lime as a manure and had told the sad story of a farmer friend who had burned lime in kilns built with stones containing manganese. Then he had spoken of the dangers of brewing cider in lead vats, this in his view being a common cause of colic.

Cuby smiled. ‘I would not say so.’

‘Well, I do sometimes. But I also cannot get away from the originality of his mind.’

‘Would you go into a partnership with him on the horseless carriage?’

‘I think there might be a better future for the steam ship – rivalling the packet ships by carrying mails . . . But yes, I’d go in with Goldsworthy if he put up a reasonable proposition.’ Jeremy was thoughtful. ‘But the opportunity for me may not be yet. This could well be a long war.’

They reached their apartment and Jeremy paid off the driver. They climbed the stairs, his arm round her waist.

Cuby said: ‘It has been a lovely day.’

They went in. In their absence an official letter had been delivered. Jeremy broke the seal and went pink.

‘Dear Heaven!’ he said. ‘A tragedy! I have been promoted to captain.’

Chapter Eight

I

Clowance was in her back garden pricking out lettuce seedlings. She was part sheltered here from the relentless wind, but still it blew uncomfortably about her; the two weeks of it had dried the light soil almost to powder and she had given the plants a good watering last night so that those she pulled up to discard would not disturb the others.

Stephen had been out since nine; he had said he would be home to dinner but had not turned up. If he was going to change his plans he usually sent a boy with a message; but not this time.

It was the last day – though, being a Friday, probably the bank would not make a move until Monday. Stephen was as taut as a wire under strain. He had done everything he could: there was no other lever within his reach; but being the man he was it was not natural to sit down to await the blow. He had said he was going down to the *Adolphus*, which, fully laden but still unvictualled, lay in the Penryn River waiting orders. Clowance could not imagine he was still there. Probably he had gone to the Royal Standard, was drowning his sorrows in a conventional way. But she was anxious. Being a man of action, and she well knew sometimes of violence, he might be venting his anger and frustration in some dangerous way.

So when a footstep sounded she turned eagerly, apprehensively, but relieved to see him.

‘Stephen! I waited – a long time.’

There was an expression on his face she could not read, grim but with a different light in his eyes.

‘What’re ye doing, dear heart?’

It was the first time he had used that expression for two weeks.

‘You can see,’ she said. ‘This wind is drying everything, but I think they’ll come on now.’

‘I didn’t get back to dinner,’ he said. ‘I was called away.’

‘Oh? Where?’

Oh? where?

He came over and stood beside her, looking down at the ground she had been working on. 'Are they far enough apart?'

'No, but the next time I thin them we can eat the thinnings . . . What is it, Stephen?'

He put his hand on her shoulder. 'What do you call it when a man is due to be hanged by the neck and then at the last moment he is told it is not so?'

'Not so? Do you mean reprieved?'

'Reprieved. That's it. At least, that's what I reckon it is.'

She turned to him. 'How? Tell me what has happened? Is it good news?'

He said: 'This morning. When I was working on the *Adolphus* this morning and reckoning how she could be cheapest unloaded, a man came, a message from Truro. I was requested to make my appearance at Warleggan's Bank at three this afternoon.' His hand tightened on her shoulder. 'It was on my tongue to curse him and tell him and his employer to go to hell; but no, I thought to meself, if this is the last act I'll go see just how they wish to proceed about it; I'll go discover if there is any other mischief planned for me. So I took horse – hired from Greenbank Stables – and rode into Truro, to the bank, was there by soon after two.'

'Is it good news?' she said again.

'Only Lander was there – no sign of George, but he said – and I took care to make double sure what he said – that on due consideration it had been decided to continue to fund me – to a limited extent, on a reduced scale. There's a strict upper limit, a new system of accounting, no this, no that—'

'But Stephen!' she interrupted him, grasping his arms, 'does it mean – does that mean we are saved?'

'In a fashion, yes—'

She hugged him. 'But that – that is the most wonderful thing! You can keep your *ships*, go on with your trading? Even perhaps build our house?'

'I reckon so, wi' safeguards, and a sort of going slow. I have yet to work it all out. He put it all in writing – Lander did – and I have read it through thrice. The upper limit of the loan is rigid and must be reduced by twenty per cent after twelve months. No more accommodation bills but a renewal of those out. I reckon I shall be acting all the time under George's thumb. I don't altogether care for it—'

'But that does not *matter*! Who cares if we have to proceed more carefully? We are *safe*! *Safe*! *Safe*! Stephen, I have nothing in the house to drink but ale—'

He permitted himself his first smile. 'I reckon I've got a lot of your lettuce soil on my sleeves . . . I can tell you this is the biggest relief off my mind. Even now it is a rare puzzle to me. I had wild and drastic thoughts. We'll go out tonight to

it is a rare puzzle to me. I had wild and drastic thoughts. We'll go out tonight to celebrate. We'll go to the King's Arms. Mary Commins is a friend of mine and she'll put on a good meal and drink for us . . .'

She rubbed her hands and brushed his sleeves. 'There, it is nearly all gone! . . . You say you did not see Sir George?'

'Not a sign of him. I could not credit it when Lander began to speak. What made him change his mind?'

'Perhaps he meant to all along and—'

'Never. Not from George's looks that day . . . I've been wondering – will we go to their house again and be received as friends? Ye see—'

'Does it *matter*? We are safe – and in a little while can reduce our indebtedness! Even what we are getting from Wheal Grace will help! And soon enough you'll be altogether your own master again!'

He kissed her. 'You're wise, Clowance. Always was. Always will be. 'Twas you who warned me not to get tangled with George Warleggan in the first place. I wonder, d'ye think Lady Harriet would have some finger in this?'

'Does it matter?' Clowance said again.

'Have you seen her lately? Since this happened?'

'I had to go over one day last week. To return those books on architecture. I wanted to give them to a servant but she was on the steps.'

'Did you tell her?'

'She asked why I had not been to the last day of the hunt, so I just mentioned our changed situation.'

Stephen was thoughtful, combing his hair with his strong fingers.

'I reckon it maybe was something Harriet said to George. She has always been specially friendly to me.'

II

Katie Carter, made more clumsy even than usual, if not by her condition at least by her agitation at being in such a condition, upset a pan of boiling water and in trying to save it got a substantial burn on her arm. Cook sliced up a cold potato, slapped it on her arm and tied it in position with a handy strip of duster. Thereafter work as usual.

After a couple of days they took it off and found the arm reddened and bleeding, so she was sent to see Dr Enys. She would have much preferred Mr Irby in St Ann's but Mrs Warleggan caught sight of it and said she must see Dr Enys and she would pay. This was such an exceptional sign of favour in her current disgrace that Katie did not dare to disobey.

current disgrace that Katie did not dare to discuss.

Not that she minded Dr Enys: ever since he attended her as a child she had thought him wonderful; but it was precisely because of this that she did not want to see him and exhibit her coming shame. He was likely to know of it – most people had passed the whisper on by now – but it was the face to face encounter she dreaded.

When it came it was not too bad. He had such a handsome way of being impersonal: he was surgeon and she was the patient; there was nothing more between them than that. But then, after he had bathed the burn and dusted it with healing powder and given it a proper light bandage, he spoiled it all by feeling her pulse and saying:

‘Is your pregnancy quite normal, Katie?’

She flushed and broke into a sweat. ‘Please?’

‘You are carrying a child, I understand. Do you feel well?’

‘Oh, yes . . . Bit sick in the mornings, like.’

‘Are you about four months?’

‘Ais.’

‘That should be clearing up now then. Let me know if I can be of any help to you.’

Katie fumbled a shilling out of her purse. ‘Mrs says I was to pay you this.’

‘Thank you. Don’t touch the bandage for five days, unless it becomes painful. Try to keep it dry. I’ll give you some of this powder to use if you need it.’

Katie put on her cloak, anxious to be gone. Dwight considered her for a moment, uncertain whether to say more. These people were part of the family of Sawle-with-Grambler whom he had made it his business to care for over the last twenty-odd years.

He said: ‘They have not found Saul Grieves?’

Katie’s flush went darker as she stared out of the window.

Dwight said: ‘Your mother thinks he should be sought out.’

‘I wouldn’t marry ’im,’ said Katie, ‘no, not if ’e was the last man on earth.’

Dwight walked to the door with her. ‘Perhaps there is some other man you will marry.’

‘Fine chance o’ that, I reckon. Not many’d want me wi’ a bastard child. And there’s not many I’d ’ave!’

She opened the door, and the sun fell in on her shabby clothes, her heavy Spanish hair, her fine skin.

‘I hope this wind will stop soon,’ Dwight said. ‘It is drying everything up.’

‘Ais. Fishing boats put out, they’re ’ard set to get ’ome.’

‘There’s one man would gladly marry you,’ said Dwight. ‘If you would have him. And make a good father . . . Music Thomas.’

She half stopped, then snorted like a horse. ‘*Music?* That gurt lump. *He* was put in wi’ the bread and took out wi’ the cakes, if ever there was! . . . That’s a fine jest, Surgeon. Why, ’e’s only ’alf a man!’

‘You’d be surprised,’ said Dwight. ‘As you know, I have been helping him, and he has made great progress. He can tell the time now and the days of the week. But you see him yourself quite often. Do you not notice any difference?’

‘Can’t say’s I do.’

They stood then in awkward silence.

‘Get along with you, then.’

Katie said: ‘Oh, ’e’s always grizzling at me like ’e likes me; but – but I’d be ’ard put before I wed *that* loon!’

Dwight smiled. ‘Well, Katie, you are a free woman and I am no matchmaker. It occurred to me that it would be better if your child had a foster father. Sometimes—’

‘Oh yes, Surgeon, I’m sure you be right. But, begging your pardon, not a father all the village would snigger at.’

III

The weather at last abating, Stephen decided to take the *Adolphus* across himself on the Sunday. He did not invite Clowance to go with him.

‘Ye don’t mind, dear heart? It takes a time to get over the shock, to feel things are mebbe going to come right after all. It’s like when your leg goes to sleep, the pain begins when the circulation comes back.’

‘How long will you be away?’

‘I’ll be back so quick as I can. But the weather’s wayward. While I’m away I want to think things out.’

‘What things?’

‘How I shall live my life with George Warleggan breathing over my shoulder. Oh, I know he always has been after a fashion, ever since I went to his bank; but I conjectured it was a *friendly* breathing, if you follow me. Now I don’t know what it is. I feel I’m living – we’re both living – on the end of a lifeline, and who knows when he’s going to take out his scissors and cut it?’

‘He may have done what he did just to shock you, Stephen. So long as you keep to the agreement you’ve signed there’ll be no more trouble.’

‘Mebbe yes. And mebbe no. I haven’t *seen* him since he changed his mind. I don’t know what he’s going to *look* like. I only know he looked very nasty when

I was told they were going to bankrupt me. Harriet may have persuaded him to change his mind, but what's to stop him changing it back? The sooner I'm out of his reach, the happier I shall be.'

'But how can you be?'

'Not yet. Not this year. But if I can't get out of his hands it will not be for want of trying.'

Stephen was filling his pipe. He looked a big formidable young man, capable in his own mind of taking on the world.

He said suddenly: 'The *Chasse Marée* is due any day. You know I got an offer for her? Well, I shall still sell her; concentrate on the other two. With the money I get from that . . .' He hesitated.

She said: 'What?'

'I have not decided. But 'tis not going into Warleggan's Bank, that's for sure. Nor is the money from Wheal Leisure. Don't worry, I'll keep to the contract, see Warleggan's are just satisfied. But if I sell *Chasse Marée* I shall have money in hand. Out in the Channel I'll have time to think what to do.'

You have some ideas?'

'Yes, I have. But I'd better prefer not to say what they are.'

'Until they're decided?' she asked stonily.

'Until they're firmer. I can't be sure yet. Don't worry, I'll talk with you then.'

He put his arm round her. 'After all, ye're my partner, are ye not?'

She said: 'If you sell *Chasse Marée* Andrew will lose his ship.'

'That has to be thought of too. I'll try not to let him down. He can always sail wi' me. Or mebbe take the *Adolphus* when I want to be home.'

'You know he wants to get married?'

'What, Andrew? No. Who to?'

'Thomasine Trevethan. George Trevethan's sister.'

'My oh my. So that's the way the wind's setting. Well, good luck to him. Though I doubt he'll be able to set up house with her on what I pay him.'

'He knows that. Before this happened – before Sir George threatened to withdraw his credit – I was going to ask you if you could promote Andrew – somehow – so that he was in a better position to marry.'

'Ah yes, well, we must think around it somehow, mustn't we. If there's some way I can work him into any scheme I launch, then be sure I'll do it. We want to keep him happy, don't we.'

The *Adolphus* left at dawn on the Sunday, following, by a single tide, the West Indian fleet and all the other casual vessels which had been embayed by the relentless wind. Although little above a half-gale in Falmouth it had been more severe in other parts, and there had been wrecks up and down the coast. The sloop *Dolphin* foundered near Padstow, the *Concord* off Trevoze Head, the *Active*, Captain Dodridge, on passage from Cork to London, was driven ashore at Hendrawna; he was drowned along with two of his crew, the other three were saved. The wrecking was done politely and the survivors well looked after. There was a great shoal of pilchards around the Cornish coast, brought in perhaps by the contrary weather. It was a bumper catch.

Clowance was worried about Andrew in the *Chasse Marée*.

On Tuesday Geoffrey Charles called.

Clowance was startled half out of her life to see him, for she had thought him still in Spain. He laughed at her.

‘I could not stay there with the wolf of Europe again at large! Why, if he were to win Flanders he might soon again establish a hegemony in Europe and be knocking at the gates of Madrid before we knew where we were! I have come to offer my solitary musket if the thinking in England is that we should try to stop him.’

They kissed, Clowance feeling the steel in the thin arms, observing at close quarters the tight mouth and the injured jaw.

‘And Amadora?’

‘Is at Trenwith.’

‘Trenwith! Why did I not know?’

‘We sailed from Ferrol, and should have put in at Falmouth, but the weather was so foul we had to make for Padstow. We have been home ten days. I have heard about your mother and father from the Enyses. Is there any later news?’

‘I’m afraid not.’

‘. . . And are you well, my dear? And where is your husband?’

‘At sea. What a pity that you have never met him. He will be very sorry. When do you sail?’

‘Alas, the 43rd are still in Canada – or somewhere at sea. If allowed I shall join the 95th Rifles, even if it means dropping a rank. They have just arrived in Southampton from America – or so they should be arriving by now, as they spoke a revenue cutter from St Ives. With them are regiments of the 27th and 58th, with three troops of light dragoons. I am being favoured with a lift in a fast sloop which should catch them there, or if not I’ll follow ’em to Ostend.’

Clowance had been told by her parents that Geoffrey Charles had been a spoilt child. It was difficult to believe that this hardened but gentle soldier had ever

been pampered. How much she preferred him to his half-brother, the elegant but cynical Valentine.

‘What will Amadora do while you are away?’

‘Drake and Morwenna and Loveday have come and will stay until I return. Pray go over and see her.’

‘Of course! As soon as ever possible! For I long to meet Juana.’

‘You will greatly admire her. She is so much like her mother.’

She made him a cup of chocolate, and as the sloop was leaving tomorrow in the forenoon, she pressed him to lie here tonight. He said he had first to call on Aunt Verity, but if he could persuade her to let him go, he would return. They talked of the Blameys and how the younger Andrew was faring, then of Jeremy and Cuby, and she gave him Jeremy’s latest letter to read, and also her mother’s.

‘I will try to look him up as soon as I get to Flanders. I am not sure how difficult or how easy that may be. From what reports I have received there is great activity but also great confusion.’

‘Do you think there will be war – a battle of some sort?’

‘Oh yes.’ He spoke without hesitation.

After a moment Clowance said: ‘I shall be anxious. But many people think there may yet be a compromise peace. Even Jeremy in his letter, you see.’

Geoffrey Charles shook his head. ‘Bonaparte says he wants only to live in peace with his neighbours; Wellington says there will be an agreed formula without conflict; but in fact they are both preparing furiously for war. Wellington, from what I hear, has such a makeshift army, and Bonaparte is likely to be so concerned to consolidate his rear, that they may hesitate and crawl around each other for a month or two yet; but a trial of strength is inevitable. And when it comes it will be the irresistible force against the immovable object.’

Clowance shivered. ‘Do you like fighting, Geoffrey Charles?’

He flexed his injured hand. ‘As a boy I hated it, was terrified of *any* sort of violence. But in Spain and Portugal, after a time, one hardened up. And there was such camaraderie, such tests of courage and personal endurance, such a fusion of men into a single splendid fighting force . . . the stimulus of conflict was enormous. I seemed for years to have forgotten how to be afraid. Now I am afraid again.’

‘Because . . .’

‘Because of Amadora and Juana, of course. I have too much to lose.’

‘Yet – you need not have come now.’

He sighed. ‘I would not have stirred a foot to go to America or India, or wherever the next conflict showed. But this – this is unfinished business.’

V

After Brigadier Rougiet's visit, Ross found the closeness of his confinement relaxed. He was allowed an hour's extra liberty a day, walking in the garden, with an armed guard a pace behind. The food improved, and he suspected he was enjoying the same vittles as General Wirion. The wine also improved. Twice he even received outdated copies of *The Times*, from the second of which he was very angry to see that the Corn Bill had passed through the House of Lords.

He had one meeting with Wirion, who was pleasant enough, discussed life in France in general terms and asked if there were any specially irksome features to his imprisonment which might be put right. Ross replied, only the imprisonment itself.

He saw no more of Tallien and was not questioned further. Occasionally he caught glimpses of fellow prisoners, but only one, as far as he could tell, was English, an unkempt man of considerable age called Sloper, who the guard said had been arrested as a spy three years ago. Ross never got a chance of speaking to him.

The early summer was advancing and Ross was glad of the fresh air and the extra exercise. To his surprise, the long periods of enforced idleness had done his ankle good, and he was able to walk almost without a limp.

What interested him most about his extra liberty was that he got a much better idea of the layout of the prison, its guards, its wires and its walls. Towards the end of May he discovered where the stables were.

Chapter Nine

I

George had never forgiven *The Times* for announcing the baronetcy of Ross Poldark, especially in the Court column, so of late he had been taking the *Morning Post* instead. It didn't much matter – the London papers were all a week late when they reached him and sometimes the local papers cried the news first. There was the particular case when the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* had issued the communiqué announcing the victory at Trafalgar and Nelson's death two days before its London rivals.

But one piece of information which amused him in the paper he was at present reading was an account of an event which had rocked the financial world of London the day before. On the Wednesday a post-chaise decorated with laurels and flags had dashed up the Dover road announcing that Napoleon had been assassinated and that Carnot was forming an interim government for the purpose of inviting Louis the Eighteenth to return to the throne. On the Exchange government stocks which had been very low – three per cent Consols at 57 – had shot up six points, only to fall again when the news had proved to be false. In the meantime the instigators of the ruse, having bought heavily on the Tuesday and sold at the peak on the Wednesday, had made a fortune.

People were such fools, George thought, even bankers and financiers: they rushed like sheep to greet good news, panicked so easily at bad. It was a wonder no one had ever thought of such a simple trick before. Communication was the bugbear. No one *knew*. The owner of a system of fast communication, especially if it were a private system, could make a mint of money any time. The semaphore, which had been installed by the Admiralty in a few towns, should be greatly extended. While it was not, everyone lived at the mercy of rumour.

In London last year George had met a Mr Nathan Rothschild, a Jewish banker who had gained a high reputation in the city and with the Government, and Rothschild always, George thought, seemed to have better information about events in Europe than anyone else – and usually quicker. Perhaps it was because he had brothers in similar influential positions in a number of the capitals of

he had brokers in similar influential positions in a number of the capitals of Europe. Presumably he depended on couriers like everyone else. They must just be better couriers.

George had not been to London at all this year, having settled down to enjoy the comforts and stimuli of pursuing his many interests in Cornwall. The journey to London was either bone-jolting and exhausting or – if you suffered from seasickness, as he did – only to be undertaken in the height of summer. But he thought he would go soon. There were pickings to be had, he was sure. In 1810 he had lost half his fortune while trying to double it in order to improve his chances of persuading Lady Harriet Carter to marry him. It had taken several years to recoup his losses. But he had learned a lot since then. Look at the way these rogues had hoodwinked the market. There were safer and more legitimate ways of making money in the present volatile state of the world, and he was convinced Nathan Rothschild knew of them.

In the last three weeks George had been in a very perplexed state of mind. Or more properly of the emotions. The news that he was to be a father again had taken him utterly by surprise, and perhaps because of the surprise it had shaken him all the more. The total break with Valentine had left him virtually without a son. His beloved little Ursula was the apple of his eye, but she was only a girl. This quite astonishing news that Harriet had conceived meant that he had at least a fifty-fifty chance – he liked to think it more – of having another son. Someone else, someone worthy of him to carry on the name of Warleggan. And a Warleggan with noble blood! Although the Osborne family had never really taken to him, his son would be a part of it. His son would be not only Sir George Warleggan's son but the nephew of the Duke of Leeds. It added a new stimulus in life.

If he went to London and played his cards properly he was sure he would increase his fortune. If he went to London and made more use of his membership of the House and his ownership of the pocket borough of St Michael he could well earn himself the extra reward that Ross Poldark had so undeservingly been given. He might even, with judicious expenditure of money and the political pressure he could exert, become a real baron. Lord Warleggan. While Valentine was alive that could not be passed on to a new son, but he was himself only just fifty-six and might have twenty years of active life ahead of him in which to enjoy such a title!

He had given way over Carrington in order to humour Harriet. Humour, yes, that was the damned word. But suddenly this strange exotic, aristocratic, eccentric woman he had married had become much more precious to him. She carried his child! And if she made as a stern condition to her good behaviour that Stephen's wife, the Poldark girl, should not suffer inconvenience, well, he would

Stephen's wife, the Poldark girl, should not suffer inconvenience, well, he would accept it – for the time being. That mattered nothing compared to the central fact. From now on Harriet must be 'humoured'. He had lost his last wife in childbirth, and not long before Ursula was born he had engaged in very angry scenes with Elizabeth. It shouldn't happen so this time. Whatever the outcome, he would have nothing ever to reproach himself with. Let Harriet have her way. Nothing mattered but that.

Over the longer term, of course, George had no intention whatever of giving up his pursuit and prosecution of Stephen Carrington. It would have been foreign to his nature even to consider such a thing. After all, there was no great hurry. Once the child was safely delivered. Once Harriet no longer needed to be humoured. In the meantime, if it pleased her to have Clowance at the house, or even Stephen, he would raise no objection. His manner towards Clowance would not alter at all. The less he saw of Stephen the better, but when they met he would be impassively polite.

In the meantime he could console himself by considering other plans. Without ever resorting again to the dramatic act of closing Stephen's account with the bank – for that, he could see, by its blatancy would offend Harriet afresh – he could make Carrington's life a burden – an unsuccessful burden – in more devious ways. There were a number of men who had offended George at one time or another, and with only one notable exception they had not prospered after. They had had to leave Cornwall to obtain work or had sunk out of sight doing some menial job. George could make his influence felt almost anywhere. And none had offended him half – one tenth – so deeply as Stephen Carrington.

II

George would not, of course, have considered for a moment using any illegal means for bringing Carrington down. Only once in his life had he sanctioned violence against a man – that was Jud Paynter who had betrayed him after taking money from him at the trial of Ross Poldark – and he had afterwards regretted it. He might have a fearsome reputation in some quarters – and he was proud of it – but it was not the reputation of a man who broke – or even bent – the law.

To 'assist' the law was quite a different matter. He had often assisted the law, and there was no reason on this occasion to give up the attempt because there was no real evidence for what he knew to be the truth. Besides, a man who risked his neck to steal money from a stage-coach might well have committed other criminal acts in the past for which he could more easily be brought to book. If the fox escaped from one lair you might trap him in another

soon if the fox escaped from one trap you might trap him in another.
Carrington's past life was shrouded in mystery. Mr Trembath had been instructed to write to a fellow lawyer in Bristol who was to be invited to make inquiries.

Also there was still the question of Stephen's accomplices in the raid: two at least, one a woman. Who were his closest associates, or had been at that time? Clowance could not have been the woman, for she had been thin and dark. Andrew Blamey (another Poldark!) had been very thick with Carrington for some while and was notorious for being in debt. Inquiries had shown that it was impossible for him to have taken part in the robbery, but he might know something about it and George had noticed that he talked very freely when the wine was in him. He must be encouraged to come to Cardew more frequently, however distasteful it might be to entertain yet another Poldark.

III

On the 30th May Andrew Blamey returned to Penryn in the *Chasse Marée*, to be told that it had been sold in his absence and that he was out of a job. There was the offer of his acting as mate on the *Lady Clowance* under Sid Bunt, or second in command on a voyage Stephen Carrington was planning for the *Adolphus*; but with conditions which he found unacceptable.

He said to Clowance: 'He wants young Jason to be second mate, with special concern for hostile navigation. Where does that leave me? We should be running athwart each other at every turn! I have reached the conclusion that Stephen does not want me aboard and never had any intention except to have his nephew in a position of complete authority under him.'

'I'm sorry, Andrew,' Clowance said.

'You know what Stephen is about, of course. It can't be unknown to you.'

'He is going to use the brig as a privateer.' Clowance got up. 'He told me this when he returned from France. Now we are again at war with France he sees a chance of – of making money. He is going to Plymouth tomorrow to get his Letter of Marque ... I don't like it at all, and I have told him so. I don't want to become a widow ...' She turned. 'But, Andrew, we have just gone through a very bad two weeks when it seemed as if we were to be bankrupted; I cannot give you more details than that, perhaps I am already saying too much; but it has pushed him into a corner where he prefers to take this chance. I hate it and I have told him so! He took the decision while he was at sea and as I am his wife I must stand by it.'

Such a long speech was quite out of character for Clowance and reflected a three-hour argument she had had with Stephen when he returned with the news of his decision. She had attacked both the decision and the manner of it, saying he had broken his promise of discussing it with her first, and that to go on a dangerous hunt of this sort was no longer necessary as the threat of bankruptcy had been withdrawn. He had tried to draw her to him, but she had refused to be touched by him, knowing that he hoped his physical appeal would qualify her judgement. He had admitted that he had taken the decision without consulting her but said that he had to move quickly if he was going to strike while the iron was hot. War between England and France might last for years, or it might all be over in a few months. Two or three such voyages as he proposed, lasting perhaps only a month or so each, might be enough to make their fortune. With a good-sized vessel like *Adolphus*, properly equipped and manned, there should be pickings a-plenty. Fully armed with four six-pounders, a lively crew, and special high bulwarks of elm planking fitted up for protection, they could hardly come to much harm and should bring back a couple of prizes each voyage. The rewards were enormous ...

‘Why do we need rewards? Those kind of rewards?’ she had asked. ‘If Warleggan’s Bank had truly foreclosed—’

‘If they had truly foreclosed we should not have been able to mount this! Let’s be thankful for small mercies. But we can’t *count* on ’em. You didn’t see his face, Clowance, that day he told me his bank wasn’t going to trade wi’ me any more. From now on, I wouldn’t trust him farther than I could throw him. He’s got it in for us, even if Harriet put in a good word.’

‘And what if he knows you have been privateering? Won’t this just confirm him in all his prejudices and give him the opportunity to close you down again?’

‘Not if he doesn’t know in time to stop me. When I’ve been and brought back a prize or two I can snap me fingers at him and tell him I’m banking elsewhere!’

Clowance had been silent then, knowing that Stephen’s mind was made up and that not even she could change it. She also knew his dangerous ability to think that because he wanted a thing to happen it would happen. What was to say that he would not cruise in the chops of the Channel for a month and find nothing – or that he might not encounter a French cruiser and himself be captured? Absolutely nothing except his belief in himself.

Yet often enough, she knew, he had pulled things off; his confidence had not been misplaced. And his eyes were alight with purpose; she shivered a little to think that equipping one of his ships to go on a privateering cruise came more pleasurably to him than organizing legitimate trade. In the end he had silenced her by saying: ‘Well and good, I’m going to take some pickings from the French.

What's the difference? Your brother and your cousin are going to fight them. Your father's held prisoner of war without just cause. You can't surely be thinking too well of 'em yourself.'

She could not explain all this to Andrew who had dropped in to exchange news. But she did tell him that Stephen had said he had ideas for Andrew if he would but contain his soul in patience.

'It is not my soul that is growing impatient, little cousin, it is my body with its material wants! Incidentally, let me say I haven't got any moral scruples about privateering; it is only a little different from the prize money that all our naval captains seek. Nor do I mind risking the odd flying bullet. After all, 'twas only the mercy of the Lord, and a little skilful seamanship last month, that saved the *Chasse Marée* from capsizing while she was tender, sailing from Oslo to Drammen to pick up the timber. No, let's say it is just that I cannot get along with young Jason Carrington and his uncle's determination to push him into an authority he isn't yet entitled to! ... By the way, will you be at Cardew tomorrow evening?'

'No.'

'I have been invited, somewhat to my surprise. But as Thomasine will be there I shall be happy to go along. I have a guinea or two to risk at the tables but at Tamsin's behest will not go into deeper water than I can swim out of. She does not know yet that I am without work. I rather fear her father offering me some position in his gunpowder factory. Though if he did I suppose it would be a sign that he was beginning to accept me.'

'Andrew.'

'Yes?'

'If you go, when you go, I pray you not to discover to Sir George any of Stephen's plans. There have been words between them on financial matters – you know Stephen banks with him – I do not know if he knows of Stephen's plans to use the *Adolphus* as a privateer, but I would especially not want him to know it from you.'

'Have no fear, little cousin. I shall be the soul of discretion.'

IV

Stephen had been busy since dawn. It was not merely refitting the brig for purposes of war, it was arranging for the finance and recruiting the crew. On most of the ventures he had known setting out from Bristol, the financing of the voyage had come from a number of small but regular adventurers, and there

were plenty such to be had in Falmouth and Penryn. Men were willing, he found, to put their money into a raiding ship with the prospect of big gains where they had been reluctant to invest it in peaceful trading. But he wanted the least outside investment possible, so that his own gain would be greater. He had chosen four of his friends and acquaintances from the Royal Standard to take ten per cent each, and he, from the sale of the *Chasse Marée* and the income from Wheal Grace, could provide the other sixty per cent.

Nor should he have too much of a problem finding a crew – again, once the news got around, there should be plenty of volunteers – but it must be the right crew. They must be sailors, or have some experience of the sea, for he had no time to knock landlubbers into shape, and a few at least must know how to fire a musket and discharge a cannon. They must be tough, handy with a rope or a cutlass and ready to take orders. Some vessels, he knew, sailed from Bristol with double the normal complement of officers in order to take care of any risk of mutiny, but he decided to take that risk. Even so his complement would have to be over fifty. In privateering it was necessary to have enough force to make a boarding party *look* irresistible, and in the event of capture you had to have enough men to crew the captured ship.

So it would be living in unbearably cramped quarters, eating and sleeping where you could, jostled together in bad weather and in good, searching the horizon for a sail, and no room for grumblers or shirkers. Stephen would have been quite glad to have had Andrew Blamey with him because of the authority of his experience, but Blamey and Jason simply didn't hit it off, so that was that. He'd pushed the boy forward and had put two reliable older men, Springfield and Penberthy, directly under him to give him advice when it was needed.

The more he saw of his son the fonder he grew of him. It's hard anyway to take a sour view of someone who hero-worships you; but Jason was very companionable, and they had the same impulses and feelings about so many things. Indeed in the first few months of their time together Stephen felt he had not quite come up to the image expected of him: the owner of three small trading vessels, commercially sound, content with small profits, hard working and staid, with a home and wife to care for and a respectable place to build in Falmouth's business world. Now it was all changed. They were off on a predatory trip that exactly suited Jason's romantic conception of his father.

He ate at the Royal Standard, alone this time. Jason was still working on board the *Adolphus*, and Clowance was visiting her Aunt Verity. Relations had been strained between him and his wife since his decision. Almost for the first time she had refused his caresses, as if trying to register her protest, make it clear, unconfused by physical contact. It would pass; he was sure it would pass when

his adventure turned out to be the success he knew it was going to be. He knew she was not taking any stiff moral attitude, rather that she thought the risks too high and altogether unnecessary.

He had wondered whether to bother to make the tiresome journey to Plymouth – where, he had heard, the press gang was out again – merely to obtain a Letter of Marque. But without it he was a pirate, with it he was legally entitled to board and capture; he must go.

Eating at the next table from him was Captain Robert Buller, the tough, sturdy, middle-aged packet captain of the *Queen Charlotte*, refitted now and ready to sail on the New York run on Friday.

Not an approachable man but a tough, fair-minded seasoned sailor who had made enough money to build himself a substantial house on the newly burgeoning seafront of the town. He knew Stephen and nodded when they passed; Stephen's recent approach to him on behalf of Jason had not apparently been resented.

'Hope this fair weather keeps up over the weekend,' Stephen volunteered. 'You're sailing Friday, Cap'n?'

'Aye,' said Buller, picking his teeth.

'Full complement, I suppose?'

'Aye.'

'Me nephew I decided to keep with me for the time being. He's young yet. Bit more sea experience before he aspires to the Packet Service.'

'Maybe,' said Buller and took a swig of ale.

'There's a man I know,' said Stephen; 'used to be in the Packet Service, first officer, I believe, or second officer, cannot remember. Opted out. Much regrets it now. Very capable man. Still pretty young. I believe he would like to return to the service, if he had the chance.'

'Name?' said Buller, still busy with a tooth.

'Blamey.'

Someone was shouting at the other end of the room, something about Death to the Frenchies.

'Blamey? Andrew Blamey's son?'

'Just so.'

'Went missing, didn't he? *Countess of Leicester*. Couple of years ago, wasn't it?'

Stephen was surprised at the memory. 'He was in dire straits at the time. Trouble with the moneylenders. You know. If he'd stayed he would have gone to gaol. That's all changed now. A changed man. He'd give his ears to be back in the Packet Service again.'

‘What’s he been doing since?’

‘Sailed with me on a couple of voyages. First-class man. Has just brought me other brig home from Oslo with a cargo of timber and saddlery. He’s always regretted leaving the Packet Service, I can tell ye.’

Captain Buller pushed his plate away. ‘Gaming and drinking, no doubt, that was his trouble. They say his father was too fond of the bottle once. That was before my time.’

‘Never touches it now.’

‘Who? The father or the son?’

‘Both,’ said Stephen, lying in a good cause. ‘But young Andrew never *did* drink at sea. Couldn’t fault him at sea.’

‘Don’t know what Captain Faulkner said. Never spoke to him about it.’

‘*Countess of Leicester*’s in Jamaica, if all’s well.’

‘I know that,’ said Buller irritably.

Stephen hesitated. But he was never one to be easily put off. ‘I hear they’re pressing men in Plymouth. I’m off there meself tomorrow so I sh’ll have to watch out! I’m going to get me a Letter of Marque. I’ve already written about it.’

‘Oh, aye, I heard tell of this. No trouble finding *your* crew, eh? Make sure they’re not all tinnners!’

Stephen laughed and ordered another glass of ale for Buller. They sat listening to conversation around them.

‘Now the war’s on again,’ said Stephen, ‘good crews will be hard to get. Experienced young officers specially. I’ve invited young Blamey to come with me on *Adolphus* but he hasn’t answered finally yet. I don’t think he will come.’

‘Why not?’

‘He has a fancy for the navy.’

Buller grunted, but it was hard to be sure whether it was a grunt of approval.

‘Privateering’s a fly-by-night job,’ he said presently. ‘You toss a card: a quick gain or a quick loss.’

‘There’s more skill than that in it, Captain Buller. Seamanship and guts.’

‘Oh I’ll give you guts. Guts and blood. Still, if you’ve the fancy for it, I wish you luck.’

‘Thanks ... Shall I tell Blamey to come and see you?’

The famous eyebrows came together. ‘What for?’

‘I thought if he had the chance he’d better prefer to return to the Packet Service than go in the navy. They’d jump at him, of course.’

Buller finished his beer. ‘Well, I shall not jump at him. But I tell you frankly, Carrington, I could find room for a reliable young officer. If he really means what he says and is prepared to sail Friday eve, I’ll see him if he presents

himself at my house at eleven tomorrow.'

V

Andrew had called in to see Clowance again when Stephen burst in upon them. Andrew had stayed late at Cardew yesterday playing cards and at length had been persuaded to spend the night. He had passed the early part of the evening with Thomasine, who was warm and sympathetic about his plight. On departure this morning Harriet had charged him with a message for Clowance, which was to say that Sir George was leaving for London tomorrow and would she care to come and visit her one day soon?

'Where the hell have you been?' Stephen demanded. It could have been more tactfully phrased, but his goodwill had turned to frustration as it looked as if his efforts to help Andrew were going down the drain.

Andrew had a thick head and was only just coming to. He flushed and said: 'What's that to you?'

'I've been seeking for you everywhere – as if I'd not enough to do minding me own business! I even sent over to Flushing to see if you were there.'

'Shouldn't you do just that,' said Andrew. 'Mind your own business?'

Clowance put a hand on his arm. 'Stephen, you wanted Andrew? Was it something special?'

'I thought it was something special,' said Stephen roughly. 'I saw Captain Buller last eve and persuaded him that Andrew would like to return to the Packet Service. He said he needs an officer for his first trip to New York, leaving Friday. He said if Andrew went to see him at eleven this morning he'd mebbe engage him.'

Clowance looked at the clock. 'But it is past eleven now! Where did he want to see him? At his house? Andrew ...'

Her burly cousin rubbed his chin, which had not been shaven this morning. 'Avast, I don't remember ever saying I wanted to go back to the Service. Let me settle my own life in my own way, Stephen!'

Clowance said: 'But, Andrew, it might be a solution! It – it would give you more standing with the Trevethans ... if that's what you want. You'd go back as an officer, lose nothing for having been away two years. And your father and mother would be delighted!'

Andrew shrugged. You don't live your life to please your father and mother.' He looked at Stephen without favour. 'Where did you meet Buller? I expect he was in his cups.'

Stephen turned round. 'Well, it's not my business to say what he should do. It's his own business.'

Stephen turned away. 'Well, it's up to you, boy. Take it or leave it. Meddle it or leave it anyhow, as he said eleven and ye couldn't be there until a quarter before twelve. So forget it, if ye've the mind to.'

'Your pony's outside,' Clowance said to Andrew. 'It would take you no more than fifteen minutes. You could explain to him you had been away for the night and only just returned. What is there to lose?'

'If he said no, nothing. If he said yes, I have to ask myself, do I want it?'

'Well, I've no more time to waste,' said Stephen in disgust. 'If ye want me, Clowance, I'm aboard the *Adolphus*.'

'Stephen, it was a kind thought,' said Clowance. 'Thank you. When Andrew is in a better mood perhaps he will thank you too.'

Stephen patted her cheek and went out. They could hear his hard boots clattering up the street.

After a moment Andrew suddenly laughed. 'God damn, I'll go and see. I've only met Buller twice and twice he's growled at me like a mangy old dog, but he's a good seaman, I'll say that. Faulkner always spoke well of him. And he don't change his crew much ... New York ... Hm ... not a bad run, so I'm told. Wonder if all the American privateers have heard about the peace yet.'

'Go on if you're going.' Clowance took his arm. 'Do not let the chance go by default.'

Andrew stared down at his jacket. 'Spilt some wine down it last evening. Hope it don't show. Anyway, they're my best togs. I wonder if Buller was serious? You know how Stephen can think something has happened when he wants it to happen? I suspicion that when I get up there I shall be turned away at the door.'

Clowance had been fearing the same thing. 'Well, you won't ever know if you don't try. And don't underrate Stephen. Sometimes he can work wonders ... Anyway I am very obliged to him for doing this.'

They went to the door together.

Andrew said: 'You know, it was fortunate you asked me to keep quiet on what Stephen was about. Late last night, when all the girls had gone to bed, a fat little man – oldish man – sat down next to me, began to talk – Blencowe, he said his name was – thought he was a servant at first. Says he has a son in the navy, asked me a lot of questions about what sort of a life it was. Then, after a while Stephen Carrington's name came up, and he said he knew him and admired him and what sort of man was he to work for? And so on. And so on. Might have been trying to pump me. You know.'

'And you said nothing?' Clowance asked.

'Can't remember exactly what I did say – one gets a bit fuddled late at night.'

But I can promise you I told him nothing about Stephen's plans for the *Adolphus*.'

VI

Corporal Julien Lemerre, being preoccupied with thoughts of the girl he had met in the village last night, was slow to notice his colleague's late return. Corporal Charles Bernard always took the breakfast up at eight and normally was back by twenty minutes past. At fifteen minutes before nine Lemerre swore and stirred himself to walk up the two flights of stairs and along the corridor to the room where Captain Sir Ross Poldark would normally be eating his breakfast – indeed by now should have finished it.

The door of the room was open, which anyway was against regulations. Lemerre went in and saw the breakfast was untouched. Corporal Bernard was sitting in a chair bound and gagged.

There was not much need for conversation. Lemerre took a knife from his pocket and hacked at Bernard's bonds until he was free. Then he ran out of the room, down the stairs, and pulled the alarm bell.

Chapter Ten

I

June 4th was a public holiday in Paris. It was a day of celebration and re-dedication to the imperial power of Bonaparte. Thirty-six fountains provided free wine in the Champs-Élysées, huge trestle tables offered food to all, open air displays had been arranged, with military bands, fire-eaters, tight-rope walkers, conjurers and magicians.

With sunset came a great concert in front of the Palace of the Tuileries, and afterwards a firework display, showing the ship on which Napoleon had landed on the French coast on the 1st March. The Emperor himself watched it all benevolently from a balcony. A week later he left Paris to join his army at Avesnes.

His army consisted of 125,000 men, with 350 guns. It was organized into seven army corps; a homogeneous mass of eager and angry and courageous Frenchmen, fanatically devoted to their Emperor and aware that they must conquer or die.

The Prussian army under Marshal Blücher amounted to 115,000 men and 290 guns; it consisted of four army corps and occupied Charleroi and the country east with outposts as far as Namur.

The mixed army under the Duke of Wellington consisted of 105,000 men and 200 guns. About one third were British, of which 12,000 were his veterans of the Peninsular War, the rest untried and under-trained. Scattered among the various divisions of the army were about 20,000 Dutch–Belgian troops, so scattered that the British elements could help to stiffen them. The rest were made up of 5,500 first class troops of the King's German Legion, a quantity of Brunswickers and Hanoverians, five Nassau battalions and a Netherland Indian brigade. This army guarded Brussels and the country to the west, particularly the road from Mons.

The Prussian and British armies, by the nature of the distances their defences were stretched to cover, were too far apart to be in touch with each other and contact was only maintained by means of messengers carrying scribbled notes across the intervening thirty-four miles.

across the intervening thirty-four miles.

On the 7th June, before he left Paris, Napoleon issued instructions that dropped a blanket of iron secrecy over the movements of his army. All frontiers along the Sambre, the Moselle, the Rhine were sealed. No stage-coaches were allowed to travel. Every wagon was intercepted, every traveller held and searched. Only his own agents moved, spreading false reports wherever suitable, even as far as Brussels.

It was into this countryside that Ross Poldark, having broken out and stolen a horse, had to make his way in the hope of reaching the British positions.

II

He'd been lucky at the beginning. He had reckoned on a maximum of fifteen minutes; in fact it was nearly forty before the alarm bell sounded. First there was the knife, the pouch with the small change, the keys, which Corporal Bernard had unwillingly loaned him, then a flight of stairs and cupboard where spare uniforms were kept; a tunic and a hat were all he had time for; another flight and a door where the other corporal was supping coffee with his feet up; past that and into the courtyard. General and Mme Wirion, he knew, always went to mass on Sunday mornings at eight: it was worth the risk. The third key he tried let him into the General's house which was on the corner of the courtyard. A woman stared at him, hand to mouth, as he came into the living quarters. A cloak, a better pair of boots, two silver candlesticks, a pistol without cartridges, a map, no money to be seen anywhere, some bread and cheese and a bottle of wine; he let himself out of the front door and into the street. Two old women pushing a handcart, a lad kicking a stone; the stables were round the corner. He chose a pony which was nearest to hand, saddled him, grabbed a nosebag to hold his possessions, was leading the pony into the street as someone shouted from the back of the stables.

Then it was all straightforward - for the time being. He took his direction from the sun until he came to the River Meuse, then began to follow it downstream towards the north. It was good weather, warm, with an occasional thundershower. The road kept to the left bank of the river, sometimes leaving it for a few miles as the river described a deep narrow winding arc, then rejoining it. There were a few peasants in the fields, an occasional ragged traveller on the road or a child driving a few sheep; he kept a sharp watch behind but there was no obvious sign of pursuit. He felt conspicuous on his pony, his legs too long; but no one seemed to take any notice at all. Only once on that first day did he hurriedly dismount and lead his pony into a copse while a troop of cavalry

hastily dismount and lead his pony into a copse while a troop of cavalry clattered past. He spent the first night under some willows, his pony contentedly chewing grass and dozing by the light of a sinking moon.

Early on the second morning he came to a village and spent some of his few coins buying bread and cheese and butter and another bottle of wine. The shopkeeper, looking at his hat and tunic, asked if he was going to join his regiment, and Ross said yes, hoping that no one would remark his broken accent. Nobody did. The shopkeeper wished him luck and told him to make haste. 'The Little Father must not be kept waiting. He is ready to strike.'

It puzzled Ross that there was still no sign of pursuit. Perhaps there was no one to send. France was in turmoil. The armed forces worshipped Napoleon and would follow him to death or victory; but a large proportion of the people longed for peace and a quiet existence. Who knew what General Wirion's private thoughts were? And what in any case did it matter that one middle-aged Englishman should be at liberty when the destiny of Europe was shortly to be decided?

On the morning of the second day he came upon a town of a fair size (General Wirion's map had been discarded, as it did not cover so far north), but emboldened by the total lack of interest people were taking in a lonely, ragged, ill-dressed soldier, he rode straight in and by luck found the kind of little shop that he was seeking. There he sold the silver candlesticks and the pistol, and the boots, which were too small for him. The one valuable item of his personal belongings he had been able to retain throughout his captivity was the gold watch that had belonged to his father. When planning his escape he had decided to sell this to provide him with the money to sustain him on his flight, but when it came to the point he chose not to. The items he had filched from General Wirion would see him through the next two or three days. He would like to keep the watch for Jeremy.

He learned from the shopkeeper that he was in Sedan; that if he followed the river he would come to Charleville-Mézières – not too far distant – maybe twenty-five kilometres. And after that? The shopkeeper shrugged. Far, far to the west was Arras. North and nearer, but still distant, was Charleroi. That, no doubt, was where he should be heading. Troops marching, gun carriages rattling, they had all been through here yesterday and the day before, and the day before that. A great army. No doubt he was one of the stragglers. Where did he come from: he was not French? Poland, said Ross.

He led his little pony away and wandered through the narrow streets, stopped for a coffee and an omelette at a white-washed inn which had some tables outside. It was the first hot food since Saturday night, and last night it had been raining

Charleville-Mézières was in fact two villages planted on either side of the Meuse with a narrow stone bridge connecting them. He spent that night in an orchard and again bought food on the Wednesday morning in a hamlet whose name he never knew. It was in the late evening that he first saw the soldier.

He had seen others before and kept his distance successfully. This man was a figure at the end of a long tree-lined track, riding in the same direction as himself but half a mile back. Ross would not have picked him out so quickly had he not turned in his saddle to see the inclination of the sun. There was a copse by the roadside and he jumped down and led his pony into the thickest part of it to allow the solitary gentleman full right of way.

As he approached he could be seen to be a tall man, sitting very erect, dark cloaked in spite of the heat. He wore tight-fitting white pantaloons and black tasselled Hessian boots. A well-dressed, well-mounted officer. And glinting plainly under the cloak, where it was open to give the rider some air, was a scarlet, tight-buttoned tunic.

Ross stared unbelieving. This must be some strange foreign regiment, certainly not French; one could have sworn ... Yet he made no move and would have allowed the man to go by. And the man, who was staring straight ahead, would have certainly gone by but for Ross's pony. Seeing the horse, the little animal let out a snuffling neigh and shook his head until the harness rattled.

The man brought his horse up short; there was a pistol strapped to his saddle and this was whipped out of its holster.

'Qui va là?'

The foliage of the copse would not have deflected a bullet. There was nothing to do but come forward ... Ross led his pony out. The two men eyed each other.

The officer said: *'Qui êtes-vous? Que voulez-vous?'*

In his halting French Ross began the story he had told the innkeeper. He was a Pole, he said in an apologetic tone, who had been delayed by a fever and was now hastening to follow his regiment and hoped to rejoin it tonight. Ross was aware that his uniform would hardly pass muster to a critical eye, and at the same time he was measuring whether a quick leap would enable him to knock the pistol down and unseat the horseman.

The officer seemed willing to accept the story, and with the words, *'Alles-vous en, donc,'* was ready to let the matter rest.

It might have been better to do just that; ships could pass in the night ... Yet Ross wanted to hear the man speak again.

With a humility that sat strangely on him he asked if the officer could tell him the direction the French army had taken; and he listened very carefully to the man's reply. Ross's French was halting, this man's fully fluent, but with a

distinct accent.

Ross said: 'Do you speak English?'

The officer fingered his pistol and glanced around. The only sign of life were two goats grazing nearby, and a cottage at the turn of the road.

'What is it to you? What do you wish?'

Having made the move, there was no further point in concealment.

'In fact I am British. It is true that I am trying to make my way north, but I am hoping to *avoid* the French and to join the Allied army. The tunic under your cloak – it is very much like a British army uniform. May I ask what it really is?'

'What is your name, please?'

'Poldark. I am an Englishman who was attached to the British Embassy in Paris. But when Bonaparte returned I was arrested as a spy, and since then have been interned in Verdun.'

'And were released?'

'No, no. I escaped last Sunday.'

The man was in his middle thirties, with a bony face, sharp dark eyes, a mouth which given the chance could have been humorous.

'Whom did you work under at the British Embassy?'

'Chiefly Lord Fitzroy Somerset.'

'What position did he hold?'

'He was Minister Plenipotentiary after the Duke of Wellington left for Vienna.'

'What was your mission?'

'I was asked by the Earl of Liverpool to come to France to report on the sentiments of the French army.'

The man smiled wryly. 'I think we know those now, don't we. Who else was at the Embassy?'

'Charles Bagot. Ian McKenzie.'

A moment's silence. The larks were singing in a cloudless sky.

'Your pony gave you away.'

'Yes.'

'He looks tired. Have you come far today?'

'From Charleville-Mézières.'

The officer put his pistol back in its holster.

'I am going north. Ride with me a little way.'

On Friday the 9th June the *Queen Charlotte*, Captain Robert Buller, sailed on her first voyage to New York since the end of hostilities. With her went Andrew Blamey, rehabilitated against his will – or so he made a play of it to his friends, though certainly not to Captain Buller, who was going to be no easy task-master – but privately responding to the challenge and privately satisfied to get his old berth back and privately pleased to tell Tamsin about it and to take a fond leave of her.

Because of it Clowance warmed to Stephen again, and their own separation two days later was affectionate and uncritical, she hiding her anxieties.

The *Adolphus* sailed on the Sunday evening, bristling with men and arms. Stephen had been content with his four long six-pounders. The armourers in the port had tried to sell him some nine-pounder carronades, but Stephen had fired such weapons while in the *Unique* and knew their range to be too short – also they jumped violently and sometimes even capsized when they were hot. Four solid six-pounders would bring most of his potential prey to heel.

Stephen had found Captain Buller's warning all too appropriate. More than half his crew were good hardy seamen, anxious to avoid the press and keen to forage in search of a quick profit; but the rest were a mixture in which out-of-work miners predominated. He made do, comforting himself with the knowledge that most miners had some knowledge of the sea, smuggling or fishing in their spare time, and knowing that if it came to a fight there would be none tougher. Not all could load a musket; they all knew what to do with a cutlass.

The weather was still stormy, the winds fitful, but it was good sailing weather. With his son standing eagerly beside him Stephen set a south-westerly course, making in the general direction of Cherbourg.

IV

'What did you say your name was?'

'Poldark.'

'I think I have heard it somewhere before. My name is Colquhoun Grant.'

'I have heard *that* before, unless there are two officers of that name.'

'There are, damn the feller.'

'But are you not the one who was at Bussaco?'

'I was. Were you there?'

Ross told him. Grant laughed. A snorting chuckle.

'That is where I heard the name. His lordship looked upon you as an unfriendly observer.'

‘But you ... were you not Wellington’s chief information officer?’

‘Reconnaissance officer. Yes.’

‘We never met,’ Ross said. ‘But your name was well known in the army. Isn’t that the uniform of the 11th Foot?’

‘It is. And no doubt you wonder why I come to be wearing it deep inside the enemy positions.’

‘It had crossed my mind.’

‘Because I am a reconnaissance officer I prefer to wear my uniform. I always have. There are obviously greater dangers of recognition and capture but if caught one is not hanged or shot as a spy. As you undoubtedly would be Poldark, if you were captured in your present garb.’

‘Thank you,’ said Ross. ‘But so far it has allowed me to travel unmolested.’

Grant looked up at the fading daylight.

‘We need to avoid Rocroi. This morning there was a heavy concentration of French dragoons there. I do not suppose they have yet crossed the frontier.’

‘We are near the frontier, then?’

‘Oh yes. But I fear it will not guarantee you safety.’

‘Safety I seek. But it would not be the first consideration if this were a crisis in which I could be of use.’

Grant looked at him. ‘It is certainly a crisis. Bonaparte has joined his army today just south of Beaumont, which is some thirty kilometres north-west of where we are now. When he will move and which way are matters yet to be discovered.’

‘You have agents?’

‘I have agents. Not always the most reliable. It was different in Spain.’ When Ross did not speak he added: ‘Many Belgians have been disillusioned by the peace. They were promised independence and instead have been given over to Holland under a Dutch prince ... I shall be meeting a *reliable* man tonight, late tonight when the moon has set. Damn the moon.’

They rode on for another twenty minutes and then Colquhoun Grant led the way off the track and into a coppice full of brier and young ferns.

‘This is as far as we may go as yet. There are French troops all around here. I have not eaten since morning so shall take something now. You are welcome to share it if you wish, Poldark.’

‘Thank you. I’ll join you. But I have some bread and cheese and a half-litre of wine.’

They dismounted and unsaddled their horses, tethering them in a clearing where there was good grass. Grant took off his cloak and sat down in his full regimentals as if he were in an officers’ mess, except that he squatted in the

undergrowth.

‘You are an army man?’

‘Oh, long since. The American War of Independence. It seems centuries ago.’

‘But you have kept up your interest – in military affairs – quite clearly? Are you a major?’

‘Captain. My cousin is a major – was a captain at Bussaco – but he has since retired from the army.’

‘Do I take it you are a Member of Parliament?’

‘That is so.’

‘Well, Captain Poldark, I can offer you two choices. Later tonight I can put you across the frontier in the direction of Chimay. From there if you make north-west for Mons you may just steer clear of the French army, which by then should be advancing out of your way. From Mons make for Ghent where the Bourbon Court is; those members, that is, who haven’t already scuttled away. After that there will be no difficulty in your reaching Bruges and Ostend. But I warn you, the early part of this trek will be dangerous. And I would strongly advise you, as soon as you are over the frontier, to contrive some change of clothing to avoid misunderstanding on either side.’

The cheese was strong but Ross was hungry. He bit into the bread to soften the taste.

‘And the other choice, Colonel Grant?’

‘It would be to come with me. I shall rejoin Wellington in two or three days, depending how the situation develops. Once Napoleon has declared himself, the need for behind-the-lines reconnaissance will become less important. But I would strongly advise you against this course. Not only will it be a bloody battle but if you were captured before you reached our positions you would quite possibly be hanged by the neck.’

‘It’s a risk I prefer to take ... But I do not think my pony can keep up with your horse.’

‘Nor would it. Nor would it.’ Grant took a map from his pocket and screwed up his eyes to read it by the light of the half moon. ‘It is possible I could use you, by God. If that were the case we would have to find you a different mount, eh? I will see what news André brings tonight. We have *some* friends.’

V

On his third day in London Sir George Warleggan called by appointment to see Mr Nathan Rothschild at his offices in New Court, St Swithin’s Lane. They had

met twice before, the first time in Manchester in 1810 when George was counting on the prospect of an imminent peace with Napoleon and making his unwise speculations. Mr Rothschild had lived in Manchester when he first came from Germany, and he had been liquidating some of his assets while George was moving in.

George did not like the man. He thought him a cold fish. And for a foreign Jew whose father had been an inconspicuous curio dealer in the ghetto in Frankfurt he was too abrasive. Only thirty-eight or so, stout, rapidly going bald and affecting no wig, speaking English with a guttural Germanic accent, he had already become a close friend and valued associate of the British Government because of enormous deals he had done for them financing the Peninsular War. George resented this. How had it come about that a foreign Jew, and such a young foreigner, had attained such a position of power and eminence in a Christian society?

He should have had a fellow feeling, for he had had something of a similar history. It was true he had suffered few of the humiliations of a German Jew, such as being confined within the Jewish district by chains slung across the exits at night, but he remembered his boyhood when he had been looked down on and patronized by sections of Cornish society as the grandson of a country blacksmith and the son of an unimportant smelter. Like Rothschild he had built upon the enterprise and initiative of an ambitious father, and now there was virtually no one in the county of Cornwall with whom he could not claim to be an equal. And certainly no one would ever dare to *patronize* him!

But this was small beer compared to Rothschild – many years his junior – and a man almost deliberately disclaiming the polish that George considered himself now to have acquired. Of course he had brothers, as George did not, settled in positions of financial strength in most of the capital cities of Europe. Perhaps he felt he could afford to remain uncouth.

George had brought with him an ambitious scheme for the development of water power in the West Country and the extension of the toll roads to open up development there. He did not really mind whether Rothschild was interested enough to help finance such a scheme; it was the opening he wanted for a general discussion in which several times he was able to bring the subject round to Bonaparte and the likely outcome of the new war affecting the prospects for such a development.

For a while they fenced a little, the man with the astutest financial brain of the age, and the provincial banker on whose native Celtic cunning had been grafted years of mercantile and financial experience.

Then Nathan, his cold eyes heavily lidded, turned the scheme down with neither dignity nor politeness: the proposition was too regional for him, he

neither dignity nor politeness, the proposition was too regional for him, he grunted. He had early sensed that the meeting was a pretext, and, once he had seen where it was designed to lead, he gave nothing further of his own opinions away. They parted with a show of amity and assurances of respect that barely hid the lack of either.

Although he carefully chalked this rejection against Rothschild, in case on any future occasion he should be able to do him a bad turn, George came away not wholly dissatisfied. He had framed his questions and rehearsed them beforehand in such a way that even disclaimers could be a sort of admission that the knowledge was there. He was now more than ever certain that Rothschild had better lines of communication with events in Brussels than the British Government, that somehow news was got to him more quickly and more reliably.

After leaving, he strolled north, keeping an eye open for the pickpockets and cutpurses who abounded in the area. It was a fine sunny day and the crowds milled everywhere, with hackney coaches forcing their way through, drivers cracking whips; ballad singers competing with fish cryers, and the sellers of hot rabbit pies, fresh spring water, quack medicines and cheap penknives all ringing their bells to claim attention. Beggars crawled in the gutters, elegant ladies were being carried in their chairs, less elegant ones were sharp-eyed looking for a likely man. Dust and dirt and refuse and the occasional stink.

George turned into King William Street and called at an office where a man called Samuel Rosehill was waiting to greet him. Mr Rosehill acted as an agent for Warleggan & Willyams Bank and also for George personally. He was himself a Jew.

‘Rosehill, this man you know in the Rothschild office, how far can you rely on him?’

‘The few confidences he has given me have proved to be sound, sir. I can hardly say more than that.’

George grunted, and then changed it to a cough, not wanting to sound like the man he had just left.

‘The market is very volatile but very low. Nervous, I’d call it. Would you know, could you follow any buying or selling pattern from what this friend of yours could tell you or by observing the actions of the people who trade for the Rothschilds?’

Rosehill scratched under his wig. You mean to be able to tell when the Rothschilds are buying and when they are selling? I believe one could discern a pattern, yes. But I question how much my friend could help, sir. Nathan Rothschild uses a number of agents, apart from trading direct.’

‘Your friend might know who those people are.’

Your friend might know who those people are.

'He might know that.'

'You would be able to follow any trend at very short notice? Within the hour, say?'

'Oh yes. Given the finances to do it.'

'I'll see the finances are to hand.'

There was a pause. Rosehill said: 'I am not sure if I take your meaning, sir. Am I right in supposing you would wish me, as it were, to follow Rothschild's lead? Buy when he buys? Sell when he sells?'

'Yes.'

'I have to warn you, sir, that Mr Rothschild is infinitely devious in such matters. He knows there are other speculators waiting to follow his lead and deliberately adopts tactics to throw them off the track. Might I make a suggestion?'

'Of course.'

'Mr Rothschild himself frequently comes on 'Change. He always occupies the same place, just on the right as you enter from Cornhill. He will stand there for an hour or two, sometimes more. By observing the men he meets and then what they do to obey his instructions might be the best and most reliable method you could adopt.'

George gazed out at the street. Much as he would have hated to find any common cause with Demelza, he would have agreed that London after Cornwall was unbearably noisy.

'I shall stay at Flandong's another week. Send for me immediately if there is any unusual movement on 'Change which you can ascribe to the Rothschilds. If you are not certain, still send for me. I shall wait at the hotel and can be with you within the hour.'

VI

They had talked in the night. Although sleep came now and again to one or the other, they were both too alert to doze for long. They spoke of their families, their adventures in war and peace, their hopes for the future. Colquhoun Grant said he came of a family of eleven, six other brothers; his father had died young; he had himself been a soldier since he was fifteen; by a strange quirk had been taught French by Jean-Paul Marat when the *sans-culotte* had been a refugee in England from his own kind. He could now speak five languages and make himself understood in three more. The farthest west he had been was when he

was stationed at Plymouth. Ross told him of the missions he had undertaken, to Vienna with the Earl of Pembroke in 1807, his helping to escort the Portuguese royal family to safety in Brazil, his trip behind the French lines in Portugal which had ended at Bussaco.

‘Lucky you were not captured there. This time, when you were interned in Verdun, did you give your parole?’

‘No.’

‘Ah. I did once. I was captured in Spain, brought into France, broke my parole, lived for a time as an American in Paris before escaping to England. The excuse was that the French broke the terms of the parole by treating me as a prisoner. But I am still unhappy about it. Of course a French officer of equal rank was immediately repatriated. But I am glad you were able to escape with a clear conscience.’ Grant stirred. ‘The moon is nearly down. It is time we made a move.’

They resaddled their horses and rode off into the night. Grant seemed to know exactly where they were going. Twice they saw camp-fires, and once drew in to a clump of trees as a squadron of horse artillery rumbled past. They went through a more populated zone, and here they dismounted and led their horses in single file. It was a very mild night with no wind, but a few thunderly clouds hid the emergent stars.

After an hour or so Grant led the way through a stream and to a derelict barn. He cupped his hands and hooted like an owl. Two figures grew out of the darkness, and they entered the barn. Inside it smelt of animals and was pitch black. Horses were stirring. One of the figures began talking rapidly to Grant, but Ross could not follow it for the man was speaking Flemish.

As the conversation continued Ross’s eyes grew accustomed to the extra darkness and he could see a table, a bench, a couple of chairs. He sat on one of the chairs while the fourth man sharpened a bayonet and watched him.

‘Could you understand that?’ Grant said.

‘No.’

‘French troops crossed the frontier an hour ago and are driving towards the Prussians at Charleroi. This is the move we have been waiting for. Wellington has always suspected an attack such as this, but he has also had to be prepared to counter an encircling movement to cut the British off from the sea. Unless this is a feint, and we shall know more at dawn when we get another report, this means Bonaparte will try to knock out the Prussians before turning on the English.’

‘What exactly should we know at dawn?’

‘Whether Bonaparte himself has gone. There has also been great activity around Mons, but *that* seems likely now to have been the feint. If once we can be

sure that the advance on Charleroi is the main thrust, then Wellington can begin to withdraw his troops from the Lille, Conde and Valenciennes roads.' Grant rubbed his long jaw. 'He depends largely on me for this information.'

'The Duke?'

'The Duke. As Head of his Intelligence I now have the responsibility for giving him this information in time for him to act on it. I shall not go myself as I have a reliable messenger. André will go. But tomorrow I might need a second messenger. These other men are more useful to me here. If you were willing I could send you with a further message. I shall expect to follow about a day later.'

VII

By eleven in the morning the French Imperial Guard had driven the Prussians out of Charleroi. Napoleon sat in a chair outside the Belle Vue Inn and watched his troops marching in to occupy the town. The following afternoon the French massively defeated the Prussians at Ligny, and Marshal Blücher was unhorsed and knocked senseless as the French cuirassiers rode over him, pursuing the Germans retreating towards Wavre. The German losses were sixteen thousand men and twenty-five guns.

Satisfied that he had knocked out one opponent, Napoleon turned all his forces and his attention upon the other.

Chapter Eleven

I

The Duchess of Richmond was giving a great ball in Brussels, perhaps the most glittering of a glittering season, to be held on the ground floor of her large rented mansion in the rue de la Blanchisserie. Everyone of importance was to be there, but two days before, Jeremy returned the tickets he had been at some pains to get.

‘Do you mind, my love?’ he said. ‘We have been to so many balls since we came here. I shall be away tomorrow, and fancy a quiet evening with you on Thursday. Just supper and love and sleep.’

Cuby looked at him quizzically. ‘I would have liked to go but I prefer to be alone with you, if that is how you fancy it.’

‘I fancy it. I may be more away during the next few weeks and would like to make the most of my favourite wife.’

‘Do you think there will be a battle soon?’

‘Not at all sure. The French have the deal, and we cannot see their cards.’

So on the evening of the 15th they went out alone to the little restaurant they had visited on Cuby’s birthday. They walked there from their apartment. In the warm evening the people of Brussels were out in numbers. No doubt there would be a huge crowd outside the Duchess of Richmond’s watching the arrivals.

There were also more soldiers about: cavalry clattering here and there, platoons of infantry marching. Most of them were going south.

They ordered a pleasant meal, much on the lines of the one they had had in March; talked in a desultory way, eyes warming to each other, hands occasionally touching.

‘Are you more sure than you were on Tuesday?’ she asked.

‘About what?’

‘Bonaparte.’

‘Oh yes. He crossed the frontier sometime last night or early this morning. There has already been a skirmish or two.’

‘Far from here?’

far from here:

‘Probably about twenty miles.’

‘Twenty miles!’

‘Oh, don’t worry; they were driven back. It was not our fellows: I believe it was the Brunswickers or the Dutch. But the French retreated. I think they are probing our positions at various points before they attempt anything serious.’

‘Jeremy, I am a little terrified.’

‘Oh, I pray you not to be! There is a lot of noise and smoke sometimes without too many getting serious hurt. D’you know I was training some of my lads yesterday. Me, training them! But the old land pattern musket we have in the army is a very cumbersome weapon. It makes a very loud noise and a great deal of smoke but is monstrous inaccurate. The average soldier always fires it too high because it blasts away in his ear, and he turns away his head and the ball goes winging up in the air. But if you remonstrate with him, and he holds the barrel too low, the bullet will roll out before he fires it!’

Cuby said: ‘I am not altogether reassured.’

‘Then drink a little more wine and tell me about yourself. Is our baby alive and kicking?’

‘Just the first stirrings. You must not be too impatient, boy. It will be December before my time comes.’

‘What do you wish for?’

‘As to a boy or a girl? I do not altogether mind. Perhaps a boy. And you?’

‘Perhaps a girl.’

They laughed.

‘Christmas,’ said Jeremy. ‘I wonder what we shall call her – or him. Noël? I wonder where we shall be living then?’

‘Not in Brussels!’

‘No. A little while ago I thought this might be a long war, like the last. But now I think it might all be resolved, smack, bang, within a month! I shall not pursue the army as a career, like my cousin. And yet, it is strange . . .’

‘What?’

‘Geoffrey Charles, they say, was brought up very genteel, pampered as a boy. It was a great surprise when he took so much to the army. As for myself – though the circumstances were very different – I too was brought up soft, I did not really ever fancy to join the army, but now I am in it, I confess I find it rather more enjoyable than I ever expected!’

Tonight Cuby had put on a pale lavender silk frock gathered at the waist with a silver cord. He had asked her to wear it because he said it reminded him of what she was wearing when he had first seen her, and she had sheltered him from the dangers

from the gaugers.

He added: 'Of course my rapid promotion will not continue after the end of the war! It is astonishing that I have come so far without once having to purchase anything and without outside influence! It is solely due to the extreme confusion that has existed since Bonaparte escaped and the dearth of sufficient officers to command the re-formed companies and regiments.'

'I trust you don't deny that it might just be in the smallest degree because you are showing special talent. Come, boy; modesty is becoming until it is so extreme that it mocks itself.'

He looked her over, met her startling hazel eyes under the raven-black brows. Her lips, of which he knew the taste so well, were upturning slightly, a dark pink against the honey-coloured skin.

'Jeremy, I have never asked you. Was it because of me that you joined the army?'

His gaze shifted. 'Very hard to disentangle my feelings at that time.'

After waiting for him to say more she added: 'I think your sister blames me for it.'

'Who, Clowance? When have you seen her?'

'Something Isabella-Rose let drop. But Clowance was unfriendly at Geoffrey Charles's party. Perhaps she just blames me for having made you unhappy.'

'And rightly so.' He patted her arm and then sniffed at her cheek. 'Anyway we'll change that. She has only to meet you and know you. Look at my mother.'

'Your mother is the wisest of women. And one of the kindest. The minute I set eyes on her at that party I knew we could understand each other. Clowance is more like your father; she will be harder to thaw.'

'I do not think my father will be hard at all! When you know him better you will know that too. But talking of hardness, what of *your* brother and *your* mother? Do you think we shall ever be accepted at Caerhays?'

'Of course! I shall have no hesitation. Do you know, if you can come to ignore their prideful faults, they are really quite nice people! But do you know something else? Even if the opportunity were ever to present itself I do not think I ever again wish to live at Caerhays. It stands to me for a way of life that I have totally lost since I married you. There were many good things in it, many pleasant and agreeable times, but they are so intertwined with restricted and restricting attitudes, limited and limiting views, that I want the return of none of them. It is only since December that I have been free!'

'Tied to me,' said Jeremy.

'Tied to *you*! Where *shall* we live? I think I should like it to be Cornwall.'

'Yes. In spite of Goldsworthy Gurney, I believe sufficient opportunity presents itself to satisfy me in Cornwall.'

presented her to Cubby in the carriage.

‘Steam? The horseless carriage?’

‘Well, first I shall hope to earn my living at Wheal Leisure – even possibly try something fresh at Wheal Grace. I have been wondering about a small house belonging to my father, called The Gatehouse. When Dwight Enys first came to the district he lived there. Then it was left empty for a number of years, allowed to fall into disrepair. Stephen Carrington and Clowance were to live there and Stephen spent much time and some money putting it in order. Then the engagement broke, and when it was patched up they married and went to live in Penryn, so they never inhabited it. It is possible we could use it for a time.’

‘I would be happy to. What is the matter?’

‘Matter?’ His face cleared. ‘Nothing, my love. No more than a passing thought.’

She waited but he did not explain. He hardly could, because the passing thought was of storing the proceeds of the coach robbery in The Gatehouse until they moved it to the cave in Kellow’s Ladder.

‘And we must have a boat,’ said Jeremy, with an effort. ‘Do you like fishing?’

‘I never have. But I like fish.’

‘To eat? Or would you dislike catching them?’

‘No, I am not tender-stomached like that.’

He smiled. ‘I sometimes wonder if men are not more tender in this way than women. I, now, have never greatly cared for hunting. I do not wish to be sentimental about the fox – and who could be who has found his handiwork in a coop of slaughtered chickens, killed not for food but for pleasure? – but at the end of a run I cannot bring myself to enjoy the sight of him outnumbered twenty to one and torn to pieces. Yet Clowance greatly enjoys hunting, and I am sure Isabella-Rose will as soon as she is permitted.’

‘Clemency loves it as much as I do,’ said Cuby. ‘And no one more tender for animals than Clemency ever existed!’

‘Since I joined the army,’ Jeremy said, ‘I have become very little more inured to the use of horses in battle – I have only seen three killed but that was quite enough. Indeed, a secondary reason for promoting the horseless carriage in my mind would be to relieve them of that burden. Three years even in a stage-coach, and a horse is only fit for the knacker’s yard.’ He sipped his wine, admiring the colour against the candlelight. ‘And yet sometimes I wonder.’

‘What?’

‘If horseless carriages were ever to become universal we might lose the horse altogether. That would be a worse fate, for them and for us.’ He took out his watch. ‘Shall we go home?’

‘If you wish. Is it not rather early?’

He linked her little finger. 'I think, if you agree, that it is not too early.'

II

They had been lying quietly in bed, the daylight hardly yet fled from the long June sky, when there was a knock on the door. Jeremy lit a candle, pulled on his dressing-gown, went to the door.

He came back after a whispered conversation. 'It is my orderly. I must go. You may see the message.'

Cuby took the paper.

Captain Poldark's company will proceed with the utmost diligence to Braine-le-Comte where he will meet Major Cartaret who will point out to him the ground on which it is to bivouac tonight.

William de Lancey, Quartermaster General

'My darling,' she said.

'Yes, my darling. I must be off. Just as well we did not go to the ball. They have an uncanny knack, these army people, of keeping ungodly hours and trying to spoil the fun.'

Cuby swallowed back the tears that suddenly, uncontrollably, bubbled up.

'Be back by Sunday,' she said lightly. 'We have that little dinner-party.'

'Of course! I'll tell old Boney. Seriously, *carissima mia*, you have stayed in Brussels like a good wife and I doubt if you will have the least anxiety about the French. But if – *if* things went badly awry, do not hesitate to go with Mr and Mrs Turner and the Creeveys to Antwerp. It is not only yourself you have to think of but little Tweedledum whom you are answerable for. If need be, carry him across the water and I'll join you later.'

'I'll take care of myself as long as you do.'

'When we were very young I used to tease Clowance and she would get angry and throw stones at me. Since then I've always been good at dodging missiles.'

He began to dress. Outside they could hear the shrill fifes and the bugle horns. In the dark of the coming night it was a melancholy sound.

'Is Sanders waiting for you?'

'Yes. And yawning, no doubt. There will be a lot of sleepy soldiers on the march.'

She watched him, eyes darker than usual, the coldest clutch of fear in her heart.

Jeremy said: 'I wonder what my father is doing. *He* is really the soldier by temperament, not I. He'll be very irritable in his camp in Verdun if he knows there is going to be a contest for Brussels.'

Cuby began to dress.

'What are you doing?'

'Oh, it's too early to sleep. I shall see you off and then light a fire and make some coffee.'

Jeremy peered out at the moon. 'Lovely weather for campaigning.'

When at last he was ready and she was sure he had forgotten nothing he came across and took her in his arms, kissed her lightly on the forehead, the tip of her nose, the mouth. After the drowsy abandoned love of an hour ago it was airy, innocent, unemotional.

'Goodbye, Cuby.'

'Goodbye, boy. Come back soon.'

'I know. In time for that dinner-party. I'll tell them to hasten with their skirmish.'

III

André did not come with the dawn, nor until the sun was blazing from a hot sultry sky, a tall ragged man who reminded Ross of the carter who had given him a lift when the diligence broke down on the way back from Auxerre.

He and Colquhoun Grant talked for nearly half an hour; Grant went to the table and wrote out the message the Belgian was to take.

Only then he said to Ross: 'There is no longer likely to be a serious threat to Mons. Bonaparte has thrust his armies into the Charleroi gap and is rolling back the Prussians to begin. There may be time for Wellington to regroup his troops: if this message gets through by late tonight he should have twenty-four hours. Pierre is leaving right away *ventre à terre* for Brussels.'

'And you?' said Ross.

'I shall ride to Namur, where I have two royalist friends. They have a direct contact with one of Napoleon's generals. What information I bring back I will ask you to carry to Wellington's headquarters – wherever they may be by then. It will be a dangerous mission but that is what you tell me you wish to do.'

'You ride as far as Namur in daylight?'

'Three hours each way. The French army will have other matters on its hands. But if I should be captured you will know from my non-return. Then fend for yourself. Marcel or Julius will be somewhere at hand. There'll be food for you to

eat and some to carry with you. You will have a fair horse before dark.'

'And when can I be sure you will not turn up?'

'Give me till the moon sets.'

'I do not fancy such a long inactivity,' Ross said. 'Is there nothing I can do here, or in the vicinity?'

'How good is your French? Heavily accented, isn't it? You would be of much greater service by accepting the inactivity. Lie down. Take a sleep, man. There will be plenty of activity for you later on.'

IV

It was a hot sultry day and time passed slowly. Marcel and Julius soon left and Ross was alone with his pony. For the most part he stayed in the barn. The roof anyway was part in ruin, and the sun fell in strips across a floor well grown with weeds relishing the light. His pony cropped in a corner. Twice when he pushed the door ajar he thought he could hear distant cannon-fire.

He wondered if Demelza were still in London. He had received one letter only from her; then she had been staying in his old rooms and intending to remain there a few weeks. By now she would surely be safely home in Cornwall, together with the stout-hearted Mrs Kemp, the precocious Bella and the imperturbable Harry. Jeremy was another matter. He must be involved in this battle which was about to take place. He had been in the army twelve months but had not seen any serious fighting. As a relatively untried ensign he might well be among the reserves. The wonderful veteran army of the Peninsula would bear the brunt.

But Grant had said Wellington desperately lacked seasoned troops; at the most ten thousand were his old comrades in arms who had driven the French out of Spain. Many even of the other English in his makeshift army were untried youths. It was a matter of luck where Jeremy was and how he fared. There was no virtue in comforting oneself with false hopes. The real comfort was to remember all the bloody battles Geoffrey Charles had survived – almost all the bitterest fighting of the Peninsular War – before he married and retired safely on half-pay. God, what a prospect if Bonaparte won this battle! Belgium would be his; the Alliance against him would break up; Austria, to avoid being crushed, would return the Empress and their son; even Spain might again be invaded. Had England the stomach for another long war?

Had it even the stomach to solve its own domestic problems? The two copies of *The Times* he had received had given him a fair sample of the feeling of the

House when it was debating the Corn Bill. He should have been there, making his angry protest, instead of allowing himself to become a useless pawn in the international game.

And his other child, Clowance; she was safe enough in Penryn. But, try as he might, Ross could not bring himself actually to become fond of his son-in-law. There was something meretricious about his bounding energy and good spirits; he was so open and outgoing in his behaviour that one never got near enough to him to know him any better. But Clowance did; presumably she saw him more clearly than most, perceived the real sincerity that his slightly sham sincerity served to hide. Of course the sexual lure could distort a woman's view; yet Clowance was a very blunt and honest person and it was unlikely she would marry someone without genuine virtues.

One expected too much. It was natural that fathers-in-law and sons-in-law should have a mild antipathy. Did he feel differently about his daughter-in-law? In the year just gone, when Jeremy had been made so outrageously unhappy by her betrothal to Valentine Warleggan, he had felt the strongest possible dislike for the girl and all her feeble Trevanion clan. When the engagement was broken – by Valentine not by her! – it was he, Ross, who had advised Jeremy to go to Caerhays Castle and more or less help himself to the girl; grab her, take her off, make up her silly indecisive mind for her; and Jeremy had done just this, with the most brilliant of results. Even so, Ross had some ambivalent feelings about the reliability of his daughter-in-law.

At least she had conquered Demelza. Demelza had written how good and charming she had been during her stay in Brussels. And she was with child. Well, he supposed it was time he was a grandfather!

He must have slept for quite a time, for the day was nearly spent when he rolled over in the straw and sat up to see a man in the doorway.

When he came out of the bright light of the slanting sun Ross saw it was André. He was holding his hand to his ragged arm, and there was blood on his hand.

He sagged and came in and sank in a chair and said something Ross did not understand.

'Can you speak French?' Ross asked, getting to his feet.

'Where is Colonel Grant?'

'Gone to Namur. He should be back soon. You are wounded?'

'It is nothing. A musket ball. They are flying very fast out there, and you are lucky if you do not collect one or two even though they are meant for someone else. Have you water?'

Ross took a flask across to him. There was not much in it, and André drained

it.

‘You delivered the message? You were on the way back?’

André looked at him sidelong. ‘It is time Colonel Grant is back?’

‘No doubt. But we must wait. Let me see the wound.’

The sleeve was slit anyhow and easily moved up to show the blood oozing from an ugly hole above the elbow.

Ross said: ‘Is there water nearby?’

‘There is a stream. Turn left out of the barn. But I do not think you need to bother. I have seen many in a very much worse condition today.’

When Ross came back with the flask full he found the thin man sprawled with closed eyes against the side of the chair. He opened them when Ross bathed the wound and wrapped it tightly with a piece of cloth.

‘I am not mortally hurt,’ said André. ‘But I have lost much blood. I think I may faint.’

Ross brought him a cup of wine; he was able to sip it; his eyes were flickering.

‘Bring my horse in here – else he may be seen.’

Ross did this, and unsaddled the animal, which was slippery with sweat, foam flecking from his mouth. When he went back to André his eyes were shut and he was breathing heavily. He stood beside him for a few minutes and then went to sit in his chair, ate a few mouthfuls of the bread and sausage, which was all he had left.

Presently the man said: ‘Monsieur.’

Ross went instantly back.

‘Monsieur, in case the Colonel Grant should be a long time and I have gone unconscious – or perhaps if Colonel Grant should not come back, I must tell you I have not delivered the message.’

‘What? Were you wounded and unable to get through?’

‘No, no.’ André paused for breath. ‘I arrived behind the English positions and was arrested by . . . a cavalry patrol. I was identified and told them I had . . . important message for the Commander-in-Chief. Was taken – I was taken at once to the Brigade Commander, General Dornberg, who . . . who took it upon himself to open the message I carried. Thereupon he kept me for some hours . . . and then returned the message saying Colonel Grant was . . . was wrong in his conclusions and said he was certain the main – main attack would still be towards Mons.’

Ross brought back the cup of wine and helped André drink some. As he did so there was a footstep and he quickly turned, aware that he only had a knife within reach. But even in the semi-darkness Grant’s stiff figure was recognizable.

He came over and stood in front of André. The man tried to struggle into a sitting position.

‘*M le Colonel*—’

‘I heard,’ said Grant. And then: ‘Where is the message?’

André indicated an inner pocket of his jacket. Ross felt inside and pulled out the letter, on which the seal was broken.

Grant took the letter and held it between finger and thumb. ‘Dornberg! God damn the man! May the devil have mercy on him, for I should not!’

‘Dornberg?’ said Ross. ‘A Prussian?’

‘A Hanoverian! Like our royal family! Major-General Sir William Dornberg is in command of the 1st and 2nd Light Dragoons of the King’s German Legion. Some of our finest troops! He fought for Napoleon until two years ago, when he changed sides! It all smacks of treachery . . .’ Grant thumped one hand into the other and tramped about the barn. ‘But more likely it just smacks of bungling incompetence. Wellington, in my view mistakenly, gave this fool the responsibility for transmitting to Brussels the reports of the various agents as they came in. He has grossly exceeded his duty by attempting to judge the value of the reports for himself! My God, this might turn the course of the battle! The man should be court-martialled and shot!’ Grant turned to the wounded Belgian. ‘Are you *sure* General Dornberg did not pass on the report in any letter of his own?’

‘That I do not know, *mon colonel*. But the view he expressed in my hearing was that your report only went to prove that the present . . . present attack . . . was a feint.’

Grant swore under his breath again and again. Ross could see his whipcord figure trembling with anger.

‘Where are Marcel and Julius? They were bringing a horse for Captain Poldark.’

‘They said at sunset, *mon colonel*. They should be here . . . at any time.’

‘I will take the report myself,’ said Grant. ‘It will be late, but not perhaps too late to be of value. André, which way did you go?’

‘Through Fontaine l’Evêque and then I struck north. I was trying . . . to avoid the troop concentrations.’

‘Would I run into trouble if I went via Gosselies and Frasnes?’

‘There is so much movement. At night you might be able to thread a way through.’

‘The damned moon is growing.’ Grant opened his bag and took out some bread, a cooked chicken, peaches. ‘Eat some of this, Poldark. I have no doubt you have been on short commons all day.’

‘Will you please let me take the letter?’ Ross suggested.

‘Why do you not let me take the letter?’ Ross suggested.

Grant appeared to consider, then shook his head. ‘No. It is a good thought but I must go myself. Unless I personally put this into the hands of the Duke I shall not rest easy. Perhaps I should have gone this morning; but there was more here for me to do, and I did not in all faith believe that one bungling fool could put everything at risk.’

‘I shall have the only fresh horse,’ said Ross.

Again Grant shook his head. ‘I’m sorry, no, Poldark, but I must take it. If you give my mare or André’s horse the night to recover you can take one of them. They are excellent beasts. Follow me tomorrow night, or make for the coast.’

‘I’m sorry, Grant,’ Ross said in his turn. ‘Having come this far, I am not to be disposed of like some inconvenient parcel. You are in authority and I cannot stop you taking my horse. The horses outside are spent, but my little pony which has brought me all this way has been resting all day. I can travel on that.’

Grant tore off a drumstick and began to eat it. Then he nodded. ‘So be it. Look, if you want it that way, you *shall* take the letter, by God. That is what you suggested, isn’t it? I need no letter. I shall report direct to Wellington or not at all. I shall go on the faster mount, but if I am unlucky and am captured or killed, you may bear him the original message, for what good it may do any of us now.’

‘Thank you,’ said Ross.

‘Hush,’ said André, stirring. ‘That is Marcel. I know his footstep.’

Chapter Twelve

I

One of the results of Jeremy's recent promotion was that most of the men in his company were strangers to him.

There were about forty seasoned soldiers, most of them campaigners from the Peninsular War, among them the quartermaster sergeant, a rough, tough Welshman called Evans, known as Quack Evans, because he strutted like a duck. Jeremy felt he was much on trial; such men, uncouth and uneducated though they were, knew far more about war than he would ever know. Most of the other men were new recruits, country lads, gaolbirds, poachers, debtors, anyone who would take the King's shilling – or had been tricked into it – whose main awareness of the world was that life was nasty, brutish and short. John Peters, the farmer's son from Wiltshire, who was still an ensign, had been transferred with Jeremy, and Jeremy's batman, John Sanders, had been with him six months. His two lieutenants were called Bates and Underwood. Bates was from Lincolnshire, and he had known him at the Forties Club. Underwood was a stranger.

Braine-le-Comte was a pretty village, but by the time Jeremy and his company arrived there it was crowded with Hanoverian troops and their baggage wagons, whom they had to thread and almost fight a way through. At the other side there was a steep climb to some foothills, and guns were being hauled up there; hussars and dragoons were getting in each other's way, in a picture of such disorganization that Jeremy thought it unlikely he would ever find the Major Cartaret to whom he was supposed to report. Jeremy had ridden all the way on the ungainly but reliable piebald horse Santa, which he had bought in Willemstad last December, it being the practice for officers of infantry regiments to be mounted; but most of his troops were fagged out with the long march in the heat of the day, burdened as they each were with a haversack, a musket and bayonet and a hundred and twenty rounds of ball cartridge. In the way of British soldiers, they brightened noticeably when the sound of gunfire got closer.

Presently, almost to everyone's surprise, Major Cartaret appeared, a slim, dapper

Presently, almost to everyone's surprise, Major Cartaret appeared, a slim, copper man, and called Jeremy to him, explaining that they must make for Nivelles. This, it seemed, was where most of the firing was coming from and was about four miles away.

They reached Nivelles, a small town this, and beyond it a battle was taking place in the lush countryside, cannons thundering over the rye and the wheat, musketry crackling, clouds of smoke darkening the sky, soldiers moving here and there, the wounded staggering back towards the town. But this did not dissuade the townsfolk from standing in the doorways or crowding at open windows, watching and staring, some trembling and huddled together, but others cheering excitedly as at a fireworks display. On the outskirts of the town was a tree-lined square, and this was like a clearing station for the wounded. They lay everywhere, the dead and the dying together – two priests trying to comfort and help, some quite elegant ladies; and the wounded helping each other; one with a foot wound squatting and tying up the stump of a man without a hand, most of them ghastly from loss of blood, some crying out, many frightened at the thought that they were going to die for lack of medical help.

Jeremy still did not like the sight of blood, but he led the way forward. Then the road in front of him was suddenly full of soldiers coming the wrong way. A few were wounded but most seemed to be simply following a herd instinct to escape. It was a Belgian regiment and they shouted at Jeremy's company: '*Tout est perdu! Les Anglais sont vaincus! Tout est fini!*' It took ten minutes for them to rush past and then the road ahead was suddenly ominously empty. An occasional shell burst overhead and there was the intermittent crack of muskets.

After issuing his orders Major Cartaret had galloped off and had not been seen since. By the time they had gone another mile the sun was low in the sky, peering sidelong among the cumbrous trees. The wheels of a carriage behind rattling on the *pavé*, just room for it to get past, going ahead of them; in it was a single Guards officer, his coat unbuttoned, snuff-box in hand. He took no notice of the company of tramping soldiers nor of the mounted officers in the van. He was presumably on his way to fight the French.

Sight of him seemed to revive the tired men, and enabled Jeremy to have the strength of mind to keep them moving when they came to another hamlet where a large *estaminet* was surrounded by soldiers of all races taking their ease. Through the open windows you could see the rooms crowded with men, talking and arguing and smoking and drinking, and they were sprawled about outside too among their tired horses, drinking, resting, eating.

Once out of sight and sound of this relaxation, Jeremy called a halt. Two food wagons were brought from the back of the column and rations were handed round. It was time the men had a break, past time. They had marched far enough

round. It was time the men had a break, past time. They had marched far enough today, but his orders were so vague that he had little idea what to do next. There was still gunfire over the hill. It was no place to linger, this, for they were exposed on two sides, and there was little natural cover. Nor was there a stream, as there had been a mile or so back, where the men could refill their water bottles. He did not want to push on too far and blunder into the French.

The guardsman in the cabriolet had clearly had no such apprehensions.

John Peters came up and squatted beside him.

‘Permission to speak, sir,’ he said with a grin.

‘So long as it’s sensible, John. I know you’d rather be back in Brussels with Marita.’

‘Well, this grub’s not quite up to La Belle Epoque.’

‘What are the lads saying?’ Jeremy asked. ‘That we should have stopped by the *estaminet*?’

‘One or two rolled an eye, I can tell you. But by and large, them having marched so far today, they’d like to see a bit of fighting before the day’s out. You’ve got a tough lot, Jeremy, and they don’t like to see men running away.’

‘The day *is* nearly out,’ Jeremy said, squinting at the last glints of the sun. ‘Well, I’ll give ’em another fifteen minutes and then we’ll move on.’

The fifteen minutes was almost up when a horseman came galloping over the hill from the direction of the fighting. He reined in before Jeremy but did not dismount.

‘There’s been the very devil of a scrap just in the next valley, place called Quatre Bras. The Duke of Brunswick has been bad wounded and a lot of his men turned tail and ran for their lives. But we’ve drove the Frenchies back!’

There was no means of telling the rank or regiment of this solitary horseman because he was wearing a suit of embroidered royal-blue velvet and white pantaloons, and his shoes were dancing shoes. Presumably he had had no time to change since the Duchess of Richmond’s ball. His horse was dead tired and hanging its head.

‘Poldark,’ said Jeremy. ‘Captain, 52nd Oxfordshires. Major Cartaret is in command but I have not seen him for an hour.’

‘Longland,’ said the young man. ‘Aide-de-camp to the Duke. The fighting’s dyin’ down now but it’s been the very devil of a scrap. I doubt if there’ll be much more till dawn. If your major don’t turn up I’d advise you to make for Quatre Bras – that’s the crossroads; you can’t miss it, and bivouac in any convenient field you can find this side of it. There’ll be more fun in the mornin’, depend on it.’ He gently tugged his horse’s tired head up and went on his way.

So they marched on to the battlefield. A cluster of houses at the crossroads, and there was still some fighting in and out of these. All sorts of noises echoed in the hot evening air, cries of men in pain, the blowing of bugles, the neighing of horses, the crack of muskets, the whistle of bullets overhead, the distant boom of cannons and the explosions of shell. Great clouds of smoke rose from the thick woods beyond, and frightened birds were wheeling and crying. As they skirted the wood to approach the crossroads, they stumbled over corpses hidden in the tall grass. Groups of soldiers moved around the farmhouses, but there seemed no enemy among them now. A troop of cavalry about a hundred strong galloped suddenly across the fields and into the next wood.

Jeremy called a halt and rode on ahead. It was now half dark, with the moon out, and there seemed to be no one in charge, but as he reached the crossroads he could see what carnage there had been. Dead horses, dead men were piled in heaps everywhere. The farmhouses were blasted and pitted with shot. The wounded men for the most part were lying untended where they had fallen or where they had crawled to. A cavalry officer suddenly appeared from the door of one of the houses, unlooped the reins of his horse and began to issue orders. As Jeremy came up to him he realized he was a major-general. Jeremy waited his turn, then saluted and reported.

‘Poldark?’ said the major-general. ‘A Cornishman? This has been something of a scrap, by God. You just come? Yes, water your horses and men – there’s a well in the courtyard, though you’ll have to wait your turn. Bivouac where you’ve the fancy; I do not think there will be a night attack, but post sentries.’

In the end they did not, for after watering their horses and feeding themselves from the wagons and what they carried in their pouches, they lay down in the long grass, surrounded at no great distance by great companies of men who were doing likewise; and presently, tired out, fell asleep. Just before he went off, listening to the muttering and murmuring of voices around him, Jeremy thought to himself, was ever a man or men in such a strange situation? Here we are, lying down in the warm cloudy moonlight in the very *middle* of a battlefield in which we have taken no part! Not fired a solitary shot. Quite nearby there are heaps of dead and many wounded, some dying. A few surgeons and medical orderlies are working through the night but their numbers are woefully small. A good man would go and join them, try to succour the casualties. He had heard at the well that the Gordon Highlanders had had a hand to hand confrontation with massed French infantry under Marshal Ney himself, and each side had fought the other

to a standstill. There had been no ground given, no quarter asked, until the French had retreated with the fall of night. A good man would get up and try to help those who had fallen. But this good man, though not yet into the conflict, and with only one wounded of those under his command, was yet so exhausted with almost a day and a half of travel and the tension of his new command, that he put his head down on the dewy grass, thought of Cuby for a moment, and then fell asleep.

III

At six o'clock on the following morning with sultry clouds blocking out the rising sun, a group of senior officers were breakfasting in a draughty hut at a crossroads just south of Genappe, and waiting for news of the Prussians. A long table was covered with a white cloth; silver glinting in the morning light; the smell of bacon frying; of coffee; champagne bottles open among the crockery and the maps. The Duke of Wellington was at the centre of the table, other notable and noble figures gathered around him, and indeed there were so many that the numbers overflowed into the yard outside. The Duke's entourage had now increased to about forty men, including his own eight aides-de-camp and numerous staff officers such as Colonel Augustus Fraser, the commander of the Horse Artillery, Colonel Sir William de Lancey, his American-born Chief of Staff and Lord Fitzroy Somerset. Added to them was Baron von Müffling, the Prussian liaison officer, Count Carlo Pozzo, representing the Russians, Baron Vincent for the Austrians, General Miguel de Alava, his old friend from Spain, and a half-dozen assorted English aristocrats, ready to fight if necessary but belonging to no unit, here to see the fray and all of them with too much influence in England to be summarily dismissed from the scene.

On this group came a young staff officer who murmured something to the Commander-in-Chief.

Wellington nodded. 'Send him in.'

A tall gaunt ragged middle-aged man limped in.

'Sir Ross,' said Wellington, 'so you have safely arrived!'

'Poldark!' exclaimed Lord Fitzroy Somerset, getting up and clasping his hand. 'I am relieved to see you. Welcome!'

'Thank you.' Ross smiled. With noticeably less of a smile he added: 'Your Grace.'

'You were not unexpected,' said the Duke, 'so you will have guessed that Colonel Grant has preceded you.'

‘I’m glad to know it, sir.’

‘But by only a few hours. Six, in fact. He arrived at midnight with information which I would have given a brigade of infantry to have known twenty-four hours earlier. Now it is too late.’

‘Too late, sir?’

‘Too late to choose more suitable ground before the River Sambre. We must fight where we find ourselves, here among the rye fields.’

‘Colonel Grant – he is well?’ Ross said.

‘Except for a natural chagrin that his message did not get through – which we all share.’

‘I shall not need this, then, sir.’ Ross took the original message from his belt and put it on the table.

Fitzroy Somerset was at the open end of the improvised shelter. ‘Grant said you could muster no more than a pony. If that’s your mount outside it looks a very handsome pony!’

Ross’s lips tightened. ‘My pony was hit by a stray bullet yesterday. I found this horse riderless near Frasnés. It seems that it belonged to a French cavalry officer called Pelet who was under General Kellerman’s command.’

Wellington said: ‘Have you eaten?’

‘Not since yesterday.’

‘Then take a seat. Anders will make you some eggs.’

‘Thank you, sir.’

Ross brushed some of the dirt off his clothes and took the seat offered him. Until now he had had no time to feel tired. From the conversation as he ate he gathered that Wellington was waiting for the return of an officer called Colonel Gordon who had been sent with a squadron of the 10th Hussars to reconnoitre the situation east towards Sombrefe. The Duke had recalled his advance posts last night on discovering only French and no Prussians on his flank.

‘Poldark,’ said the Duke suddenly, ‘how did you come? Grant took a risk and rode almost directly along the Charleroi road, so he had nothing to report. What was your route?’

‘I kept east of that road, but by how far I don’t know. I stopped at an inn last evening, being almost too thirsty to care, and they were talking of a bitter battle in Ligny in which the Prussians had been driven back.’

‘Defeated?’

‘That was the impression I received, sir.’

‘Blücher must surely send word soon. We are all ready for the French when he tells us he too is ready.’

Ross finished the eggs and bacon and sipped steaming coffee.

The Duke was looking at him again, penetrating eyes over beak nose. But there seemed to be no hostility in his look; any suspicion of the old days appeared to have gone.

‘You have done well to get here, Sir Ross. But you are in effect a non-combatant. You have found your way from Verdun and should now return home.’

‘I should like very much to return home,’ said Ross, ‘once the business here is finished.’

‘You do not need to feel honourably detained.’

‘Nor shall I for a moment, once this business is finished.’

The Duke sipped at his glass.

‘Do you wish to remain as an observer?’

‘I would like to take some more active part than that.’

‘Colonel Grant is remaining on my staff as an additional aide-de-camp. Perhaps you would care to join him.’

‘I’d be honoured, sir.’

‘We should fit you out in better clothes,’ said Fitzroy Somerset after a moment. ‘That’s if you do not mind wearing a uniform that the previous owner has no further use for.’

‘I am not superstitious,’ said Ross.

‘There are two Poldarks in the army already,’ said a red-haired man at the table with the emblems of a colonel on his coat. ‘One’s a major in the 95th Rifles, the other a captain in the 52nd Oxfordshires. Major Poldark’s a veteran from the 43rd. I knew him in Spain.’

‘That must be my cousin, Geoffrey Charles,’ Ross said. ‘I thought he was still in Spain! By God, so he has come back into it again!’ A batman poured him more coffee. ‘The other I don’t know. My son is an ensign, and I think is in the 52nd but perhaps . . .’

‘J. Poldark,’ said the red-haired colonel. ‘He was promoted last month.’

‘To – captain?’ said Ross in astonishment.

Wellington looked down the table at him. ‘Yes, I observed him myself last month. He has a grasp of things that I find valuable in a junior officer.’

Ross stirred his coffee, the steam drifting before his eyes.

‘I have been interned three months. It might be three years.’

An orderly came in and spoke to Fitzroy Somerset.

‘Colonel Gordon has arrived, sir. He is just coming up the road.’

A thick-set young man presently entered. Ross could see his horse outside sweating and foam splashed. He spoke in an undertone to the Duke, who however soon communicated his news to the men anxiously waiting.

‘Old Poldark has a damned good liking and respect for Wellington. That

‘Old Blucher has had a damned good licking and retreated to wavre. That must be all of twenty miles from here. We can expect no help from him today – indeed he is lucky to be alive. So we are on our own, gentlemen, and out on a limb, a promontory, a point, not easily defensible.’

No one spoke. The Duke got up and not for the first time Ross realized he was not a tall man. Only a few inches taller than the great man who opposed him. No one spoke, for they were waiting for the decision which might decide the fate of the battle, the fate of the war.

Wellington said: ‘Gentlemen, we must retreat.’

IV

Jeremy had been dreaming of champagne corks popping, and woke to the reality that it was almost full daylight and that the sounds he heard were muskets firing off in the woods to the right of Quatre Bras. In spite of the warm morning he found himself chilly, and he wrapped his cloak around him as he stood up. Men were sitting up all round him, stirring, yawning, stretching, wondering what the new day would bring. Some had already lit fires and were cooking what little food they had left. Jeremy was ravenously hungry, and while Sanders prepared a bite of breakfast for him he munched the remnants of a cake Cuby had given him. Some men were cleaning their arms, others talking and joking; no one seemed to be taking much notice of the smart skirmish on their right.

‘Sir.’ It was Quack Evans. ‘Mayor Cartaret is here, with orders for the day.’

Jeremy brushed the crumbs off his uniform and walked across the field to greet his superior, who had just dismounted.

‘Bad news for us, Poldark,’ he said. ‘The Prussians have been heavily defeated and we are isolated here. We must retreat.’

‘Retreat? We have only just arrived, sir!’

‘Colonel Coleborne’s orders. But you have some satisfaction. Your company has been chosen to cover the retreat. You will stay here until all are gone, except G Troop Royal Artillery under Captain Mercer. You will then follow the other troops, and we shall expect you to link up with General Lord Edward Somerset when your task of delaying the enemy is done. His brigade of Guards is at present retreating on Genappe; but failing any later information you must find him as best you can.’

When he was gone Jeremy called his two lieutenants, Bates and Underwood, and the ensigns and the sergeants, and told them their orders.

They were not well received, and he could see the ordinary soldiers reacting in a similar way when the news filtered down. After all, you could see the French

a similar way when the news filtered down. After all, you could see the French camping on the slopes in the distance. What in hell was the good of marching all this way and then not having a go at them? Why, there was a bit of hot work going on in the woods nearby – if the company couldn't advance this might occupy their time. Grumbling, they disposed themselves in some sort of order and prepared to wait.

Troops began to march past them, rode past them, artillery rumbling away, one regiment gradually appearing to fill the place of the one which had just left, all retreating towards Brussels.

As the living thinned out you could more clearly see the dead, thickly strewn where they had fallen among the flattened rye or been thrown in heaps to clear the roadways. Some were nearly naked, having been stripped in the night by the peasantry; dead horses too robbed of their valuable harness. It was a depressing sight. About a mile away on the brow of a slight hill were G Troop of the artillery, the only troop, apart from Jeremy's company, who were not moving back. Jeremy wondered if it would be suitable to gallop across and have a word with his friend whom he had last seen on a happier day picnicking in Strytem.

Since leaving Nivelles yesterday, there had been little sign of habitation. The few cottages to be seen were empty and were being used only as cover for the opposing forces. People had fled; but the presence of looters showed some still lurked, possibly in the woods or the Forest of Soignes.

Just then it began to rain. The clouds had been thickening since dawn, and now a torrential downpour cloaked off the farther hills. Very soon everyone was soaked through and hungry, the light breakfasts they had had long forgotten. When the rain ceased for a few minutes the only troops still in sight, apart from the battery on the hill, were a score of light dragoons trotting from the woods on the left and what looked like a full brigade of hussars moving through Quatre Bras. It was led by the general Jeremy had spoken to last night. Major Cartaret had said his name was Sir Hussey Vivian.

As he came level with the company of infantry he reined in and said to Jeremy: 'You're covering the retreat in this area?'

'Yes, sir.'

He took out his glass and levelled it at the hills behind. Jeremy could see the ominous black patches beginning to move. White smoke was rising through the trees.

Vivian said: 'That's the French. Lancers, I think. Supported by massed infantry. It's time to leave, lad.'

'Yes, sir.'

At that moment Captain Mercer's artillery opened fire at the advancing masses on the hillside

masses on the inside.

Vivian said to his orderly: 'That battery has been left with only sufficient ammunition for a token resistance. I saw their wagons on the road an hour ago. Send over and tell them to begin leaving in ten minutes. Polwhele.'

'Poldark, sir.'

'Ah yes. You're one of the North Coast breed. Is it your father who's MP for Truro?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Thought so. I was born there. Went to the same school as he did – though later. Now look, get your men on the move right away. If the French come within musket shot give 'em a round or two; but no heroics. If you form square you'll be overwhelmed.'

There was a vivid, electric streak of forked lightning, followed by a clap of thunder which drowned the heavy barking of Captain Mercer's five nine-pounders. The storm raged overhead while the 52nd hastily fell into line. They had hardly begun to march when the French artillery opened up from among the trees.

V

In Brussels the guns could be clearly heard and seemed to be getting nearer. Crowds of English and Belgians stood on the ramparts of the city watching the passage of vehicles and men to and fro along the Charleroi road, and listening to the approaching battle. Cuby went up for a short time with the Turners. Grace Turner was also expecting a child but like Cuby she was staying with her husband, who was a secretary at the British Embassy.

Gradually the word 'retreat' began to be heard, and, not long afterwards, 'defeat'. The Prussians, it was said, had been swept aside with dreadful losses.

Then Bonaparte had turned upon Wellington. The young Duke of Brunswick, brother of the Princess of Wales, was dead: he had been mortally wounded trying to rally his inexperienced troops, who had broken and fled before the attack of the veteran French; Wellington and his staff had only just escaped capture. The victors were approaching the city.

Soon the Charleroi road was proof enough of the rumours. Few if any troops continued to march out; the road was choked with commissary carts piled with returning wounded, some lying across saddles, many limping or being carried by their comrades. Returning too in broken companies were the defeated Brunswickers, mingling with Dutch-Belgians and elements of the landwehr who had had enough of war and were streaming back into and through the city.

The Mayor of Brussels issued an urgent appeal to the inhabitants for old linen and lint, for mattresses, sheets and blankets, to be sent to the Town Hall. All suitable public buildings would be made available to accommodate the wounded, and rich citizens who showed an unwillingness to help would have wounded men billeted on them by decree.

Many of the English prepared to leave for Antwerp – those who had a means of transport.

‘You go,’ Cuby said to Grace Turner. ‘I shall stay.’

Chapter Thirteen

I

The retreat went on throughout the day in pouring rain, with constant skirmishing, a few casualties, but no ferocious pitched battles like yesterday. On the whole the withdrawal if untidy was measured; and the French, as much impeded by the rain and the mud, advanced at about the same pace.

Wellington, having been under constant fire yesterday and in truth having only narrowly escaped capture, dined equably with his staff at an inn called the Roi d'Espagne in Genappe. 'Gentlemen, I advise you to relish this meal for I fancy it will be the last comfortable one we shall have until this business is over.' Ross dined in a second room with Colonel Grant and a few others. He was wearing the jacket of a Coldstreamer, but the trousers had not been long enough, so a deceased Field Brigade officer of the King's German Legion had provided the rest.

Not that he looked much out of the way. All the officers were soaked in rain and plastered with mud and the bright dyes of their uniforms had run. Ross's first mission was to take a hasty message to General Sir Thomas Picton, who had been in the thick of the battle yesterday and nursed two broken ribs and a grievance because he had been asked to retreat from the position he had just gained. After dinner Ross would have liked to inquire the whereabouts of the 52nd Oxfordshires but could not bring himself to do so. To be invited to join Wellington's staff was a sufficient compliment without his presuming to ask to interrupt the battle to meet his son.

At three the party moved off, following the bulk of the army through what might be called the Genappe gap. In their wake by a matter of two hours came the rearguards, among whom was the troop of Royal Horse Artillery and a company of 52nd Oxfordshires under Captain Poldark. Some fighting took place during the afternoon, and the Oxfordshires lost three men. The Roi d'Espagne, having served dinner to the British, served supper to the French.

Retreat is always difficult and depressing; and the weather did all it could to make either movement or conflict impossible. All except the paved roads

make either movement or combat impossible. All except the paved roads became seas of mud. Food was non-existent until the evening when they caught up with a few commissary wagons. Then they squatted round sputtering fires trying to eat and warm themselves. Mayor Cartaret, who had joined them after Genappe, with a second company under a Captain Allison, said they were lucky to have kept to the centre and made good time; other regiments on the left and right flanks had had to struggle through hilly villages and swamped fields, and some men had lost their boots in the glutinous mud. Rearguards, particularly to the east, had been constantly harassed by French snipers.

This, he said to Jeremy, was as far as they would go today, and it was likely that here they would be expected to make a stand. On their left flank was the main Brussels road, on their right the big farmhouse of Hougomont. All around them regiments were marching, taking up positions, buglers were blowing, cavalry trotting. Captain Mercer, with his six guns, each pulled by eight horses, his nine ammunition wagons, with six horses each, his baggage wagons, his mounted detachments, his mules and spare horses – over two hundred animals in all – had disappeared into a fold in the land farther back towards Mont-St-Jean.

Jeremy gave the necessary orders to Lieutenants Bates and Underwood and set about consolidating their position so far as they could for the rest of this evening and the approaching night. They had halted in the middle of an enormous rye field, and the soil was so soft and so sodden with the rain that one was standing permanently in inches of mud. Every step had to be taken with an effort, hauling one's foot out and putting it down into another part of the quagmire.

In the distance now they could see the French closing in on them, until detachments of skirmishers in the van were less than a mile away. There they halted and began, it seemed, similar preparations to camp for the night. Some French artillery opened up, and occasionally a ball would pass uncomfortably near; but the main preoccupation was shelter from the weather. It was impossible for men to lie down, or they would almost have drowned; yet they could not stand up for twelve hours. The latest downpour had put out the fires, and there was nothing more to eat. Then Sergeant Evans – the old campaigner – began to gather up armfuls of the five-foot standing corn and rolled it together until it formed a thick mat. This he laid on the mud, then put his knapsack on top and sat on that cross-legged and covered his head with his blanket.

The movement was infectious, and soon at least half the men were following suit, then almost all the rest. Jeremy slogged and stumbled round his company. He had previously given orders for the officers' horses to be tethered to bayonets driven into the ground; all other arms to be piled and no man to leave his position. Satisfied that there was little more to do, he returned in the last of the

position. Satisfied that there was little more to do, he returned in the last of the daylight to a corner where Sanders had magically persuaded a small fire to burn and sat by it with his six officers, smoking and drinking gin and using the sodden rye stalks to cushion him against the worst of the trickling water.

II

It rained all night, and when the sickly daylight dawned the two armies faced each other across an undulating plain of Flanders mud. Ross, so far as he had slept at all, had slept dry; but some of the staff had been moving by 3 a.m. and among them, he suspected, the Duke.

It was still raining but the sky was much lighter, and from his vantage point at Mont-St-Jean Ross could see something of the replacement for what must be the coming battle: British and Hanoverians and Belgian soldiers already in the positions they were to defend, if not yet ready to fight. The two first defensive positions were the inn at the fork of the roads called La Belle Alliance, and to its right the old farmhouse of Hougoumont, half hidden in its woods and apple trees; immediately behind them, astride the Brussels road, the smaller farmhouse of La Haye Sainte. About six the rain stopped and a hot sun came out.

Colquhoun Grant, coming across to where Ross was standing, said: 'A message from Blücher at last. The old man is alive, thank God, and has promised two divisions by this afternoon. Pray Heaven the roads dry up, for otherwise they will never cover the distance in the time.'

Ross said: 'Perhaps the issue will be decided by then.'

'They're massing behind Placenoit . . . The Duke wants to see you, my dear feller. I am off to Waterloo with a message, so I hope to be back within the hour.'

When Ross got into the front room of the inn Wellington was just finishing writing a despatch. There were nine senior officers in the room with him and Ross made his way politely forward, bending his head to avoid the beams.

Three men at the table. Sir William de Lancey said: 'I am sure you would wish to know the whereabouts of your two relatives, Poldark. The 95th Rifles are positioned at La Haye Sainte in a gravel pit, supporting the King's German Legion. The 52nd Oxfordshires are positioned in a large cornfield this side of the Château de Hougoumont, with the Foot Guards on their right flank.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'Before that,' said the Duke, spreading the paper and folding it, 'I want you to take this message to Prince Frederick of the Netherlands. I would prefer you to deliver it personally into his hands but give it to no one less senior than

convey it personally into his hands, but give it to his own less senior than Lieutenant-General Stedman.'

'Thank you, sir,' Ross said as he was handed the paper.

Wellington rubbed his nose. 'The young prince, you will find, is eager for action and will not take kindly to being instructed to stay out of the present battle. If he expostulates with you, tell him that although I am expecting a frontal attack, Bonaparte may still try to turn my flank and capture Brussels. That would be a disaster it will be his duty to prevent.'

The Duke got up and led the way out of the inn, followed at a respectful distance by the rest. He was not in any full uniform but wore a blue coat and cape with white breeches and highly polished boots. His horse was waiting for him and he mounted it and led the way to inspect his troops. At the sight of him men began to cheer, but he smiled coolly and waved them to silence. There would – there might – be time to cheer later.

'Where is Prince Frederick?' Ross asked Fitzroy Somerset.

'At Halle. Take the lane to Braine l'Alleud and from there you can turn up the road from Nivelles. You will travel faster than trying to cut across country in this quagmire.'

'How far is it?'

'About ten miles.'

'My God, it will take me all morning! I shall miss the battle!'

'Don't worry, my friend. If I know the French they will not attack until they have breakfasted. Even then, they may pause a while longer for the ground to dry.'

While Ross waited for his horse to be fetched he gulped a hurried breakfast, staring out through the window at the patchwork of fields and small woods and undulating slopes, all darkened with the movements of men, particularly the French, who were massing in glittering columns less than a mile away. Steel helmets, tiger-skin turbans, blue coats faced with scarlet, green and crimson plumed headgear, pennants fluttering, all the pageant and panoply of the greatest army in the world. It was a menacing sight. From here Ross could see La Haye Sainte, but Hougoumont was out of view in a fold of the hills. It looked as if Geoffrey Charles and Jeremy would both be in the forefront of any conflict which developed. The sooner he was off, the sooner back. Once he had discharged this task he would make straight for Hougoumont. After all, he was under no one's command.

As he left, with the sun blazing down now, fusillades of shots were heard all along Wellington's lines. They were not directed at the enemy, but the troops were drying their muskets and rifles, the easiest way being to discharge a shot out of the barrel before cleaning it.

III

At 11.30, on a halcyon summer morning which seemed already to have forgotten the torrents of yesterday, the battle for Brussels began with a tremendous cannonade from the French guns. The Allied gunners presently replied, and soon the lovely morning was devastated and the sun obscured by black smoke from the guns. Then four battalions of French infantry, preceded by clouds of skirmishers, attacked the farmhouse of Hougoumont and after a bitter fight captured the road south of the house. Without possession of Hougoumont the French could not move up the shallow valley that it dominated and envelop the British right.

They reached virtually the walls of the old house but were driven back with heavy losses by four companies of British Guards under Lord Soltoun. Attack and counterattack went on for three hours, each side committing more and more troops to taking, or holding, a position which was on the right of the main battle area but which more and more was seen as vital to the outcome of the day.

Then, centrally in the two-mile front, the French advanced under Marshal Ney; preceded again by a great cannonade from eighty of Napoleon's finest guns. At 1.30 sixteen thousand soldiers marched across the blackened burning valley and up towards La Haye Sainte. They came on in stately unhurried masses, two hundred men wide by twenty-four deep, to the dreaded sound of the drummers, *rum-a-dum-dum, rum-a-dum-dum*, a beat which had struck fear into the hearts of all the armies of Europe. The Dutch-Belgians were driven out of La Haye and Papelotte, with almost all their officers killed. La Haye Sainte, though not captured, was isolated, and the 95th Rifles, under Major Geoffrey Charles Poldark, were forced out of their gravel pit and driven to retire towards Mont-St-Jean. A counterattack by fourteen hundred Scottish infantry against eight thousand French would have been overwhelmed had not Wellington ordered two brigades of heavy cavalry to their rescue. Life Guards and King's Dragoons took part in an irresistible charge which cut through first the massed infantry and then the French cuirassiers and drove everything before them until the French were fleeing on all sides. But impelled by the contagious frenzy of the fight, the two great cavalry regiments ignored the bugle calls to halt and drove deeply into enemy lines where they were themselves surrounded, counter-attacked and cut to pieces. In a single action Wellington lost a quarter of his cavalry.

The bombardment continued, with the weight of gunnery much favouring the French. Three forms of missile were used: first, the solid round shot, an iron ball

which bounced and ricocheted and could plough a great trough of death and maiming among a group of soldiers; if it missed them then eventually it came harmlessly to rest; second, the hollow round shot filled with explosive and with a sputtering fuse: these could be picked up and hurled away if the fuse was not too short, but if you guessed wrong you knew no more about it; third, the canister or grape shot, used at close quarters, which burst when fired, spraying the area with pieces of broken metal. Cannon-fire was never accurate but a concentration of it on a concentration of men made certain of heavy casualties. The sound overhead was like the humming of great hornets, blasting the ground and people wherever they landed.

One after another of Wellington's aides went down. General Picton was killed and Sir William Ponsonby. The bitter fight for Hougoumont continued all through the stifling afternoon. Men coughed in the acrid smoke, sometimes lost their way, fired ever more inaccurately through the drifting smoke. Everywhere as far as one could see the fields were strewn with dead and dying men and horses, knapsacks, muskets, broken cannon wheels.

At three o'clock the French cannons, having been dragged forward again, resumed at closer range and with greater intensity. Wellington, expecting Blücher's relieving divisions on his left flank, was not aware that the Prussians, bogged down in mud, were advancing to join him at the rate of only a mile an hour.

In the next ninety minutes four great French cavalry attacks were delivered against the British right centre, nearly five thousand horsemen in the first, over ten thousand in the third. Quarter was scarcely ever given or asked. Again and again they attacked the British squares and again and again were driven off, with bitter losses on both sides. Inside the squares were the bloodstained dead and dying, outside the French dead piled up so much that they became a protection and a barrier.

Napoleon withdrew his brother Jerome from leading the endless attacks on Hougoumont and instead ordered howitzers forward. These set the large house and most of the barns on fire, including the one where the British wounded were lying. These were all burned to death, but the remaining defenders retreated into the chapel and the gardener's house, from which they continued to shoot down the French as they attempted to capture them.

IV

The two companies of the 52nd, defending rising ground to the left of

Hougoumont, had suffered badly, Jeremy's the lesser of the two. But both had borne the brunt of the repeated attacks on the British right. In squares the infantry stood, often kept in shape by the long staves of the sergeants, repelling one attack after another. When the cuirassiers failed they came under fire from grape shot. This ploughed lanes through the squares, and the French cavalry charged up to take advantage of the openings. But before they could do so the squares closed again across the dead and dying men, resolutely firing and bringing down the horsemen.

Most of the time Jeremy sat on his horse, where he could see a little more and could direct operations. The bullets droned around him and one cut his sleeve but, surprising himself, he felt no particular fear: it was as if there was some overriding demand upon his mind and heart. But then, in the early afternoon in the middle of a fierce attack, he saw a sharpshooter taking deliberate aim at him from a distance of not more than twenty yards. His mouth went dry and his hands became rigid, but he forced himself not to dismount. The man fired, and missed. Almost at once he was cut down by Ensign Peters.

About 2 p.m. the Duke came up out of the smoke and consulted with Major Cartaret, but while he was so doing another attack developed and he had to ride into the centre of the square for protection. The situation at Hougoumont was desperate. The farmhouse was surrounded by an entire French division, yet still the firing went on. It was all hand to hand now, sword, bayonet, musket-butt, axe, kill and be killed, no orders needed; just fight to the death.

Soon after the Duke had left, the artillery found a better range on the 52nd Oxfordshires. John Peters was cut in half by a cannon-ball, and almost immediately afterwards a huge shell landed just in front of Jeremy. His horse reared and saved his life but at the expense of its own. Seventeen other men were killed or wounded by the blast.

About three there was a brief lull, even in the attacks on Hougoumont. Since early morning the 52nd had had nothing to eat or drink, but now some wagons came up with a cask of water and a tub of gin. All the men rushed for the water, but most took a swig of gin after and then hastened back to the line.

At four the Duke returned, his entourage reduced to one aide but himself miraculously unwounded. Jeremy was with his commanding officer when Wellington rode up.

'Well, Cartaret, how do you get on?'

'As you see, my lord. We are badly cut about and have been in action all day. A relief even for an hour would be a godsend.'

The Duke made a wry face. 'God may send it, Colonel, but alas I cannot. We are stretched to the limits, as you can see. All our reserves are committed.'

Cartaret rubbed a spot of blood off his hand. 'Well then, my lord, we must stand until the last man falls.'

Soon after he had gone, erect and calm on his horse among the hail of shot and shell, the French cavalry launched another attack, but this time the Life Guards swept out from the rear and met them in a head-on clash. It was like a giant blacksmith's shop, Jeremy thought, the clanking of steel against steel, horses snorting and whinnying and falling. Close to the defensive square one guardsman struck his opponent with such force that head and helmet went flying, and the horse leapt away with the headless rider still sitting upright and the blood spurting from the arteries.

As the cavalry retreated the infantry came on again. *Rum-a-dum-dum, rum-a-dum-dum*: it beat in time with the soldiers' steps. Lieutenant Bates, kneeling beside Jeremy, was shot in the jaw. Jeremy detailed Sanders to help him back to a cowman's hut where most of the wounded had been taken. Numbers were now so far depleted that Major Cartaret ordered the few men left to form line four deep. Again the wave approached and again it was thrust back. Then, mercifully, a lull. Such was the smoke that it was impossible to see how the battle as a whole was faring. Cartaret ordered a muster to be taken. Captain Allison had been killed early on, and not one officer of the second company remained in the field. Jeremy, Michael Underwood and the major were the only three officers left. There were three sergeants, including Evans, and about a hundred men fit to return to the battle.

Then a rider came past to say that La Haye Sainte had at last fallen. Defended to the bitterest end by a regiment of the King's German Legion, it had been evacuated with scarcely more than two score survivors. The centre of the Allied line was crumbling.

Major Cartaret looked up from behind the bank where most of his remaining troops were crouching and saw that in manoeuvring to attack the Guards the French infantry had exposed their flank. He wiped the blood from his face and stood up.

'Come on, you men of the 52nd!' he shouted hoarsely at the top of his voice. 'Now's the time to show 'em what we're made of! Remember Badzyoz!' He raised his sword, leaped the bank and stormed towards the enemy. His troops, without food all day and exhausted beyond endurance, rose slowly and then, gathering momentum, stumbled after him.

Under this sudden attack the French wilted and broke, but then the attackers came under a sudden cross-fire from a hitherto unseen company of tirailleurs, appearing from behind the smouldering chateau. Cartaret was shot twice in the head and died instantly. Evans was wounded in the leg. Jeremy was shot in the

back and side and fell flat beside a horse that had both its back legs blown off. The horse was struggling to get to its feet, dragging itself away on its stomach. Jeremy lost consciousness.

V

He half woke to find someone kneeling beside him. He must have been dragged back because he was in some sort of shelter. This man was kneeling beside him. Then he knew he was delirious.

‘Father.’

‘Jeremy . . .’

The man was ragged and bloodstained and had a week’s growth of beard. But he wore no hat and that made him unmistakable.

Somebody wiped the corner of his mouth. The battle was still raging but seemed more distant. In a corner Sergeant Evans was trying to staunch the blood from his leg. It was very dark.

‘This – a dream?’

‘No. Can you drink this?’

Blessed water. But it didn’t seem to go farther than his throat.

‘What are you doing?’

‘I escaped from Verdun. I would have been with you earlier but my horse was killed. Jeremy, lie still.’

‘No choice,’ said Jeremy. ‘Is the battle . . .?’

‘Still close. But the Imperial Guard have been broken. They came in a great mass and have broken, have given way. And they say the Prussians are in sight.’

‘Lost a lot,’ said Jeremy with a sigh, ‘of my friends.’

‘By God, I can’t find a surgeon!’ said Ross, speaking into the air. ‘Jeremy, my son, lie quiet. Can you take some more water?’ He wiped the blood again from the corner of Jeremy’s mouth.

‘These horses,’ said Jeremy. ‘They should never be in war. If men have to fight – let ’em fight on foot.’

‘I will see if I can find someone,’ Ross said, his voice unrecognizable even to himself.

‘Don’t go . . . Is it night yet?’

‘No, about eight, I think. I cannot tell you for my watch is broke.’

Jeremy saw now there were a couple of dozen men in the hut. All must be in great pain, but no one was groaning – only the occasional sigh and grunt.

‘Father . . .’

‘Yes?’

res:

'My love to mother.'

'Yes.'

'Tell her . . .'

'What?'

'No matter. I wanted to tell her – something. Perhaps I left it too late. But I have written.'

Ross felt the tears running down his face. He bent to wipe the blood once again from Jeremy's mouth.

'Perhaps the next war,' said Jeremy, 'will be fought with steam engines.'

Evans was dragging himself towards the door. He knew if he could not get help soon he would bleed to death.

'Father,' said Jeremy.

'Yes?'

'Look after Cuby . . .'

'Of course. I promise.'

'That', said Jeremy, 'is the hardest part of all.'

And then he died.

BOOK THREE

Chapter One

I

Letter from Ross Poldark to his wife, dated Brussels, 22nd June 1815.

Demelza,

I have to tell you that Jeremy is dead. I cannot bring myself to write the words, but there is no way I know of breaking this to you gently. He fell nobly and bravely in the great battle just fought in the area south of the village of Waterloo, about twelve miles from this city and won by the British and their Allies in a decisive manner that must finally and forever settle Bonaparte's fate.

I do not know, my dearest, how to begin to tell you what it has been like. In early June I escaped from internment in Verdun and tried to make my way towards Brussels. The difficulty of this journey, though little more than 150 miles, was far greater than the mere distance because between me and whatever troops defended Brussels lay the whole of the French army of the west – some 120,000 men. I was vastly lucky to avoid capture and probably would not have succeeded but for the help of a Colonel Colquhoun Grant, a British officer who was acting as a spy for Wellington, and between us, though we eventually travelled separately, we arrived at Wellington's headquarters as the main battle was about to begin. For the duration of the battle Grant became one of the Duke's aides-de-camp and I was invited to fulfil a similar function. Naturally I tried to make contact with Jeremy's regiment, but was sent first with a message which took half the day, partly because my horse was shot from under me, though I escaped with a bruising.

The carnage on both sides was appalling. I have never seen such ferocity in attack or such utter relentless courage in defence. Just around the farmhouse of Hougoumont, which was where Jeremy was stationed, over two thousand men were killed. In total we are thought to have lost 20,000 men, the Prussians about 7,000, the French about 30,000. Geoffrey Charles survived like me, and did not even suffer a scratch, although he was in the forefront of

like me, and did not even suffer a scratch, although he was in the forefront of the fight throughout. All Wellington's main aides were killed or wounded – in total fifteen. Fitzroy Somerset lost his right arm. Sir William de Lancey, the Chief of Staff, was gravely wounded and is not likely to recover. Adjutant General Barnes and his deputy were both wounded. Colonel Gordon and Colonel Canning both died. In the battle the Duke of Brunswick died early, and Lord Picton was killed on Sunday. Two of Jeremy's closest friends were killed, and one wounded. Young Christopher Havergal, who made such a fuss of Bella, has lost a leg. I have also just heard that Brigadier Gaston Rougiet, who visited me in internment and gave me a greater liberty which enabled me to escape, was killed at the very last, fighting the Prussians.

If there was ever a battle fought as savagely as this, I have never known it or want to hear of it.

They say that Fitzroy Somerset suffered the amputation of his arm without a murmur and that the next morning was seen to be practising writing with his left hand.

Dearest, dearest Demelza, I give you all these details not because they can interest you but because they keep me a little longer from the sort of detail that I find it so hard to face. Jeremy died a brave soldier's death; he led his much-depleted company against a French infantry brigade which outnumbered him ten to one. Because of the loss of my horse I was tardy in returning the message I carried to the Duke – who in extraordinary fashion survived the whole battle unscathed – but as soon as I had done this I hurried down towards where I knew Jeremy's company had been fighting all day. I arrived just as a Lieutenant Underwood was carrying him back after he had been shot.

He lived for perhaps half an hour, but did not seem to be in pain. He knew me and sent a loving message to you. That is all I can say.

That night, the Sunday night, I stayed by him, while the French army finally broke and then was utterly destroyed by the Prussians. I did a little to help some of the wounded but am afraid I was too distracted and distraught to have done all I should. On the Monday morning I was able to find a conveyance of a sort to carry him back to Brussels. The road was almost impassable still, for the wounded, the baggage trains, the commissary wagons, the medical supplies, wandering groups of soldiers trying to regain their units; we went with the majority, but a few vehicles were fighting their way against the tide. The road had almost broken up with the pressure it had been under and in some places was a sea of mud. In one place we were held up for fifteen minutes while vehicles were at a standstill. Then, sitting there as I did helpless upon my horse I heard a voice cry 'Captain Poldark!'

upon my horse, I heard a voice cry – Captain Ross!!!

It was Cuby. It seems that Lady de Lancey, Sir William's wife, hearing that her husband was lying grievously wounded in a cottage in the village of Waterloo, had hired a coach and coachman, and, learning of this, Cuby had asked if she might travel with her to see if she could gain news of Jeremy. It was my appalling duty to give her that news.

Dearest Demelza, I have never seen a woman more heartbroken than Cuby was when she realized what I was saying – I know of only one who will be more so and she is holding this letter. What can I say to comfort you when there is no comfort? I try to think of the three children we have left and our duty to them not to fall into utter despair. That many a father and mother through the ages have suffered as we suffer now does not make it easier to sustain. Nor the thought of the thousands of other parents who have been bereaved by this battle. Perhaps we have always been too close a family. To feel so deeply about one's children is a great happiness – and a great danger.

Jeremy is buried in the Protestant Cemetery of St Josse ten Noode, just on the south side of the Chaussée de Louvain. It was a simple ceremony but a dignified one. A stone will be put up.

I am returning to England tomorrow with Cuby. She rode in front of me to Brussels and I thought every moment she would faint and fall. I will remain a day or two in London before returning to Cornwall. At present she thinks she will stay a little while with her brother Augustus in London. She thinks that returning to Cornwall only seven months after leaving it in such happiness is more than she can face.

She bears our first grandchild.

My love, it is only three months since we separated but it is like an age. I long to see you. Perhaps we can comfort each other.

Ross

II

When Clowance heard she left a scribbled message on the kitchen table for Stephen – who had still not returned from his foray – and rode across to be with her mother. Verity went with her. Demelza's two brothers were nearby – Drake at Trenwith, Sam at Pally's Shop. Dwight and Caroline too. Ben was at the mine and all the miners who had known and liked Jeremy so well. Paul and Daisy Kellow, with Mr and Mrs Kellow in the background; Valentine and Selina, just returned from Cambridge; the villagers from all the hamlets around. Letters began to arrive from as far afield as the Harveys at Hayle. A strange, stilted,

troubled one from Cuby's mother. So many letters from people in the county: the Devorans, the Falmouths, the Trenegloses, the de Dunstanvilles, the Foxes. Even Harriet Warleggan sent a kind little note. Letters, letters; everyone so kind made the heartache worse.

Demelza took to walking across the beach and back, not to get rid of the deadly sickness and the emptiness and the aching – for there was no way out of that – but simply to tire one's muscles, to exhaust one's body, so that something was registered on the mind besides grief. Dwight gave her tincture of laudanum at night, but it always wore off at dawn when life was at its lowest and coldest. Then she would stand by the window and cry alone for the loss of her son.

Verily did not like walking as far as the Dark Cliffs, but Clowance kept her mother company, most of the way in silence. When it was not Clowance, Drake would go, or sometimes Sam, though he had to be careful not to speak too much of God. Dwight told Demelza to go easy; twice Caroline persuaded her to visit Killewarren and spent part of the day with her.

It was almost only to Caroline that she found she could talk at all – and sometimes in the evening to Verity.

All the beauty had gone from Demelza's face. Perhaps one day it would return, but at present few of her friends in Paris would have taken her for the vivacious, comic, ebullient young woman they had known in February and March.

'Why have I so much cause to be bitter?' she said to Caroline once. 'Folk die all the time – babies, old people, even young people like Jeremy. But I *am* bitter just the same. I don't want to see anyone, talk to anyone, be friendly with anyone. I just want to be left alone to think – to grieve – to think.'

'My dear, that'll do you no good. Though I well comprehend—'

'It does good to remember,' Demelza said. 'It does good to remember a thousand days of caring . . .'

III

But, returning to the county more quickly than his old enemy, came Sir George Warleggan, full of the greatest satisfaction. For on careful calculation he decided that he had added twenty-four and a half per cent to his fortune. His belief that the Rothschilds would know first, and his commission to Rosehill to keep the closest watch on them and to make all the use he could of his friend in the Rothschild office – this had been triumphantly successful. Hardly eating a proper meal for three days, he had haunted the city and the Exchange. The nervousness

of the early part of the week had intensified, and the market was like a sick patient with undulant fever, reacting to the lightest rumour.

Looking back on the situation as his personal coach carried him the last few miles through the thickly wooded valley towards his own home, he felt a supreme contempt for the way the government of the country had been run, the singular clumsiness of its communications, its total lack of any attempt to bridge more quickly the distance – at the most two hundred miles – between the House of Commons and the scene of an operation which would decide the fate of the world.

It seemed that the battle had raged for three days, from the 16th to the 18th June. It seemed that on Tuesday the 20th Mr Nathan Rothschild, by means of his swift-riding and swift-sailing couriers, had learned that there had been a victory for the Allied troops under the Duke of Wellington, and being on terms of the closest friendship with the British Government had informed them of this. The Cabinet, sitting in a sudden emergency session so early in the morning, had discounted the information as unfounded. Their own envoys had just brought them news of Quatre Bras, the British defeat and the retreat on Brussels. This had followed the news of the defeat of Blücher. The general opinion was that all was lost.

The same day in the afternoon a Mr Sutton, whose vessels plied between Colchester and Ostend, had brought one of his ships back without waiting for passengers because he carried news of a tremendous battle being fought between Bonaparte and Wellington on the Sunday almost at the gates of Brussels. On the Wednesday *The Times* printed this information and wondered with regret that the Government had not made better arrangements for quicker transmission of the news. Were the Duke of Wellington's own despatches, the newspaper wondered, to depend upon similar vagaries of commercial patriotism? It was not until Thursday that the official bulletin was issued from Downing Street announcing the victory and calling Wellington the Hero of Britain.

But of course it had all happened for George on the Tuesday and Wednesday. Through his friend, Rosehill had been able to obtain the information that the Rothschilds had reported a victory for the Allies and that Downing Street had disregarded it. All that day George expected Nathan Rothschild to make some move. But when he did make a move, it was to sell stocks not to buy them . . . The market, already far down because of the news of Quatre Bras, fell still further. Not only George was watching the influential Jew.

George was puzzled, watchful, upset; for a while bitterly critical of Rosehill who he thought had given him wrong information. It's all over, said the brokers. And so did Rothschild's agents. The battle has been lost at a place called

Waterloo. Rothschild, they said, has been hoodwinking the British Government. Then Rosehill sidled up to George with a whispered comment: 'The last hour of trading. Watch that.'

In the last hour that the Exchange was open on the Wednesday Rothschild suddenly bought a huge parcel of shares, among them Consols, which had touched a new low. George, sweating heavily, immediately followed suit. He spent an unhappy morning on the Thursday when shares moved only erratically upwards, stimulated by a few people buying, including Rothschild again. Then the news of the great victory burst on the world – the French army utterly destroyed, Bonaparte making his escape to Paris, the Allies everywhere triumphant.

It was not only the Allies who were triumphant, George thought. Rothschild, by perfectly fair speculation, acting on the information he had already given the Government but which they had chosen to disregard, must have doubled his already immense fortune. And he, George, by astute emulation, had added about twenty-four and a half per cent to his already considerable fortune – or about eighty thousand pounds. It could have been more, he knew; but hedging at the last, still mindful of the disasters of 1810, and fearful of being cheated in some way by the cold young Jew, he had invested only two-thirds of what he might have done. Nevertheless, it was no mean achievement. Every night on the way home he had opened his business case, taken out a fresh piece of paper, and made his calculations afresh.

Just to complete the whole operation he had sent Tankard flying back to Cornwall – more than post haste, killing his horses if necessary – with instructions to Lander to buy all the metals he could, chiefly copper, before anyone else knew of the victory. There was no assurance that the price of metals would go up as a result of Napoleon's defeat – might be the contrary – but if he could virtually corner the market he would be in a position to dictate its movements.

He looked forward to telling old Uncle Cary what he had done. Five years ago, Cary had been scathing in his denunciation of the speculation which hadn't come off. Now, though no doubt grumpy and grudging, as was his nature, he would have to admit the brilliance of the manoeuvre. Nothing spoke so convincingly to Cary as money.

George was also looking forward to seeing Harriet again. In the euphoria of Thursday he had bought her a present, a diamond brooch. It was second-hand and a bargain, but he had paid, if not more than its worth, more than he had intended, and occasionally this little worm of self-criticism came to disturb his sense of wellbeing. But at least Harriet, who loved jewellery, could not fail to be

pleased.

He must be careful not to appear to boast to her about his coup; indeed he knew it would be better if he did not mention it at all – if he could *possibly* forbear. Harriet did not pretend to despise money – indeed, she liked it – but it was not central to her philosophy; it was only valuable to her for what it could buy; and he knew if he told her of his successful speculation she would only congratulate him in an absent-minded way, looking cynically amused as she did so, and change the subject.

He wondered if Harriet had heard yet about Jeremy. The first casualty lists had been issued on the 4th July, and his name had been on it. George supposed the whole county would know about it now. Personally he was going to shed no tears; he never had liked the tall, gangling young buck: typical Poldark with his arrogance and his pride. The women were rather better – at least Clowance was – but the men were all the same. More fools they for going in the army and trying to be heroes. It seemed no time at all – though it was actually getting on for twenty years since Ross himself had performed some so-called dare-devil rescue of Dwight Enys and others from a French prisoner-of-war camp and so had become a nine-days' wonder and the hero of the county. Well, now his son was gone, and bad luck for him and for his contriving a baronetcy for his son to inherit – though George had heard there was another son barely weaned yet; they bred like rabbits on the North Coast. That miner's brat with the stupid name; she'd had half a dozen at least.

But talking of breeding; there was his own wife pregnant now, bearing his son, who, with blue blood in his veins, would live to inherit all his mercantile wealth and possessions. What should they call him? George had a fancy for the name of Hector – or Nicholas; but no doubt Harriet would have ideas of her own. He believed it would be about Christmas or January; Harriet was typically vague. It was still a long time to wait. Pray God the child wasn't premature . . .

The carriage turned in at the gates of Cardew, and George's eye looked about with critical appreciation, admiring the elegance and extent of his own property but scanning it for any evidence of indolence or neglect. When it came to the big pillared entrance of the mansion, one of the coachmen jumped down and opened the carriage door. At the same moment the door of the house opened and two footmen stood there to greet him. It was a warm afternoon and the coach had been stuffy – it needed to be well cleaned inside with a carriage soap and thoroughly brushed out.

He stretched his legs and his back, glad the journey was over; nodded to his servants and went into the hall. Harriet was crossing, followed by her two boarhounds. She looked up in surprise. Castor growled, and she put her hand on

his muzzle to restrain him.

‘Why, George,’ she said. ‘Good-day to you. You’re soon back.’

IV

During the momentous days of late June, while the fate of empires was being decided, Stephen was cruising in the Channel hoping to settle some of the problems in his own life.

It seemed the *Adolphus* was out of luck. Fishing vessels and a few tiny trading schooners – the latter just worth seizing but Stephen would not touch them; he was looking for bigger game. The weather was changeable, mainly sunny, almost calm; but then the wind would take off from an unexpected quarter and blow hard, so the crew was kept busy making and shortening sail. Twice they sighted larger vessels but Carter, who had been in the navy, was quick to recognize them as British warships. Then in a flurry of a brief squall they came suddenly in sight of a French frigate and had to run for their lives. The *Adolphus* crowded on all the sail she could and soon was heeling right over, white water along her lee rail, dipping and spouting into the short seas. It was an anxious two hours until nightfall.

Stephen had laid in a generous supply of stores: biscuit, beef, pork, peas, coffee, tea, sugar, flour, pepper, salt, lime juice; and he reckoned they had enough to last a good two weeks. Fresh water might force them in a bit earlier, but he began to hear rumblings of dissension among the crew. It was not, he discovered, discontent with his captaincy, but, with too much time on their hands, they were quarrelling among themselves.

Jason, who was his informant on most things, explained to him that there was a bitter rivalry between men from Falmouth and those from Penryn, and they were dividing into two camps with about a third of the crew uninvolved in either. One day Stephen heard a group of them shouting and jeering.

‘Old Penrynners up in a tree,’ they shouted

‘Looking as wisht as wisht can be.

Falmouth men be strong as oak

Can knock ’em down at every poke.’

To which the men from Penryn shouted a more obscene rhyme back.

Looking at them, weather-beaten, long-nosed, hard-faced men, Stephen wondered that they could be such childish fools as to support a rivalry between two towns which were only a couple of miles apart. He’d been careful to lock in

all the cutlasses and muskets he had brought and had appointed a man called Hodge as armourer.

Hodge was a little fat squab of a man, swart and jowly, but a bundle of energy and efficiency. Stephen soon saw him as the most valued member of the crew and began to consult him more and more. In his forty years he seemed to have done and been everything, and his experience as a sailor helped Stephen to fill the gaps in his own knowledge. Thank God he happened to come from St Ives.

But there was no knowing how many private knives were carried in secret places or how long it would be before the feud turned into a bitter battle. Jason also told him that they had brought rum aboard: he did not know where it was stored but some of the crew had access to it over and above the daily ration.

So it was a relief on the seventh day to sight what looked like a promising sail.

A beautiful still dawn, with a pearly sun rising out of the early mists, turning them lemon-yellow and then to a grey scarf washed with scarlet. Yet as the sun rose it never came to full health. Anaemia set in, and the mist became light cloud chasing the colour from the sky. The gulls, which were always following *Adolphus*, rose and flapped and cried and settled again into the darkening water.

It was about noon that the look-out reported the sail. Stephen, who was not fond of heights, sent Carter up and then Jason. Soon you could see the sail from the deck.

‘She’s only got one mast,’ said Jason, disappointed, ‘but she’s carrying a heavy sail.’

Ten minutes later Carter came down. ‘Reckon ’tis a French *chaloupe*. She’s just put out two headsails; means she’s seen us and altered course.’

The manoeuvring of the last few days had robbed Stephen of any idea where he really was, particularly as related to the French coast; but the drift of the *Adolphus* had been continually west, so it seemed likely that there was a great width of the Channel about them.

‘Size is she?’

Carter pulled at his bottom lip. ‘Bigger’n you’d expect. A hundred ton maybe.’

‘Armed?’

‘Likely.’

‘What with?’

‘Could not say. Nothing big.’

‘Sure she’s French?’

‘Well, she’s flying the French flag.’

‘Jason,’ said Stephen. ‘Go get the French flags. See if we can reassure her.’

V

They pursued the *chaloupe* all day while the day went off. The sun disappeared about some other business, and cloud gathered and a light rain fell. It would have been impossible to keep the *chaloupe* in sight if the distance between them had not constantly lessened. Her captain clearly saw no reassurance in the flag Stephen flew and bore on a south-easterly course for home. But as the angle narrowed they overhauled him fast. Stephen ordered the armoury to be unlocked, and all men were issued with cutlasses or muskets. The sighting of a suitable prey had come just in time; the fraternal squabbling among the crew had ceased.

She was a strange-looking vessel to English eyes – very heavily sparred with an immense mainsail and a main boom very long and thick. She was steered by a long tiller, had high bulwarks and a wide stern. She should have been clumsy to handle, yet in fact moved well through the water and seemed to answer her helm readily. Her name, it seemed, was the *Revenant*.

Two of Stephen's six-pounders had been fitted as bow chasers, and when the distance warranted he told his gunners to try a shot or two in the hope of bringing down her mainsail, since it was clear that his friendly French flag was not inducing the master to slacken pace. It was then he began to regret not having let the gunners have more practice during the week at sea. (Powder and cannon shot were very expensive.) First the balls dropped far short; then they winged into the air and only a distant plopping indicated where they had fallen. Almost at once a gun replied from the other vessel. Stephen recognized it as a French long four-pounder; it could not reach them yet but could do damage at closer quarters. If only his own damned gunners could aim straight. He ran forward and saw to the next discharge himself. He might not be a first-class navigator but he had had some experience with cannon.

The Frenchman's best hope of escape was the weather. There was a handy, steady south-westerly breeze but the rain was thickening into mist, and visibility was closing in. It would be a disaster to lose touch now. Hodge was the only man who could speak fair French so Stephen sent him up into the bows with a hailer, telling them that the *Adolphus* was friendly and saying that his captain wanted to speak with their captain as he had news of Bonaparte.

The only answer to this was a heavy thump in the bows and splinters of wood flying up through the air. Stephen cursed and lowered the sight of his cannon, ordered them to fire. The cannon reared on the deck, two stabs of flame lit the grey afternoon, but the brig had dipped at the wrong moment and both shots ploughed harmlessly into the sea.

Close to, the *Revenant* was quite a handsome vessel, well cared for and every way in good shape. She was sailing heavy and probably carried a full cargo. Of course she would have to be boarded, and that was what the crew was waiting for – eagerly crouching behind the elmwood bulwarks. They looked a villainous lot, and he hoped sight of them swarming up over the side would persuade the Frenchman to strike and thus save damage and bloodshed. The *Revenant* with her equally high bulwarks could prove a nasty customer if defended stoutly.

Jason was beside him. ‘You’re firing too low, Father! What range have those guns? If we could smash their rudder . . .’

‘Do not forget we want to *capture* this ship,’ said Stephen, ‘not sink her.’ Another shot whistled over their head and tore a clean hole in their gaff mainsail. The *Adolphus* slewed as the sail split, until Carter at the helm brought her up again. ‘Now back to your place and no more talking.’ Stephen was leading one boarding party, Hodge the other. Jason was in Hodge’s party. Carter was remaining in charge of the *Adolphus*.

At much closer range now the two six-pounders fired and this time the shot found their mark. The great mainsail, carrying the full thrust of the wind, was suddenly in flapping tatters. The larger balls and the double shot had done far more damage to the Frenchman’s sail; the *Revenant* yawed, and the two vessels closed. Muskets began to fire, and some misfired in the damp and the rain. One ship ran alongside the other with a grinding crump, grappling irons were thrown, men were over and jumping down onto the deck. There was some fighting but it was half-hearted. The man at the helm looked like the Captain, and grouped around him were a half-dozen others, cutlasses out, pistols firing. But one man fell and then another and the Captain raised his hands.

Stephen let out a yell of triumph – it had all come just as he had planned it; a splendid prize! But there was another yell close beside him and a rough hand pulled at his shoulder, tugging him round. On the *Revenant*’s larboard bow something else was looming out of the mist. She was far bigger than either of the contestants: two decks, three masts, a rakish bow. There was ice in Stephen’s stomach as he recognized the French frigate which had chased them on Friday.

Chapter Two

I

It was luck that they got away at all – the luck being that the *Adolphus* had grappled the *Revenant* on the starboard side, so that the French *chaloupe* was between the *Adolphus* and the frigate and the frigate could not fire at the English ship without hitting the *Revenant*.

A panic retreat for Stephen's men – up and over the side, and back to their brig, hacking at grappling irons that failed to come free, Carter bringing over the helm as the last man dropped aboard. Both ships had been travelling at a modest speed when they came alongside. Carter made skilful use of the sail already set, and they had the weather gage. Quite quickly they slipped into the mist as the frigate sent a broadside after them. Some of it landed, and one man, from Truro, was killed, a second lost his leg. Then they were away.

There was still an hour or so's daylight left, and it all depended on whether the mist would clear at the wrong moment. But it stayed, heavy and morose. Stephen wiped the sweat from his brow and looked around. The bitterest disappointment of his life. A prize of real value, virtually surrendered, prospect of a return to England in triumph with a rich reward – and then all to be dashed from his hands. Presumably the frigate had been attracted by the firing. They were damned lucky not to have been captured.

And then Stephen looked around for Jason and found he was not there.

II

'We'll follow them,' said Stephen. 'No choice.'

'I seen 'im with Jago and Edwards. They went forward and got cut off in the strowl. There's the three on 'em missing. They'm prisoners now, I'll lay a crown.'

'Follow 'em?' said Carter. 'T'es easier said than done in this misty wet. Like as not we'll find the frigate instead.'

as not we n nnd the nngate nstead.

‘It is clearing,’ said Stephen between his teeth. ‘Look, the sky’s light where the sun’s setting. We’ll follow. All through the night, if need be.’

Rain ran down their faces as they stood by the helm peering into the light fog. A pink haze flushed the mist astern of them; the rain might well lift with the onset of evening. But that was only one of their problems.

‘Where are we?’ said Stephen.

‘Dear knows,’ said Carter, ‘unless the stars d’come out. And then ’twill only be at best guesswork so far as the land d’go. But I’ve a fancy we’re nigh in to the French coast.’

‘I didn’t think so. What makes ye say that?’

‘Notice them two French fishing boats coming up as we was going to board the *chaloupe*? They was crabbers. They’d not be far off the coast.’

‘Near Dinard, d’ye reckon?’

‘Not so far’s that. More like Cap Fréhel.’

‘The *Revenant* came from St Pierre,’ said Hodge. ‘’Twas on the tiller.’

‘Where is St Pierre?’

‘Just north of St Malo. I know it well. Upon times when we was running goods to Roscoff we’d come east to St Pierre instead. ’Twas quieter and prices was better.’

Stephen walked up and down, up and down. So far they had been cruising more than a week and now were being sent empty away. And he had lost Jason. To his own surprise this counted for more than anything else.

‘Think you could find St Pierre?’ he said to Hodge.

‘Maybe if the fog d’clear.’

‘It would depend upon you and Carter,’ Stephen said. ‘I’ve not a great knowledge of this coast, but I know it’s rocks. And the tides are lethal. But I’ve a fancy to follow the *Revenant* in.’

Hodge took out his watch. ‘If we’re near Cap Fréhel, as Mike says, we could be off St Pierre by midnight. So long as we don’t fall foul of the frigate again we could run in and see how the land lies.’

III

At one o’clock in the morning they ran in to see how the land lay.

St Pierre was a fishing village, not unlike its opposite fellows in Cornwall. A horseshoe harbour with stone-built cottages climbing steeply up the granite hillside behind. A harbour wall, a tidal inlet, a church tower showing against the skyline. Even at that time in the morning there were a few lights

skyline. Even at that time in the morning there were a few lights.

The weather was not unsuitable for a raid. Thick fine rain still borne on a light sou'westerly breeze. The moon had just risen and, though obscured by clouds, prevented the harbour from being altogether dark.

The *Adolphus*, in total darkness, had dropped anchor just inside the harbour wall. They went in the two jolly boats. Fortunately the sea was light, for each boat was crammed to the gunnels with men. There was hardly room in them to row. Each man carried a cutlass. Stephen had forbidden muskets, even pistols. 'They may squirt us,' said Stephen. 'They won't be able to shoot us tonight.'

But apart from the soaking damp, the essence of the adventure was silence.

There were only three ships in the tiny harbour and they could easily pick out the *Revenant* as the largest and because of its unusual trim. Farther up were a dozen rowing boats stranded in the sand. A light in a cottage. A light in the *Revenant*, somewhere below decks. A swinging lantern as someone moved along the quay.

On Stephen's direction they did not come alongside the *chaloupe* but paddled slowly past it, and each boat attached itself to a weed-grown iron ladder going up the harbour wall. One man was left in each boat. Stephen led the rest up to the cobble-stoned quay.

At the top he looked cautiously around, but the swinging lantern had gone. The village appeared to be asleep.

There was still the chink of light from the *Revenant*, and as Stephen dropped gently upon its forepeak he saw that this came from the main cabin. Followed by six other men, including Hodge, he crept along the deck and down the companion way. A light under the cabin door. Stephen drew his cutlass and went in.

It was the captain, sitting before a desk adding up figures in his log book. Beside him was an elderly man in a dark suit, also with a book open in front of him.

The captain half got to his feet before Stephen was across the room with the knife at his throat. Hodge had come up behind the elderly man, who looked like a merchant. The other men crowded into the cabin; the last one quietly shut the door.

'Ask him,' said Stephen. 'Ask him where he has put his prisoners.'

Hodge spoke sharply to the captain, who was trying to focus his eyes on the knife so close to his throat. A second demand brought a sharp response.

Hodge said: 'They be locked in a fish cellar at the end o' the quay.'

Stephen said: 'Tell him he shall lead us there. If he makes a sound I will cut his throat. You, Vage, and you, Moon, stay with this other man. If he utters a

word open him up. *Now . . .*'

The captain was forced to his feet and thrust out of the cabin. Stephen whispered orders to his men still clustered on the deck. They were to stay quiet until he called them, remain where their shapes would not be seen. Then he named the three from the cabin, and Hodge, to go with him.

It was a shambling dark procession which made its way to the end of the long quay. The only sound was when someone caught his foot on an uneven flagstone or splashed into a pool of water. Mindful of his own life, the captain was as quiet as anyone. He stopped before a big stone-built shed on the edge of the village. From here you could see the one light, which was in fact several lights when you got closer, and came from the windows of an inn. Talking and laughter could be heard.

The captain stood before the door of the shed and spread his hands helplessly. 'What does he say?' demanded Stephen.

'That he does not have the key to the padlock.'

The knife came nearer to the Frenchman's throat. 'Where is it?'

'He says the gendarme will have it. He be in Le Lion d'Or.'

Stephen stooped to peer at the padlock. He gestured to Hodge to try to force the lock with his cutlass, but it was clear that the knife would break first.

'Reckon we'd best go,' one of the men muttered. 'They'll come to no 'urt as prisoners . . .'

'Shut your trap!' Stephen snapped. 'Keast, go you back to the *chaloupe* and find a marling spike. Hurry, but stay quiet.'

'Aye, aye,' said Keast and turned and slipped back the way they had come.

Now that there was nothing to do but wait they could take in the noises inside the inn. The sailors had returned safely after a long voyage and were celebrating. Particularly, thought Stephen, they were celebrating the narrow escape they had had this afternoon from capture and a long internment in England.

He bent to the door and listened. He could certainly hear nothing inside, and the monstrous thought came to him that perhaps the French captain was deceiving him. If he was he should pay with his life. Leaving Hodge to guard the captain, he walked round the cellar: there were no windows but there might have been another door. There was, but when he opened it it led into a small room with bags of salt. He came back to the front and stooped by the door again.

'Jason,' he called.

No answer.

'Tell him,' Stephen said to Hodge, 'if the prisoners are not here I will kill him.' Hodge was about to speak when Stephen said: 'Wait.'

There was a burst of laughter from the inn.

‘Jason!’ he said again.

‘Father!’ It was a whisper.

Stephen felt a surge of triumph. ‘Jason. Quiet, boy. We have come to get ye. Are you well?’

‘Jago has a bad leg. I am well. And Tom Edwards. Father, can you open the door?’

‘Not yet. Have patience. And keep quiet. Can Jago walk?’

There was a murmur inside. ‘He says he will try.’

‘He *must* try.’

A warning hand touched his arm. The door of the inn opened and two men came out. The lantern light flooded over the cobbled street as they came arm in arm towards the crouching group; then they turned up the quay towards the *Revenant*.

They were both well gone in drink and stumbled several times on the way, supporting each other.

They were half-way up the quay when little Keast slid out of the gloom beside the waiting men, who had been so concerned to watch the French sailors that they had not seen him coming back. He carried two marling spikes. ‘Reckoned one might break,’ he said.

Stephen attacked the lock with less regard to silence than he had previously shown. There should be plenty of his men waiting to receive the two Frenchmen when they stepped aboard, but whether they could be disposed of without rousing the town remained to be seen.

The first spike bent but the second, forced in on top of it, did the trick. The padlock broke. The door squeaked open. Jason came out first, flung his arms round his father.

‘Didn’t I say, lads? Didn’t I say he’d come for us?’

‘Quiet!’ said Stephen, giving his son a hug. ‘And quick. Now come on, quick. There’s much still to do. But *quiet*, everybody!’

Two of the other men were helping Jago out. Edwards too was limping. In all this the thoughtful Hodge was still holding a knife to the captain’s throat.

There was still no sound from the *Revenant*, so it looked as if the returning sailors had been taken care of.

The party began to return along the quay. The rain was heavier than ever, misting men only a few yards from each other.

They reached the *Revenant*. Twelve men shinned down the ladder to return to the jolly boats, cast off, pulled round to the stern of the *chaloupe*; four other men ran the length of the ship, dropped lines to the boats, which began to row away. Hodge had gone below with the captain. Jago and Edwards were aboard. Keast

and another man had cast off the stern rope securing the *Revenant* to a bollard. Stephen and Jason stooped to throw off the forward rope.

‘Halt!’ shouted a voice. ‘*Nom de la République! Qui va là?*’

It was a French soldier who had come suddenly out of the moonlit fog. For a second they stared at each other. Stephen lifted his cutlass. The soldier discharged his musket full in Stephen’s face.

The hammer came down to strike the cap and the cap failed to detonate.

Stephen laughed out loud and stabbed the man in the chest. Then, unable to withdraw his cutlass, he left it in the fallen figure and jumped aboard the *Revenant* as Jason cast off.

The two boats began to row the *chaloupe* out of the harbour, and the Cornishmen swarmed up the rigging preparing to make sail.

Chapter Three

I

If anyone had spoken of ‘the dark night of the soul’ to Demelza she would not have known where the words came from but she would perfectly have understood what they meant.

When Julia died all those years ago it had been when she was just recovering from the morbid sore throat herself and she had felt the loss as a mortal blow from which she could hardly recover. Julia had been nineteen months old. But she and Ross were young, and after all the despair, which had included Ross’s trial for his life and near bankruptcy, they had somehow climbed together out of a pit, which had never seemed so deep since.

But Jeremy, their second child, was twenty-four. Born in a time of great stress, he had been with them ever since, through all the vicissitudes of life, all their joys, all their sorrows. Because of that, because of his age, he was more a part of the family than any of the three younger ones – even Clowance, who was only three years younger. What she had said to Caroline was only the truth: whenever she thought of Jeremy she thought of a thousand days of caring.

When she last saw him, last December, he had grown better looking. The tall loose-jointed young man with a tendency to stoop had filled out with his army training, had matured, his hair long, his face less clear-skinned, his smile more sophisticated. No wonder Cuby had at last fallen in love with him.

Too late to save him from the army, a captaincy, and a march to his death in the mud of Flanders. Demelza knew that Clowance blamed Cuby for this, saying it was his broken love-affair that had spurred him to go into the army. It could be true; Demelza was not sure; there was another reason which perhaps only she would ever know. Though there were a man and a woman somewhere, one of them probably her son-in-law, who might yet throw light on the subject. (Not that she wanted light. Better for it always to be hidden, as the sacks had been hidden, in the dark cave in Kellow’s Ladder.)

Last time he was home he had seemed on the point of saying something to her, attempting an explanation of the unexplainable. (Perhaps in joining the army

ner, attempting an explanation of the unexplainable. Perhaps in joining the army I was trying to escape from myself.' And then, when he had seen the loving cup, which she had carefully cleaned and polished and put on the sideboard, he had said: 'Someday, sometime – not now – perhaps when we are both a few years older – I would like to talk to you.'

And she had smiled at him and said: 'Don't leave it too late.'

It had been prophetic without her knowing it. With the war over it had then been much more likely that she would predecease him. She only wished it had been so.

On Sunday, the 16th July Demelza for once was on her own. Nothing seemed to get better with the passage of the days. This morning she had walked only as far along the beach as Wheal Leisure and then turned back, having neither the energy nor the initiative to go further. A rarely beautiful day, the night wind having dropped as the sun came up, the whole beach in a state of warm confusion as the waves trembled and broke and piled up and trembled and broke again, a magisterial demonstration of power and authority. These were neap-tides, so there was not so much of a run as sometimes, but every now and then a feathery froth of water an inch or two deep slithered up to and around her feet, soaking her shoes and the hem of her skirt.

She might as well go in, she thought, and make a dish of tea; though she was neither thirsty nor hungry. It was something to do.

John Gimlett stood in front of her. She looked up at this unexpected sight.

'The master is back.'

'*What? When?*'

''Alf an hour gone. Didn't know quite where to find ee, ma'am.'

Demelza hastened her step, but not too much. She did not feel quite able to face him.

He was in the garden, her garden, looking at some of her flowers. At first she hardly recognized him, he looked so very old.

She came to the gate, opened it. He heard the click of the latch, looked up.

'Ross!' She flew to him.

Gimlett discreetly went in by the yard door.

II

'Take more tea,' she said. 'You must be thirsty after so long a ride.'

Your garden,' he said. 'It has lacked your touch.'

'Like other things,' she said. 'But 'twill alter now.'

'Your hollyhocks . . .'

YOUR HOLLYHOCKS . . .

'Jane said they was damaged by a late frost. And I think your mother's lilac tree needs hard cutting, else it will die.'

'Had you just been to the mine?'

'No, no. I was walking . . . Ben has been very good. Everyone has been very good. You're so *thin*, Ross.'

A cow was roaring somewhere in the valley. It was a distant, rural sound, almost lost in the silence of the house.

'There's so much to tell you,' Ross said, 'I don't know where to begin.'

'Maybe the first day you are home is not the right time.'

'I lay at Tregothnan last night,' he said. 'I put in at St Austell, thought I could reach home, borrowed a nag but the nag went lame . . . If there is one recurring theme in my history it is that every horse I hire or borrow goes lame . . . Or is shot from under me—'

'One was shot from under you?'

'Two, to be exact. But that is for telling some other time. Demelza.'

'Yes?'

'Can you believe it is only in January that we left here? It has been a lifetime.'

'More than a lifetime.'

'Aye, that too.'

She busied herself pouring more tea for him and then for herself. They both took milk but no sugar. Tea with sugar is not a Cornish custom.

'Little Jane Ellery was bit by a dog yesterday,' she said. 'A stray dog near Sawle. He behaved very strange and snatched and snarled, so I think they have put him down. They called Dwight and to be safe he cut into the tooth marks to make a clean wound and then disinfected it with nitric acid. Poor little Jane squealed her head off, but a sweetmeat seemed soon to set her to rights. But of course they will be anxious for a day or two.'

Ross sipped his tea. They sat quietly in the parlour.

Demelza said: 'On Friday Sephus Billing killed an adder with five young in it. He was drawing potatoes at the time. Side of the Long Field.'

'They were always fond of that wall,' Ross said. 'My father often warned me.'

'Jud used to call them long cripples,' Demelza said.

'I know.'

The brightness of the day outside made the parlour dark.

Demelza said: 'And how is Cuby?'

'She will come later. I told her she must stay with us until after the baby is born. Then she must decide her own life. You would agree with that?'

'Yes. Oh, yes.'

Ross said: 'She was very good most of the time. She only broke down once. I

Ross said: 'She was very good most of the time. She only broke down once. I have never heard a woman sob like it. It was – such an ugly noise – like someone sawing wood.'

'Don't.'

Ross said: 'I was so fortunate just to find Jeremy in time. He did not seem to be in any pain. He – he sent his love to you and asked us to look after Cuby.'

Demelza got up, took out a handkerchief and gently dabbed his eyes. Then she wiped her own.

'There is much to do here, Ross. We have been neglecting our home. Some of the seed is not sown yet. And we need to sell some lambs – I waited for you to know how many. And the damp in the library ceiling is getting worse.'

He looked at her.

She said: 'And there's the white store turnips. Cal Trevail was asking me yesterday—'

'Why are you alone like this? I thought you would never be left alone.'

'They did their best . . . Stephen came back from some successful adventure last week. When he heard about Jeremy he came straight over, stayed two nights. He had to go back, then, but wanted Clowance to stay on. I said *no*. I said *no*, you would be here soon, and for a little while I *wanted* to be alone. 'Twas true: I had no talk left. My tongue has been heavy all the time – ever since I knew.'

'But the others. Verity and—'

'Verity left on Tuesday because Andrew is very slight. It is some heart affection. Caroline's two girls are just home and she has not seen them for a term. Henry is in the cove with Mrs Kemp and they should be back soon. Isabella-Rose is at school.'

'You sent her?'

To Mrs Hemple's for half a term. I sent her before I had your letter.'

'How did she take the news?'

'As you would expect,' said Demelza lightly, controlling herself. 'The piano needs tuning badly. The damp air gets at the strings. And this old spinet, do you think we should throw it out, Ross?'

'Never. It is too much a part of our lives . . . The Falmouths sent their love and sympathy.'

'Good of them. I expect they will be concerned about Fitzroy. Many, many people have sent their love and sympathy, Ross. 'Tis very – warming to have so much love and sympathy. Even Mr Odgers . . . I think we shall have to do something about Mr Odgers soon, Ross. He took off his wig in church last Sunday, I'm told, and threw it at the choir. He said afterwards he thought he was driving away the greenfly. They have been very bad this year, the greenfly; I think it is the warm summer.'

Ross said: 'And how is Clowance?'

'Well. But you know how she felt for Jeremy.'

'And Stephen?'

Demelza put her tea-cup back on the tray and got up.

'Will you take me for a bathe, Ross?'

'What?' He stared again.

'The sea is heavy, so heavy and the sun is broiling. I have not bathed since last year – I could not without you.'

Ross hesitated. 'It is not seemly on my first day home.'

'Nor is it,' said Demelza, 'but I want you to do it for me – with me. There is time before dinner. It will help – I think it will help – to wash away our tears.'

III

Ross said: 'I am worried about Demelza.'

'Yes,' said Dwight, then nodded his head. 'Yes.'

'She is physically well, so far as you know?'

'She has made no complaints. Of course the shock is still affecting her.'

'Yet not in some ways quite as I would have expected. I am happy if it is sincere but – well, she is so full of interest in all the affairs of Nampara – just as if nothing had happened.'

'Is that how she seems to you? It is not as she has been before you came. She cared for nothing. Often she would not talk even to her family. She spoke to Caroline, but very little. Most times she would just sit there.'

'You think, then, this show of liveliness has been put on for my benefit?'

'She's a very strong personality, Ross. She may feel that she has to be supportive of you.'

'If it is put on, one wonders how long it will endure – and can only guess at what it is hiding.'

'It may not change. Once you have assumed a mantle it may become a part of everyday wear.'

Ross had ridden over and found Dwight in his laboratory, Caroline and the children being out riding. Dwight had walked out with him and they were sitting on a wooden garden seat looking across the lawn towards some trees, beyond which, if you walked a little farther, you could see Sawle Church.

'It is difficult to tell her anything about what happened,' Ross said. 'She heads me off, turns the point, brings up some other subject. Well, perhaps that is natural. One cannot go on probing at a wound – or should not, I imagine. Last

night . . .’

He stopped. Dwight said nothing, staring at a squirrel swarming up the branch of a tree.

‘Last night,’ Ross said, ‘she would hardly let me touch her. We lay beside each other in bed, just holding hands. When I woke early this morning just as it was coming light she was gone, standing by the window looking out. When she heard me move she came back, slipped into bed, took my hand again.’

Dwight said: ‘When Caroline lost Sarah . . . You remember? She left me, went to London, stayed with her aunt. I did not know when, or if, she was coming back. This is much, much worse – for Demelza and for you. Sarah was a baby – like your Julia. Jeremy was just happily married, everything before him. I can only guess at what you both feel.’

The squirrel had disappeared. Rooks were clapping their wings somewhere. They sounded like an unenthusiastic audience.

Ross said: ‘Of course there is much I cannot tell her – would not. You saw my letter to her?’

‘Yes.’

‘I said little enough about that last day . . . When Wellington entrusted me with the message for Prince Frederick of the Netherlands I knew the distance to be about ten miles, but I expected to be back in the very early afternoon. But on the way back – perhaps I was a thought incautious and steered too close to the fighting – I was almost overrun by a French cavalry charge. Then my horse was killed, and as I fell with it a piece of round shot struck me in the chest – just below the chest – and I was knocked out for what must have been half an hour. And for a time after that I could barely stand.’

Ross fumbled in his pocket and took out a piece of crumpled metal which Dwight could see had been a watch.

‘My father’s,’ said Ross. ‘It was the one thing the French left me when I was interned. When I escaped I intended to sell it to buy food or shelter or perhaps a weapon of some sort; but in the end I did not have to. Had I done so I should not be here today.’

Dwight took the crushed watch, turned it over. The face had gone altogether, and the gold case was splayed as if it had been hit with a hammer.

‘Then that is one piece of extraordinary good fortune.’

‘It was intended for Jeremy. If I had given it him perhaps he would be here instead of me. Better if it had been that way.’

‘Have you shown this to Demelza?’

‘No. Nor shall do.’

‘Well . . . perhaps not. Not yet anyway.’

The sun came out, warming them as they sat together, two old friends.

‘There are many things I cannot tell her,’ Ross said, ‘even if she would listen. That night after Jeremy’s death I could not sleep. I was not hungry but was sickly empty of stomach – and thirsty, so thirsty – and black with powder and stiff from my small injuries. I lay down in the hut for a while, trying to wrap an old blanket round me – just beside him – but after a while I got up again and began to wander about the battlefield. There were many still wounded, crying for attention, but I was too dazed to help – and in any case had no means to help – no salves, no bandages, no water. Have you ever seen a battlefield, Dwight?’

‘No.’

‘I had. Or thought I had. Not like this. Never anything like this. Of course you have been in a battle at sea, have suffered the horrors of the prisoner-of-war camp . . .’

‘Yes . . .’

‘Before he died Jeremy spoke of the horses. They were almost the worst part of it. Some were lying with their entrails hanging out, yet still alive. Others dragged themselves around in terrible stages of mutilation. Some were simply wandering loose, having lost their owners. I caught one such and rode as far south as Quatre Bras, where all the fighting had been on the Friday.’

‘Was the fighting at Waterloo over by this time?’

‘Almost. There were some Prussian troops still about, and not too particular whom they shot at; there were a few camps of them, bivouacking, cooking their meals; but the main body had passed on. Quatre Bras was a ghastly sight. You of all people must be familiar with what happens to a body after it is dead.’

‘Yes . . .’

‘Those at Quatre Bras had mostly been dead for two days. It was a brilliant moonlit night, with only a rare cloud passing across the moon. In the moonlight they looked like negroes.’

‘Yes . . .’

‘And swollen into grotesque shapes. Bursting out of their uniforms – those who were left with uniforms. Many had been stripped naked by the peasants; most of those who had not, lay upon their faces with their pockets pulled out and their boots taken, their papers scattered everywhere. Of course it was not just the peasants. The soldiers themselves: the French when they advanced, the British and Germans when the French retreated . . . The stench in the courtyard of the farm at Quatre Bras was intolerable . . . Perhaps you wonder why I tell you all this.’

‘No, I think it should be spoken of.’

‘There is no one else I would say this to. When I was in America as a young

man I saw enough to fill my crop. But not like this. That was skirmishing. This was head-on conflict of a most terrible kind.'

They sat for a while in silence. Ross fingered his scar.

'I found one man still alive. That is why I went into the yard of the farmhouse; there's a well there; I went to get him water. Why he was alive I don't know; his skull was crushed; but some people take a deal of killing. He was a Frenchman, and when he found I understood him he asked me to kill him and finish off his misery.'

Dwight glanced at Ross's lean, restless face. More than ever lean now, and the veins in his neck showing.

'I found I could not, Dwight. There had been so much blood spilt; for three days I had been surrounded by death. And then I thought of the French brigadier, whom I had come greatly to like and respect, even though he was a Bonapartist. And I knew he would say it was only a kindness to kill this suffering man. Perhaps even a duty. But still I could not.'

'I think you were right.'

'I spent more time on him than anyone else on the battlefield. I bathed his face and his crushed head and tried to tie up his other wounds. Then I put a beaker of water beside him and left him – presumably to die.'

'Were there no surgeons anywhere?'

'A few. Working desperately, trying to help the worst wounded. Though from the way I saw them treating men then and afterwards in Brussels, I wonder if they did not help to kill off more wounded men than they cured.'

'Ours is still a primitive science.'

Ross got up. 'By God, I should think so! But you, Dwight, have often said that your profession was over-fond of the leech. You bleed your patients far less than most of your fellows. These men – these so-called surgeons – were bleeding men who had lost half their blood already!'

Dwight got up too, patted his leg with the little riding cane he carried. 'The medical view is that if a wound is inflamed, bleeding will help to reduce the inflammation. It's not a theory I totally subscribe to – as you know – but I was not there and so cannot speak much against them. I'm afraid most physical treatment is rough and ready. Not least when it comes to war.'

'The arms and legs that were hacked off! I know it is better than gangrene – we both know too well that – that anything is better than gangrene . . . But afterwards, to sterilize with hot tar, and then, as like as not, a clyster of soap and water and a pill of senna pods in lard, to clear the humours!'

They began to walk across the paddock towards the distant trees.

After a minute Dwight said: 'Is your ankle . . .?'

“ . . . ”

‘well enough.’

They walked on.

‘Where is Demelza now?’

‘I left her in the garden with Matthew Mark Martin. Jane Gimlett says she has hardly been in it since she came home.’

‘We have never spoken of your baronetcy. I believe it was a good thing to take.’

‘Good? Dear God! It is a cynical twist that Jeremy will now no longer be here to inherit it.’

‘Henry will.’

Ross looked up. ‘Maybe. Well, yes. If he survives.’

‘There should be no wars after this for generations. And if there were Henry would have no need to take part. You have three handsome children left.’

‘And a grandchild on the way . . . It was strange how I met Cuby. And horrible. On the Monday morning I was able to purloin a farm cart and I put my horse – the one I had found on Sunday night – into the shafts, and I lifted – I lifted my son into the back and covered him with a blanket. The road back to Brussels was – impossible, with the sick and wounded, with returning soldiers, with ambulances and wagons; but we went with the stream. Then I saw this coach coming *against* the stream with a man riding before it with a drawn sword, forcing people to give way. I paid them little attention, for I was too sunk in my own sorrow. But I remember noticing that the coach horses were screaming with fright. Coming into the battle zone from Brussels, they were not used to the smell of blood and corruption. Then suddenly a voice called: “Captain Poldark!” It was Cuby, my daughter-in-law.’

They stopped at the edge of the paddock. The vegetation here was lush with cow parsley and ragged robin and wild marguerites. Ross wiped his forehead.

‘In all those days of battle that was the second worst moment for me. Her round pretty anxious face changed when I told her, she went deathly pale. She jumped down and insisted – *insisted* on seeing Jeremy, on uncovering his face . . . Then – then she looked at me as if I had stabbed her to the heart. Which indeed I had – and would have given my own life willingly not to have done so.’

Bees were humming around a clump of foxgloves, struggling in and out of the bells like fat robbers peering into caves.

Ross said: ‘Sir William de Lancey, Wellington’s Chief of Staff, had been gravely wounded, and his wife was forcing her way out to Waterloo to see him. Cuby had asked if she might have a lift and had been given one . . . There were other women going out, amid all the confusion, seeking their husbands, hoping to find them alive. Magdalene de Lancey found her husband and nursed him for a week in a cottage in Waterloo, and then he died.’

a week in a cottage in Watteau, and then he died.

They began to walk back.

Dwight said: 'It is hot today. Let's go indoors for a while. Will you take a glass of lemonade?'

Ross gave a short harsh laugh. 'In most of the crises of my life, the big disappointments – as when Elizabeth married Francis – the tragedy when we lost Julia – the stresses when Demelza became infatuated with Hugh Armitage – and they all seem to be *dwarfed* – *are dwarfed* – by this; in all of them I have taken to the brandy bottle. Now I am offered lemonade!'

'There is brandy if you want it.'

'I drank very little after Jeremy's death; first because there was *nothing* – except one flask I found half full of *genever*. Then I was preoccupied looking after Cuby. Then there were the burial arrangements. With one thing and another . . . I drank more than usual on the trip home, but the taste was lacking. As my medical man, would you advise a glass of lemonade at this stage?'

'I am going to take one.'

'It guarantees absolute oblivion?'

'As good as brandy in the long run.'

Ross said: 'I'm not sure that I want to regard anything – in the long run from now on . . . Tell me, Dwight, one thing extra that has been concerning me . . .'

'Yes?'

'You know Demelza all her life has been a thought fond of drink – some drink – chiefly port. When I returned yesterday there was no sign. Have you seen any sign?'

'I have hardly seen her in the evening, but Caroline would have mentioned it, I am sure.'

'She did over-drink at one time, you know. I came home one night and found her incapable. That was about a year ago.'

'I didn't know. I'm sorry.'

'It never happened again. Perhaps it was a passing phase. Human nature is unfathomable, is it not? Demelza has lost her dearly beloved son and yet appears to stay sober. I am in similar straits and content myself with lemonade. Perhaps grief – real grief – brings sobriety. Or are we just growing old and no longer consider it worth while to make gestures of protest?'

'I suspect you will live to make many more gestures of protest yet,' said Dwight, 'but they are no better for being seen through the bottom of a brandy glass.'

Chapter Four

I

Stephen said: 'It has been a bitter time for you, dear heart; and in truth 'tis sad for me. All I said to your mother was God's truth. Jeremy was a real true friend. We did – many things together. All through the time when you and I were estranged, him and me, we were still friends. In that year when we was separated he never, of course, took my side against you, but he was never anything but sympathetic to the way I felt. In fact we were both deprived in a similar way. It made for a fellow feeling. He was a brave man and it's bitter, bitter that he should be gone now, just when he was happy married and his wife expecting a baby. An' I'm deeply sorry.'

'Thank you, Stephen.'

He was rowing her back from the *Adolphus*, which she had been visiting for the first time since its famous voyage.

'And thank you for this lovely present,' she added, fingering the heavy coral necklace about her throat. 'It is marvellous pretty, and I want to wear it all the time.'

'So you shall. And others I shall buy you.'

He paused in his rowing, allowed the boat to drift of its own momentum.

'Jeremy's death,' he said, 'Jeremy's death has put a damper on what I did; but I can't but rejoice at the way everything else has turned up aces for me – for the both of us. I can't but rejoice, Clowance, and that's God's truth too.'

'I don't expect you to. In a month – in a few months – I expect I shall be able to rejoice with you.'

'Ye must be able to rejoice now, that we are right out of the wood!'

'Are we *really* safe?'

'Oh yes. Oh yes. By a long haul.'

'Can you bear to tell me again?' Clowance asked, knowing that he would like nothing better. 'At Nampara, in the bedroom, it seemed so unreal beside Jeremy's death, I could hardly take it in. You captured this ship called – called . . .

‘*Revenant*. She was a *chaloupe*. What in England we more or less call a sloop. But bigger than we build ’em in England. She was bigger than we were, bigger than a packet ship, and carried a crew, I reckon, of about twenty-five, and four four-pounders and any amount of small arms. *And* when we rescued Jason and the other two, we bore away with us the captain and a rich merchant who were aboard at the time, and can be ransomed!’

‘Why did you take the – the *chaloupe* to Bristol?’

‘I knew more people there, see. And to tell the truth I was wary of Sir George. Ye know, the Warleggans have a long reach, and after what has happened I wouldn’t trust him as far as I can spit. I thought, maybe somehow he’ll try to seize part of the cargo in lieu of a debt – or say it was illegal because of the end of the war and should be returned – or any trumped up charge. I thought I was safer in Bristol. I thought first of Plymouth, but I felt safer going home.’

Clowance shivered slightly; she could not have told why, for the day was warm.

Stephen did not notice. ‘Mind, there was a time when I regretted that choosing. Once safe across the Channel, I crept close in to the English coast, not fancying a meeting with a French frigate again; but not far off Penzance the weather turned foul; a strong gale blew up sudden from the south. There was a great peril of being embayed, so I set every stitch of canvas the masts would bear and began to claw off the shore. The *Revenant* was hull down way to the south-east of us and riding it out well. I’ve never seen *Adolphus* in such a state before. She plunged through the water so fast clouds of spray were frothing to her very topsails. I thought the canvas would any minute carry away. But it did not, and after an hour the worst was over. Both vessels rounded Land’s End before nightfall.’

Clowance let her hand trail in the water. ‘And the cargo?’

‘M’dear, we’re rich! Not rich by Warleggan standards, but well found and independent of Warleggans for good an’ all. *Revenant* was eighteen days out of New York. Skins, all sorts of skins to make coats; leather and boots; saddlery; 50 tons of pig iron, steel rods, five cases of apothecaries’ wares, 36 wheels and axles, 48 kettles – I lost count . . . Aside from the value of the ship itself!’

‘And what is happening now?’

‘The Cornish Naval Bank has a corresponding partner, as they call it, in Bristol. As the money comes in, ’twill be transferred into my name in Falmouth. I was tempted to stay on and on, but I felt I must come back and see you, tell you this wonderful news. Alas, that you had such bad news yourself!’

‘You have shareholders to pay?’

‘Oh, yes. And the crew. But the crew I have now paid off. They’re all roaring happy and consider themselves rich, small though their portions are compared to mine.’ Stephen shipped one oar and steered past some wreckage floating in the harbour. ‘The shareholders will take thirty-five per cent. The rest will set us up very nicely, and *very* independent.’

‘Have you seen Warleggan’s Bank yet?’

‘No. I shall go in tomorrow. All the way home – and ’twas none too placid a trip for July neither – I have been asking myself how I ought to do it. I thought at first just to tell them straight just what I thought of ’em. I thought over just what I should say. But then I considered further and changed me mind. I’ve decided to act just as he might act if he was in my shoes.’

‘What does that mean, Stephen?’

‘I shall act very polite. I shall tell ’em nothing of what I have been doing or what profits I have made – though no doubt they’ll hear about it or already have. I shall go in tomorrow and see Lander and simply say: “Good-day to ye, Mr Lander, it so happens that I have been able to obtain finance through another bank, and as they impose no restrictions, well, I think I shall transfer my account to them from the end of this week. Any accommodation bills I have signed, Mr Lander, will be paid the moment they come due, and I will continue, with your permission, Mr Lander, to trade in Penryn and Falmouth as an independent shipper.” Something like that, but smoother. “Good-day to ye, Mr Lander,” I shall say. “I hope I find you well. Now it so happens, quite by chance, like, that I have been approached by another bank, who offer me all the accommodation I need without imposing any restrictions as to the overdraft I choose to carry – ”’

‘I am glad you will do it that way because—’

‘Well, because of Harriet, in the main, who helped me survive. And also – well, look you, we might still go to Cardew sometime. I reckon if George can go in for being a hypocrite, so can I!’

Coming in towards the quay, they had to row between a couple of rotting hulks long since grounded in the mud. It was half tide and the barnacled ribs stuck up into the warm sunlight, glinting green and black and orange.

‘And from now it will be legitimate trading again?’

‘Oh yes. No choice anyhow. The war is over. It all just worked in time for us.’

‘For us, yes.’

This time he did notice her shiver. ‘Sorry, sorry, it will be a sore place for a long while.’

After a minute she said: ‘And Jason?’

‘Jason?’

‘He will – stay on with you?’

‘For sure . . .’ He allowed the slight current to carry them in. ‘D’ye know, it was the greatest moment when I broke into the fish cellar and rescued him. I think then I really came up to his expectations of me as a father! . . . And then to steal away with the *Revenant* right from under their noses! It was Nelson stuff! D’ye know, I’ve got me quite a reputation, Clowance.’

‘Yes?’ She smiled at him.

‘Yes. When I took me prize into Bristol – that was a brave moment too! We worked into the harbour no more than five minutes ahead of *Revenant*, which, as is the custom, was flying the British flag atop the French flag flown upside down. Lord, when we got to the quay there was a crowd cheering! And the crews cheered too, you stake your life, knowing the pickings that were going to be theirs! . . . And though I took me prize to Bristol all those sailors were Cornishmen, from Penryn and Falmouth mainly, and they haven’t been slow to tell folk of the success of the voyage and the way we took out the Frenchman. Why, if I asked for another crew today I should be swamped wi’ volunteers!’

The dinghy slid slowly in beside the quay. Stephen hooked the painter over a bollard and jumped out to give Clowance a hand.

‘We’ll get the house being built again right away. And this time I shall buy meself a good hunter, as good as Nero. We’ll have the stables built first so that they’ll be well housed . . . Then we’ll ride and hunt together on equal terms!’

‘Even when the hunt meets at Cardew?’

‘Even then. That’s what I said. Another good reason not to fall out with Harriet!’ He laughed infectiously and they began to walk up to their cottage hand in hand.

Just below them a half-dozen naked urchins were taking it in turns to leap into the harbour, holding their noses as they jumped and squealing with delight when they came to the surface among the floating seaweed and the apple cores and the driftwood.

‘And I have a mind too,’ he said, ‘to buy me another ship when the right one comes along at the right price. Three’s the proper number, increases the profit, not too many to look after.’

‘Andrew will be back from New York any time now,’ said Clowance. ‘But if this voyage has been a success I do not suppose he will want to leave the Packet Service again.’

‘I was not thinking of Andrew,’ Stephen said. ‘I was thinking of Jason.’

When she looked surprised he added: ‘Oh, I know he is young yet. And he must learn more navigation. I can tell you I’m none too clear on some points meself, but he knows *nothing*. Yet in a year or two he’ll be ready for his own ship. Nothing so big as *Adolphus* but maybe the size of the *Lady Clowance*.

There was good men on this trip, dear heart, that I'd not employed before. Carter handled the ship real well and Hodge was a godsend. Hodge I must keep in with. Both of 'em I've given special bonuses to. If I buy another vessel one or both of 'em would be ideal to be with Jason on his first voyages, to keep him on course, so to say.'

At the entrance to their house she paused, took off her straw hat and let the sunlight and the breezes play with her blonde hair. He looked at her appreciatively. Pity about Jeremy, of course, but you couldn't grieve for ever, and here he was, with a small fortune in the bank – the reward of a daring and dangerous exploit – and with a very peach of a wife who, by her independence and intelligence and refusal to conform to an accepted pattern, intrigued him the more. He wanted her and knew she wanted him. Life was wonderful and he felt wonderful. No one could blame him for that.

The harbour below them was glimmering, iridescent in the sunshine. Beyond it the bay of the Fal, surrounded by cornfields, looked like a majestic garden. Tall masts swung at anchor; towards Trefusis Point a four-masted full-rigged ship was just shaking out her sails. She fired her signal gun to show she was leaving. Small boats were everywhere. People sat on the wall higher up, gossiping in the summer sun.

'I must go to Flushing first thing tomorrow,' said Clowance. 'Mother tells me Uncle Andrew is serious ill.'

'I'll row you,' said Stephen, happily conscious that for him all the pressure was off.

II

Andrew Blamey senior had had some sort of a heart seizure, with a fast heart-beat and respiratory trouble. He was sixty-seven, and the apothecary took a grave view of the matter. However, a second man, a physician called Mather, recently arrived from Bath, prescribed Dr Withering's new drug digitalis, with mercury pills, and this produced such a remarkable improvement that when Clowance and Stephen went to see the invalid he was downstairs in his favourite chair by the window watching the movements of shipping through his spyglass.

Stephen was a rare visitor in this house, but was now much more welcome, its being known that, although he had aided young Andrew to leave the Packet Service and embark on some far from respectable adventures, he had now contrived to help Andrew return to the Service with no apparent loss of seniority. Stephen too was very much on his best behaviour today, deferring to Captain

Blamey in seagoing matters and answering modestly when Verity questioned him about his exploits. Looking at her second cousin – whom she always regarded as an aunt – Clowance remembered something her father had once said: ‘Verity was never good-looking but she has the prettiest mouth in Great Britain.’ Clowance had also heard garbled accounts of how her own mother, defying Poldark hostility to the match, had contrived to bring Captain Blamey and Miss Verity together.

Anyway, it had been a famous match, and it was only a pity that their one child, thoroughly taking and agreeable though he was, could not quite overcome his weakness for gambling and drink.

Clowance was proud of Stephen today. When he set out to subdue his animal spirits and to attune himself to the people he was visiting it was hard to fault his manners or his behaviour. She was grateful to him. It just showed what success could do.

III

Someone of about Blamey’s age on the north coast also happened to be ill at this time, but in spite of having the attention of the best physician in the West Country, he refused wilfully to get better. Old Tholly Tregirls, one-armed reprobate and adventurer, having suffered fiercely from asthma all his life, was now dying of something quite different. Ross had just time to call and see him. Tholly died, as he had lived for the last twenty years, at Sally Chill-Off’s. When Ross called he raised himself from his bed and said: ‘Well, Young Cap’n, I hear tell as you’ve had some ill-luck yourself, eh? Sapling cut off in its prime, eh? Master Jeremy gone. Poor jawb. I reckon ’twas very poor jawb.’

Ross noticed that so far people in the neighbourhood had not changed their form of address to him. He was still ‘Cap’n Poldark’, or just ‘Cap’n’. That at least was a blessing. But after Tholly had gone there would be no one left to call him ‘Young Cap’n’ to distinguish him from his father.

‘’Tis all these ’ere wars,’ said Tholly, rubbing his scarred and wasted face with a dirty hand. ‘Public wars, I call ’em. Reckon you was lucky ever to come safe ’ome from that one in ’Merica. Public wars is no good. Public wars don’t bring no good to no one. Small wars, private wars, they’re different, can profit you upon times.’

‘Like privateering,’ said Ross, ‘or ditching a Preventive man.’

Tholly showed his black and broken teeth in a grimace. ‘That’s correct, Young Cap’n, that correct. You know this surgeon – him we rescued from the

prison camp all them years agone; that were a great adventure, that were – you’d think he’d do better for me than ’e ’as – out of *gratitude*. Gratitude, you’d think. But he don’t put me on me feet. D’ye know after all these years me asthma have *gone*. Cough too. Couldn’t cough now if I wished for it. Gone these last six weeks or more. But I can’t *eat*. Can’t seem t’eat. Sally bring up good soup. But it don’t lie.’

Ross stared round the small untidy room. Tholly followed his glance. ‘I took it off, see? ’Twas irksome.’ He waved the stub of his arm towards where the hook and its sheath and leather straps stood upon an old chest of drawers pointing menacingly towards the blackened rafters. ‘When I’m gone, Young Cap’n, I want you t’ave it, see? Remind you o’ me, see. Maybe missus won’t like it so well, but put it in your own room, somewhere where she don’t go.’

Ross went to the open window, where the air was sweeter. ‘Thank you, Tholly.’ He could say nothing else.

Silence fell. Ross thought of Jeremy.

Tholly said: ‘Reckon I’ll never sell you another ’orse.’

‘Oh maybe, maybe. While there’s life.’

‘I got a long memory for these parts, Young Cap’n. I were born at St Ann’s. I mind the time afore ever your ’ouse, afore Nampara was ever builded. Used to be a little pond there, I recollect. There was ducks in it, kept by an old man living in Mellin cottages. Sometimes when ’twas dry weather, folks in Carnmore – afore Surgeon Choake’s time – would send their men with their two cows to drink.’

‘Ah,’ said Ross. ‘How old are you, Tholly?’

‘God knows. Or maybe He’s forgot too. I mind the two brothers at Trenwith, Charles and Joshua, your papa. Charles were always jealous o’ his younger brother. Charles might be comin’ in for the big ’ouse and the property, but Joshua were the good-looking one, all the women was attracted to him; then ’e wed the prettiest girl and he came ’ere to live ’s own carefree life regardless of the county. I remember Joshua building Nampara. Up it went, block by block.’

‘What year was that, Tholly?’

‘God knows . . . I were about eleven year old. Ten or eleven. Miners builded it mostly, Young Cap’n, them as worked at Wheal Grace and all around. That’s why ’tis crude built – not like Trenwith. Reckon Charles’s great-great-grandfather had proper masons, brought from upcountry. Old Cap’n never cared. I mind he said to me once: “The longer I live, Tholly, but more God-cursed certain sure I am that the Wise Men never came from the East!” Made me laff, that. He just wanted a place of his own, see? Built near the cove, convenient for him to fish or smuggle, overlooking the beach where he could line-fish and bathe

and walk and gallop on the sands. 'E began a line you've kept up, Young Cap'n. Master Jeremy should've stayed home, kept his house. But he didn't, did 'e. More's the pity . . . Well, mebbe the little tacker will – what's his name? – Henry – 'twill be a pity if the house don't go on, if it all fall to ruin. Old Cap'n started something you shouldn't neglect. Why, who'd be a king in London if he could be a squire in Cornwall?'

It was late afternoon and Ross could see a few people, mainly ragged village folk making their way towards the inn. Sally was a big-bosomed, generous, now elderly woman who had earned her nickname by being willing to let her customers have a little something on credit. 'Just to take the chill off.' They paid her back when they could, most often after a successful 'run'. Tholly had scraped a living as a horse coper and general picker-up of unconsidered trifles and had lived with Sally Tregothnan – some said sponged on her – ever since he returned from the sea. It seemed, if Dwight were correct, that his tenure was coming to an end.

Tholly coughed, but compared to the old days it was a mere genteel clearing of the throat. 'I mind them old times well,' he said. 'Mebbe I remember your mother better than what you do, Young Cap'n. How old was you when she went around land? Nine? Ten? . . . She didn't take to me, thought I were a bad influence. That's a laff. Whoever thought of influencing the Old Cap'n? He went his way . . . Mind, he took *heed* of she. Good-looking wench. Handsome handsome long black hair. Upon times I seen her brushing it when I weren't supposed to. She 'ad a fine temper. It'd flash out like a sword out of a sheath, silver and sharp and glistening – cut anyone down. O' course it was agin his nature.'

'What was?'

'Being like 'e was when he was wed to she. It never come natural to him to toe the line. It was always 'is way to break the laws, break the rules, break the standards, see. And 'e carried it off in such a style – laughing and joking and devil take it – few folk cared. He was some caution, was Old Cap'n. Yet for twelve year – twelve year, mark ee, I never seen 'im chase another woman. Course he did other things – running goods, sailing 'ere and there on this and that, wrecking if the chance came his way, feuding with landlords and gaugers. But for twelve year she kept 'im faithful.'

'Maybe he wanted to be.'

'Oh, stand on that, 'e wanted to be, else 'e wouldn't 've been! My grandfather's ghost! Not Joshua Poldark. But when she died, 'e went back to 'is old games. Chasing women – it came natural to him. Great man was old Joshua. 'Ard as nails. But a great man, Young Cap'n. He started a line at Nampara that

mustn't die out.'

IV

Two days later Tholly died. Although having a pretty good idea of the cause of death, Dwight still wanted to make sure. Tholly's only son, Lobb, the ailing, ruptured, anaemic father of five, had died last year, so Tholly's closest blood relative was his daughter, Emma Hartnell, who kept The Bounders' Arms between Sawle Church and Fernmore. Thither Dwight went to express condolences and to ask hesitantly whether he might be allowed to open the body. Cornish folk, with religious leanings and a belief in The Last Trump, generally had the strongest objection to having any relative of theirs interfered with after death by the surgeons. It came too close to the idea of the Body Snatchers. But Dwight need not have been hesitant this time. 'You can have his *head* off for all I care,' was the reply. Emma, though a nice woman and a kind one, had never forgiven her father for having deserted them when they were young and left them to the Poor House.

So Dwight opened up the corpse and took out the cancerous tumour and carried it home in a jar, where he could dissect it and examine its structure under a slide in his microscope. It was that part of the profession of medicine which Caroline most detested, but she had been unable to cure him of it.

He was reaching some interesting conclusions on the nature of malignancy when to his annoyance Bone tapped on the door and said Music Thomas was here with the request that he should go urgently to Place House where his mistress, Mrs Valentine Warleggan, had met with a serious accident.

While Mr Pope was alive Dwight had been called not infrequently to emergencies in which the old man played the leading role, but since the young Warleggans came to live here there had been no such alarms. He went out to find Music standing on one foot and then on the other and looking anxious. Being an outdoor servant, he had no knowledge of the emergency except that he'd been told Mrs Warleggan had fallen and cut herself.

Since this *might* be a matter of life and death, Dwight grabbed up his case and swung into the saddle of the horse that had brought Music and galloped off, leaving Music to return as best he could.

He was met by Katie, who, more incoherent than usual, led him upstairs to that bedroom he knew so well, where Valentine was sitting beside Selina, who lay palely in bed, improvised bandages wrapped round both wrists.

'Ecod, it was in the bathroom,' said Valentine stiffly. 'I found her there. She

has lost a lot of blood.

Selina was fainting, but when Dwight touched her arm she opened her Siamese-blue eyes and looked her recognition – then she closed them again.

Her wrists had been thinly cut, just where the veins were most prominent, and blood still welled from the wounds.

Dwight sent for warm water, bathed the cuts, put a healing salve on – at which she winced – and gently bandaged both wrists, then gave her a light draught of Theban opium.

‘I don’t think it is very serious,’ he said reassuringly to Valentine, and to Selina who had sufficiently come round to swallow the draught. ‘Have you hurt yourself in any other way?’

She moved her lips sufficiently to say, ‘No.’

‘Did she fall?’ Dwight asked Valentine, though he had a fairly good idea of the truth.

‘No idea,’ said Valentine. ‘Damn me, she must have. The maid found her – Katie found her.’

Dwight stayed for another ten minutes talking to Valentine and watching his client; then he rose to leave.

‘I’ll come down with you,’ said Valentine. ‘Martha will sit with her.’

They went in to the summer parlour – which also had hardly changed since the tenure of the old man – and drank a glass of canary together. Dwight was anxious to get back to his microscope but he could not leave yet. As Valentine continued a casual conversation about Cambridge he was forced to broach the subject himself.

‘I suppose you know, Mr Warleggan, that the cuts on your wife’s wrists were almost certainly self-inflicted.’

Valentine crossed and uncrossed his long tapering legs. ‘I had that thought,’ he said.

Silence fell. Dwight finished his glass.

‘More canary?’ said Valentine.

‘No, thank you. I should be on my way.’

‘It really is quite outrageous,’ Valentine said. ‘My wife slashed her wrists because she was told I had been with another woman.’ He yawned. ‘What is a man to do?’

‘I take it her information is correct?’

‘Oh yes.’

After a moment Dwight said: ‘Well, I suppose you could refrain in future.’

The young man got up and refilled Dwight’s glass uninvited. Then he drank a second himself and poured out a third. ‘Refrain altogether? My dear Dr Enys! Isn’t that being a trifle naïve?’

Isn't that being a little naive:

'It depends what you want to make of your marriage.'

'This is a form of blackmail,' Valentine said, squinting at his glass. 'My wife threatens to kill herself in order to enforce my marriage vows! From what I could see, the cuts were not deep, were they?'

'Not deep. But a woman has to be distraught to attempt such a thing at all. And she might cut deeper next time.'

'Next time. Exactly! There lies the blackmail. Behave or I will destroy myself!'

'The matter could be put in a more sympathetic light.'

'No doubt. No doubt. Isn't it true, by the way, I think I have read it somewhere, that people who threaten suicide seldom succeed?'

'It's been said so. But have you ever tried to open the veins in your own wrists? It requires a deal of resolution to go even as far as she has this time.'

Valentine hunched his shoulders. 'It is all such a storm in a damned tea-cup. Blood and bones, it is not civilized to behave so!'

Dwight got up. 'Well, I must be off.'

'No, wait. Listen. Finish that canary. You are an old friend, by God. You have known my family for thirty years. If anyone has to hear the truth why should it not be you?'

From the window Dwight saw Music Thomas coming up the track from Trevaunance. It could not have taken him all this time to walk from Killewarren.

'When I married Selina I took her for better or worse and she took me the same. Eh? Eh? I am fully committed to her, as I have frequently told her. She is mine and I want to live with her for the rest of my life! I truly want that, bubble me if I don't. Everyone at marriage makes other vows – take unto me only thyself and forsaking all others – whatever the cursed words actually are. How few even keep that vow? How few?'

'Perhaps not—'

'My only defect is my honesty. A few months after we was wed I spelt all this out to her. I told her that she was far and above the most important woman in my life but that she could not expect to be the only one. I warned her of it and warned her of it, and damn me if she could bring herself to believe it! But ever since I was breeched I have been interested in girls – can't resist 'em. At the beginning every one is different, even if at the end every one is the same! I cannot change my nature, not even for the sake of a damned peaceful married life!'

Valentine was pacing slowly about the room, his long narrow face cynically intent. Dwight sipped his wine.

‘After we were married I had a couple of little affairs in Cambridge, nothing more. I imagine she knew about them. But that was over a period of *six months!* Most of the time I was as pure as a parson . . . But then when we came home for the summer vacation I met Polly Codrington. Have you met her?’

‘No.’

‘No, I don’t suppose you would have. Handsome creature, married to some dull clod of a squire in Kent – thirty years older than she is. She came to stay with Miss Darcy at Godolphin Hall. We met her, Selina and I, at the Pendarves’. She was only down for a month’s holiday, Polly was, and she had a roving eye. I caught it.’ Valentine sighed. ‘Mind you,’ he said, wishing to be reasonable with himself, ‘nothing blatant. We both tried to cover our tracks. Me for the reasons stated, Polly because Miss Darcy is a trifle strait in her lacing and Polly did not wish to upset the old dear. Well, we had a couple of meetings and then, not content, agreed to spend a night together at the Red Lion in Truro. I made the excuse that I wished to see my bank, she pretended she was staying with Harriet and my father – she is related to Harriet. And all went well. All went *very* well, I can tell you.’ Valentine licked his lips. ‘I am not known in Truro. She had never been before. And then in the morning, as we were coming down the staircase together, by the worst cursed contriving of Providence, who should be passing through the hallway but that evil foul scum of a boy, Conan Whitworth. You know who I mean?’

Dwight inclined his head.

‘Apparently this odious creature’s school was only breaking up that day, and of course he stopped and tried to talk, but I cut him short and hurried Polly off. By then the damage was done. The fat toad must at once have hurried home and told his equally odious grandmother, who must thereupon and with great relish have proceeded to spread it about the county!’

‘That does make it more difficult.’

‘Very much more, because you see – no doubt you do see – this hit at Selina’s self-esteem. However, there it is and the milk is spilt! A mistake like this could happen to *anyone!* But, blood and bones, it is no occasion for amateur dramatics, for slashing one’s *wrists* and pretending that our life together is over! Polly Codrington has now gone home to her stuffy husband in Kent and who knows if she will ever return? I am still Selina’s devoted husband and intend to remain so. When you come next – you’ll come tomorrow?’

‘Yes.’

‘When you come I wish you will try to bring my wife round to some more reasonable frame of mind – and to understanding my point of view.’

Dwight smiled. ‘You are asking more than I can perform.’

‘Well try, man, try. I know you cannot leech for a wounded *amour propre* but you can at least advise her how cursed silly it is to resort to such extravagant lengths!’

Chapter Five

I

When he came to leave, Katie was holding his horse. She smiled slyly at him, and he avoided looking at her thickening figure.

‘Where’s Music?’ he asked.

‘I sent him ’bout his business. He be too long coming ’ome. Wandered off, ’e had, to his own cottage I reckon, to feed all his chets.’

‘Don’t you like cats?’

‘Not so many as ’e’s got.’

He led his horse to the mounting stone and climbed into the saddle.

‘You are keeping well, Katie?’

‘Ais. Proper.’

‘Have you thought any more of my suggestion?’

‘Gestion?’

‘That you should marry Music.’

‘Nay,’ she said. ‘Wouldn’t do tha-at.’

He smiled at her. ‘You have told me you do not fancy him greatly as a husband, but he might well become an excellent father.’

A breeze was blowing strongly off the land, and she turned towards it so that her heavy black hair was lifted away from her face.

‘Ow do I know if he d’want to be a father to someone else’s brat or no? ’E haven’t said nothing to me.’

Dwight’s horse stamped the ground, ready to be off.

‘I hear John Thomas has gone to live with Winkey and Peter Mitchell.’

‘Ais. He might just so well’ve gone years ago, mightn’t ’e.’

‘So Music is alone in the cottage.’

‘Cept for the chets. Tha’s why he’m always shrimping off to feed ’em; there’s no one else now. But ’tesn right, I d’say. Chets is independent. Chets can forage for themselves. Don’t need some poor mazed man stealing time off to feed ’em.’

‘It is not a bad little cottage,’ Dwight said. ‘Of course it has been much

It is not a bad little cottage, Dwight said. Of course it has been much neglected.'

'Tis a rare old jakes.'

'But could be done up, put to rights. At present there is no incentive.'

'Please?'

'At present there is no one interested in it; no one to work for. Music put up some shelves for me last month. He's none too bad a man with his hands.'

'Tisn't his hands that are weak,' said Katie with a short laugh. 'Tis his 'ead.'

'Which is improving all the time. He's trying very hard, Katie. Talk to him sometime instead of shouting at him. You'd be surprised.'

II

The following evening Katie unexpectedly had to go to the stables, and Music was there alone and put the question.

At least he mouthed something in a sweaty stutter in which the word 'wed' recurred too frequently for Katie to misunderstand him.

She stared at him in contempt.

'Ave ee been at the bottle, ye great lootal?'

'N-nay! Not so! I'm so sober as a judge. Honest! God's honour, Katie!'

'Then ye did oughter be *'shamed* of yourself, thinking such lewd thoughts! *Me wed you?* Why I'd 'ave as much use for you as a toad for a side pocket!'

Music cringed, his knees shaking. Then with a sudden burst of bravado he said: 'I dearly love bebbies. Bebbies I d'like. I dearly love the dear sweet sights.'

'You've got plenty of babies,' said Katie. 'All them chets. Look to them.' Then in vexation she added: 'I d'know who's been putting you up to this monkery! 'Tis Surgeon Enys. Well, he'm a good man, but 'tis no consarn of 'is what I d'do or don't do. And 'tis no business of yours neether!'

'Ais, Katie,' said Music humbly, and 'No, Katie.' And 'Yes, Katie,' again. He could not meet her indignant glare.

Katie would have liked at this stage to have flounced out of the stables, but she was not the flouncing sort: her step was too heavy. And, seeing the big young man looking so miserable and sweaty, she said: 'Tis all well meant, I dare suppose, on both 'is side and on yourn. Who'm I to be so hoity seeing as to what I've done and the trouble that have come 'pon me? Still, there you be. 'Tis no more'n I deserve, and I'll tek my draught wi'out help from no one.'

'I be strong,' said Music, finding his voice again. 'Strong. All ways. All ways, see. God's truth. I'd labour for you and the bebbie. *Tha's* no more'n you

deserve.'

Katie continued to stare at him from under black, contracted eyebrows.

'Giss along wi' you,' she said at last. 'You can't come mopping wi' me. You're 'alf saved. You know you're 'alf saved. Can't do nothing 'bout that. Even Surgeon can't. Look to your chets, Music. I'll see for myself.'

III

As soon as Clowance heard that her father was home she had to see him. She also felt that Stephen had to go, and Stephen, still in the flush of euphoria, reluctantly agreed. They rode over and stayed two nights.

Clowance was as shocked in the appearance of her father as she had been of her mother, and the visit was a difficult one. Again Stephen was on his best behaviour and did not let his lack of interest in people a generation older than himself show in any discourteous way. He was quite fond of his mother-in-law who had continued until recently to be such a pretty woman and tolerated a father-in-law who was a distinguished man and notable in the county.

Sir Ross, it seemed, had no particular plans for his own future, and intended to live quietly for the next year or two. He had given notice that he would resign his parliamentary seat as soon as Lord Falmouth found it convenient. Lady Poldark spent most of her time in the garden, where the energy she expended was like a counter-irritant to her grief.

Isabella-Rose, fresh-faced from school, was more subdued than anyone had ever known her. Not only was she mourning for her beloved brother with whom she had had a delightful jesting relationship, but she was also deeply upset because her other beloved, Christopher Havergal, had lost a leg. After such cruelty she said she could never sing again.

After dinner on the first day, Stephen and Clowance rode over to Trenwith, but there they found only Drake and Morwenna and Loveday. Mrs Amadora Poldark had just left with her baby daughter for Paris to join her husband, who was to be stationed there as part of the army of occupation. Amadora had been over several times to see the Poldarks and had told them of her summons, but Demelza had mistaken the week she was leaving.

Then they rode on to Place House and drew a second blank. Selina was in bed with a feverish chill and had been told to see no one; Valentine was in Redruth.

In the evening Dwight and Caroline invited them all to supper, which made for a much more cheerful evening than could possibly have taken place at Nampara. Daisy and Paul Kellow had also been invited, and it was a talkative

party if not a jolly one.

While carefully avoiding Waterloo, they asked a lot about the months Ross and Demelza had spent in Paris before Napoleon's escape. Ross was incredulously angry that Fouché should have now been elected President of the Provisional Government and had negotiated with the Allies for the capitulation of Paris. There was talk of his even being reappointed Chief of Police in Louis the Eighteenth's new government. 'It cannot be allowed to go on!' Ross said. 'This evil creature must be thrown out!'

'Perhaps Jodie will see to it in due time,' Demelza said. She had had two letters recently from Mlle de la Blache, the second one from Paris, repeating an invitation that they should visit there again, now the bad time was over. Henri, Jodie thankfully reported, was safe and well. She could never thank Demelza enough for her help on that terrible escape, or be more appreciative of Isabella-Rose's innocent but vital intervention.

It was a long time since Stephen and Paul had seen each other, and the old conspirators privately exchanged congratulations, Stephen on his successful adventure at sea, Paul on his potentially successful adventure in the marriage market. They spoke of Jeremy with regret, but, being young, the thought of him being dead and dust and corruption did not so greatly worry them. Death to them was something that happened to somebody else.

Daisy, who had always had great hopes of Jeremy until he became besotted with Cuby, did not appear to repine at all. With the dreaded wasting disease having taken off two of her sisters, she lived too close to the tomb to be overawed by it.

The next day Stephen and Clowance rode home together, Stephen feeling the satisfaction of having performed a tedious duty and the pleasure of returning to the town he had made his own and where his livelihood was always going to be. He had avoided meeting Ben, and need not now go back to the north coast for six months or more. The north coast was a backwater, a dead end, and those who lived there were welcome to it. The future lay in the Channel.

'Look you,' he said, 'being around and about the way I am, I hear all sorts of bits of news that don't become public till they're stale. Yesterday I heard that Coombes's cottage in Flushing was for sale. 'Member him? He worked in the Customs House. Wife died last year; he died Wednesday. Son don't want the cottage, will put it up for sale next month. Reckon if someone went along, offered seventy-five pound, quick sale, money down, he'd take it.'

'Is it the one at the end of the row?'

'Next to the end. The one with the white front door. I have a mind to buy it.'

'For us?'

'No, dear heart, not for us. The building of our house restarted last week. I thought to buy it for Andrew.'

Clowance was starded. You mean . . .'

'He's overdue now, should be home any day. He wants to get wed – he has no money. I thought to give it to them as a wedding present.'

Their horses separated, and it gave her time to take in what he had said.

'Stephen, that *is* generous of you! You are so kind – I'm sure he will be delighted, overwhelmed.'

'Well, he could feel aggrieved that he did not come on our venture, eh?, feel he had missed a big bonus. He can look on it that this is his share.'

Clowance said: 'I can't kiss you, but I will later. Thank you for such a generous thought.'

Stephen laughed heartily. 'And if he don't want it, I can sell it again. But I wouldn't give him the money – he might not keep it for his marriage portion!'

'I conceit Tamsin will sober him up. He'll have responsibilities. I'm told his father gambled and drank too much when he was young.'

'Eh well, ye would not think so to look at him now, would ye.' Stephen flicked at his horse to quicken its step. 'This old nag . . . Next thing is to find me a hunter. I shall wait now till St Erme Cattle Fair in two weeks' time. They say there's some good horseflesh coming up.'

'Let me come with you,' said Clowance. 'I haven't lived on a farm all my life for nothing.'

'Wouldn't go without you,' said Stephen.

They rode on.

IV

Dwight had seen Selina the following day and then called a week later, at her request. No confidences were exchanged, and it would have been against his professional ethics to invite them. Nor, had she told him the facts, would he have been prepared to put Valentine's point of view. On this third visit, when he found her up and about, she spoke rather sheepishly of her clumsiness in breaking the glasses, and attempted to demonstrate to him how she had fallen forward, cutting both wrists at the same time. The amount of blood she had lost was little, and the dark rings under her eyes were no doubt concerned with the cause of the accident, not the accident itself.

He sat chatting for a few minutes, discussing the arrival off Plymouth of the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte as a prisoner of the British in HMS *Bellerophon*.

Selina was of the opinion that he was being treated with too great a respect – it was said that every officer, English and French, uncovered when he came on deck and that the harbour was swarming with small boats trying to get a glimpse of him. Dwight said he was not sure as to the amount of respect he deserved. It was true that, but for him, many thousands of good young men – including one very near and dear to them all – would be alive. But it was the custom of the British to show respect for their fallen enemies and, as well as being a terrible scourge, which everyone admitted, Bonaparte was a great man. For instance the Civil Code which he had introduced into France would probably provide a model for future generations.

On this Valentine arrived, having been out riding. Conversation abruptly lagged, and then Selina, smiling too brightly at Dwight, asked to be excused.

After she had gone Valentine said: ‘Not drinking? My wife has caught some of the parsimonious habits of her former husband. I swear you did not like the canary you had before. This is a very good Mountain, shipped direct from Malaga. Try a glass.’

Dwight tried a glass, and for a while talk continued on the subject of the late Emperor.

Then Valentine said: ‘Tell me, Dr Enys. What did my mother die of?’

Dwight thought cautiously round the sudden change of subject: ‘She died in childbirth. Your sister—’

‘Ursula was born on the 10th of December. My mother did not die until the 14th.’

‘It is not uncommon, if something goes amiss, for the mother to survive a few days.’

‘Do you know what went amiss?’

‘She died of blood poisoning,’ said Dwight shortly.

‘Was that why she smelt so bad?’

Dwight looked up, startled.

Valentine said: ‘Well, you see, I was nearly six at the time. They would not let me into her room but the smell escaped into the passage. It is a smell I have never been able to forget.’

There was an uneasy silence. Dwight said: ‘I am sorry you were allowed near. The disagreeable smell was due to a putrid condition of the blood.’

Valentine resumed his ramshackle pacing. ‘You will excuse these questions, Dr Enys, but you have been a friend of the family, and their physician, long before I was born and you must know more about my family than almost anyone alive.’

‘I have known your family for thirty years but I have not been their physician.

Your father always had the Truro man, Dr Behenna, and he was engaged to wait on your mother when Ursula was born. I was called in because labour began prematurely while she was still at Trenwith.'

'Prematurely?'

'Yes.'

'I too was a premature baby. Eight months, I understand.'

'I understand so.'

'And so became the cause of great dissension between my father and my mother.'

'I do not know what gave you that impression.'

'A six-year-old boy is not without perception, especially where his parents are concerned.'

'No. Maybe not. But . . .'

'It is good, this wine, isn't it,' said Valentine. 'My wife's money enables me to live off the fat of the land, so no doubt a more moral man than I am would feel obliged to adhere more obviously to his marriage vows.'

'That is for you to decide—'

'I wonder if my mother adhered to her marriage vows?'

Dwight finished his wine and got up. 'I don't think I can help you on this subject, Mr Warleggan.'

'You cannot have lived in these villages for so long without knowing that nothing is ever kept permanently secret. My problem is remembering what I knew in my heart as a child and what I have heard in sidelong whispers since. What I do know . . . Pray sit down again.'

Dwight reluctantly sat on the edge of a chair but waved away an attempt to refill his glass. He appreciated that under the surface gloss Valentine was speaking of something that had been gathering a long time in his heart.

'As a child I soon came to see that I was the bone of contention between my parents. Sometimes all would be apparently well, and then a word would be dropped, a shadow of some sort would be cast – and it always involved me. Sometimes for a month at a time my father would not speak to me, would not even look at me. I might have been some leprous monstrosity which had to be ignored and shunned. Unclean! Unclean! Of course my mother was not like that. Her loving care for me never wavered . . . Naturally all this did not make for a happy childhood.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Did you know that my parents had a violent quarrel only a day or two before Ursula was born?'

'No, I did not.'

'D'ye know, I have a pretty clear memory of the events of December '99. We had been in London and rather happy there. At least, my mother seemed to be, and that reflected on me. She had got much fatter, and I did not understand that, but my father was in a good mood and I was happy with some new toys. I remember specially a rocking horse. I wonder what happened to that? Suddenly it all changed – as it had done sometimes in the past, but never so badly as this – and I felt I was guilty of some terrible sin. We journeyed back to Cornwall, and I remember I was coachsick most of the way. It is not at all agreeable, my dear Dr Enys, being coachsick at the best of times, but when your father looks his utter disgust – indeed hatred – at every fresh retch . . .

'When we reached Truro influenza, scarlet fever and dysenteries were raging, so my mother took me off to Trenwith to see her parents and to keep me out of infection's way. Smelter George stayed behind. It was a dark month. Do you remember it at all?'

'Very well.'

'Trenwith was monstrous dark. It might have been haunted. Do you remember the great storm that blew up during that first week?'

'Yes.'

'It was one of the worst storms that had ever been, but, child-like, I found it vastly exciting. The servants we had, Tom and Bettina – d'you know, I cannot remember their surnames – they took me out to see the sea at Trevaunance; they got a good wiggling afterwards for taking me, for roofs were blowing off and branches falling. But suddenly at supper that night my father turned up with a face like fury. I was so excited out of my usual fear of him that I tried to tell him about the storm. He snapped back at me as if I were an evil thing, and I was sent instantly to bed – in something of a temper myself, I may say.'

Valentine picked a piece of ore off the mantelshelf, weighed it appreciatively in his hand. 'Early assays on Wheal Elizabeth are promising – copper very obvious, but signs also of tin and zinc.'

'Very promising.'

'That night,' said Valentine, 'after I had been put to bed and the candle blown out, I got up again and padded along to my mother's bedroom. But I did not go in. My parents were both there and in the midst of one of their bitterest quarrels. I listened to it all, taking in words but not comprehending them. Only since. Only since, remembering the words, have I gathered their meaning. It seemed that George Warleggan thought he was not my father.'

Dwight frowned. 'Are you sure you remembered the words correctly, that you did not misinterpret the causes of the quarrel? Children can so often mistake these things.'

'Do you remember to tell me that your father was never kind and kind to his children . . .

‘Do you mean to tell me that you have never heard whispered doubts in these villages about my parentage?’

‘There is always tittle-tattle in villages, Mr Warleggan. Most of it is entirely invented and should be ignored.’

Valentine pushed back his hair. His vivid eccentric manner was at odds with this rather stuffy room, furnished by his elderly predecessor.

‘When Ursula was born George Warleggan came into my bedroom to tell me. I was terrified – he had never been into my room for as long as I could remember. But now – for some reason – it was as if the storm – his storm – had passed. He actually patted my hand, told me about my sister, said that my mother was well but must rest in bed for a few days. He talked to me about going to school, about the recent gale, almost as if no enmity had existed between us. I could make nothing of it, remained frozen to his touch. Children cannot change as quickly as all that. I was relieved when he left. I only wanted to see my mother again. This, of course, I did, and also Ursula, but the day after that my mother was taken ill – and the day after that she died.’

Through the open window you could hear the children calling to their cattle in the fields. A horse whinnied in the nearby stables.

Dwight said: ‘Your mother was delivered prematurely of a perfectly healthy child. I delivered the child. I did not see your mother again for two days, as Dr Behenna arrived and took charge. Then when I was called in again I was appalled at the sight of her illness. Do not misunderstand me, this could not have been the result of any mistaken treatment Dr Behenna prescribed. Had I seen the complaint earlier I would have diagnosed it more quickly, but could not have halted it.’

‘And the complaint was?’

‘I have told you. A form of blood poisoning.’

‘Gangrene, wasn’t it? I have read books.’

‘A form of blood poisoning.’

‘Caused by what?’

Dwight thought: almost certainly by drinking part of the contents of a little bottle I still have in my cupboard at home. He had no means of analysing it, but he had tasted it and could make a reasonable guess at some of the ingredients. But never could he say anything of this to any human being, least of all to Elizabeth’s son.

‘Dr Behenna described it as an acute gouty condition of the abdominal viscera which manifested itself in cramp-like spasms and inhibition of the nerve fluids.’

‘Do you believe all that medical flummery? You are, after all, well known to be the most advanced and knowledgeable physician in the south-west.’

Dwight stared at the tensed up young man. ‘However knowledgeable any one

Dwight stared at the tensed-up young man. 'However knowledgeable any one of us is, we struggle in the dark, Mr Warleggan. We know so little of the human body, even after centuries of practice and experience.'

He might have added: And of the mind, Mr Warleggan, and of the mind.

Chapter Six

I

Ellery and Vigus had dropped hints about it at the changing of the cores, though they hadn't dared to face him out. But Peter Hoskin was a more substantial character and when he made a sort of side reference to it he tackled him in the changing shed.

'Well, I dunno narthing 'bout en,' said Peter. "'Tis only what I been telled. Beth Daniel fur one. And others. But it edn naught to do wi' me, Ben.'

'If it edn't naught to do wi' you,' said Ben, 'why don't ee keep yer big trap shut!'

'I don't see as you've any call to take on so,' said Peter testily. 'Why don't ee ask her? She'll soon tell ee nay if tedn truth.'

Katie was normally home on Tuesday afternoon, that being her afternoon off; though she had seen much less of her parents' shop since her disgrace. Jinny, her mother, being a good and respectable Wesleyan, had not taken kindly to a situation in which her daughter should now be preparing to bear a bastard child without making any attempt to bring the scoundrel to justice who was responsible for her condition.

Ben went along and found Katie at home helping her mother to cut up the rhubarb for jam.

Whitehead Scoble, their step-father, was now very deaf and was dominated by Jinny who, though of a naturally amiable disposition, had hardened and toughened with the years.

'Well,' said Katie defiantly, 'what if 'tis true? 'Tis my consarn, no one's else.'

'Lord save us!' said Ben between his teeth, 'ye cann't mean it, Katie. Ye cann't. Wed to the village idiot! For land's sake, don't that beat all!'

'I don't see you need to get in such a niff,' said Katie. 'He's not such a noodle as he belonged to be. Ye give a man a name and it d'hang round his neck like a dog collar all 'is life. Besides . . .'

'Besides what?'

''Tis the child to think on.'

I ve the child to think on.

'E'll thank ye, sure 'nough, 'e truly will – or she – to be give a father that don't know the time o' day or whether 'tis Christmas or Easter! If you wed a pattick like Music ye'll have to keep three 'stead of two—'

'He've got a cottage.'

'Oh, so you're wedden the cottage, are ee—'

'I never said that! I never said nothing o' the sort . . . Anyway, 'tis my life and I shall lead it as I think fit—'

'But 'tis *not* fitty. Wi' all the village a-sniggering to bust. They're whispering and sniggering at the mine already. Why, folk'll jeer at *you* not at him—'

'Oh, leave the maid alone,' said Jinny. 'She've dug her own pit – let her lie in it!'

'What's that?' said Whitehead. 'What's that you say?' He began to light his nose warmer from a spill thrust between the bars of the fire. A cloud of smoke from the shag drifted across the room.

'You mean t'say you don't *mind*?' Ben turned on his mother.

'Course I mind! But I mind the disgrace the more. If I had my way I'd have that Saul Grieves fetched back from wherever he be skulking and *forced* into church. What he did with his self after that would be his consarn. But this way he d'get off fine and free and leave Katie to bear the consequences!'

'I've told ee,' Katie said, near to tears but not giving way. 'I'd never marry Saul Grieves, not if he was to come on bended knee. Music's just a makeshift. But 'twill make the child legal and give him a name.'

'Well, don't expect *me* to acknowledge Music as me brother-in-law! You must be half saved yerself, Katie, to think on such a thing. What do Grandfather and Grandmother say? They'll spit. I reckon they'll spit.'

Jinny came across to him. 'Don't you go upsetting Granfer and Gran, else I'll give you something to think 'bout, Ben! They're old, and when the time d'come I'll go and tell 'em what I think best they should know. But until then, you keep your spleen to yourself!'

'They'll know about it soon enough,' said Ben. 'You'll find some kind friend'll be along any day, if mebbe they don't already know. Anyway, I'd not like to be there when you d'tell 'em!'

He left the room, and they heard the shop door slam as he went out.

'What was amiss with him?' asked Whitehead. 'He was in a rare taking. I suppose he don't like the idea of Katie wedding Music?'

Andrew Blarney returned in the *Queen Charlotte* after a stormy voyage which had taken twice as long as expected and in which they had been attacked by, and driven off, a big American privateer that had not yet apparently become aware of the Peace Treaty of Ghent. He accepted Stephen's gift of the cottage with uproarious pleasure, and they celebrated it at a little supper-party in the Carringtons' cottage, Tamsin being there chaperoned by her brother George. Consent to the marriage by her parents had not yet been given, but everyone at the supper assumed it would only be a matter of time.

Grown expansive on the Rhenish wine, Stephen went into more details of his privateering escapade than Clowance had heard before. In particular when the French soldier had fired point blank at him and the cap had failed to detonate. Stephen now treated it as a great joke, but it had been the luckiest escape from certain death. Clowance could not help but think of another and longer conflict, and wish that the rain had continued at Waterloo.

It seemed that Andrew had enjoyed his trip in the *Queen Charlotte*. In spite of his joviality, Andrew was not the easiest of men to get on with, and so it was notable that he had found an accord with the grumpy Captain Buller. Something in Andrew's character had responded to the stern discipline of his captain, and something in the way he had responded had pleased and satisfied Buller. The success of the voyage radiated through Andrew's spirits, and though he drank plenty he did not become noticeably drunk. They made gay plans for a day next week when they would visit the new cottage together.

On the Friday Stephen and Clowance rode out to St Erme, whose annual cattle and horse fair was the biggest in the county, and Stephen paid what Clowance thought an outrageous price for a handsome dark bay gelding, 'the property of an officer recently fallen at Waterloo'. The two men selling the horse told Stephen that they would get a far better price at Tattersall's but they were selling locally to avoid the cost of the travelling. Moses, as he was called, was a very big animal – seventeen hands – and was clearly accustomed to hunting. A six-year-old, they said, and Stephen could not take his eyes off it. As well as being good at persuading himself that what he wanted was right, he had a similar tendency to believe the persuasiveness of others; and the sale was soon completed.

They rode through Truro and back to Falmouth in triumph, Clowance on Nero leading the hired horse. Even if he has paid too much for it, she thought, it's his money, won by his enterprise, why shouldn't he have the enjoyment? Just as he enjoyed giving me the necklace. Just as he has enjoyed giving the cottage to Andrew. (I hope he has as much money as he says. I hope – I do hope and pray – he will know when to say stop.)

III

The courtship of Music and Katie did not follow a conventional pattern.

For one thing, they did not look at each other as affianced people should. Music gazed constantly at Katie, his pale puzzled eyes gleaming with happiness – he was in his seventh heaven only because there was not an eighth – but he never let his gaze fall below her face. He became alert and experienced in interpreting the nuances of her expressions – which boded ill for him, which tolerance, which – very rarely – liking or approval. He never allowed his gaze to travel anywhere below her chin, for he knew without ever having been told that her corporeal presence lower than the neck was not for him. It was unthinkable territory.

For her part, although she quite frequently spoke to him, she always kept her eyes lowered, as if to reduce within herself the shame of such a match. To meet his adoring eyes would have been to establish a contact, an intimacy which could, of course, never be allowed to establish itself. She went to his cottage, walked around it, made comments, a few suggestions, which he eagerly agreed to. In the end she found he only had four cats. Tom, one of the scabby tabby toms, had been caught in a gin at the beginning of the year, so all that were left were Tabby, Ginger, Blackie and Whitey, which was certainly more than she wanted, but Music was so obviously devoted to them that she decided to tolerate them. In the harsh cat world of Grambler, wastage would no doubt take one or another off in due time, so long as she was absolutely firm about admitting newcomers.

Music went about in a dream world, working every spare moment he could get away from Place House, which was little enough, putting new thatch on part of the roof, clearing out the smelly fishing-tackle, hanging the back door on new hasps so that it would shut properly, mending the broken windows, repairing the fire bars, cleaning out the jakes and laying stones to it across the dusty scrub of the yard. In his excitement he had to be careful not to walk on his toes again or let his voice break into its upper register.

One day when he was trying to repair the table leg his older brother John walked in. He had come over to see what was going on. They were neither of them men of many words, and after a few grunted monosyllables of greeting John spat on the floor and thrust his hands into the upper pockets of his breeches and watched Music trying to get the table to stand steady without rocking.

‘When’ll ye wed?’ he asked presently.

‘Dunno.’

‘I’ve heard tell ’tis to be the 1st October.’

I've already told us to be the 1st October.

'Mebbe.'

'What Katie says goes, eh?'

'Mebbe.' Music stopped to scowl at his table. 'Ais, I reckon. What Katie says goes.'

'Know ye she's only marryin' ye on account that she's forced put?'

'I reckon.'

'It don't fret ye that ee be going to be fathur to Saul Grieves's child?'

'Tes Katie's child. That's for sure.'

'Aye, that's for sure. What do Art say?'

'Aven't asked 'im.'

'Nay, ye wouldn't. Well, I tell ee what ee d'say. He say you're all mops an' brooms where Katie's consarned. She cares for you no more than for a pail of muggets. 'Tis just convenience. That's what 'tis, Music. Just convenience.'

Music stretched up. 'Aye?'

'Aye. He also d'say, and 'tis the very truth of the matter, that we all three on us own part o' this yur cottage. So if you be gwan set up house wi' this woman and 'ave her child, 'tis no more'n right 'n proper that you d'pay a rent to we.'

'What?'

John Thomas repeated his words, aware that Music was not taking them in. Eventually Music said: 'You mun ast Katie.'

'Aye, I thought so much. Ast Katie. She'll run ee round like a cocket, I'll tell ee for certain, I sorrow for ee, Music. I sorrow for ee.'

'Ais?' Music smiled. 'Well I bain't sorrowing for meself, see?'

After a few weeks the whispering and the sniggering died down, and people began to accept the match. Music, though a big strong young man, was weak-willed and easily sat on and very sensitive to ridicule. Katie was a big strong young girl, not at all weak-willed, and, when she was among her own kind, a formidable presence. Folk didn't laugh in her face and she cared little for what was said behind her back. Also there was the distant Poldark connection. Her brother was underground captain of Wheal Grace and Wheal Leisure. Her mother had worked for the Poldarks for a long time, a long time ago, and so had her father. Her grandfather, Zacky Martin, who had been a semi-invalid for years, had been Cap'n Poldark's righthand man through the early troublous years and still lived in Mellin, hard by Nampara. An uncle and an aunt, no older than she was, were employed at Nampara, in the house and on the farm.

It counted for something in the village. It made the enormity of the match greater but it made criticism of it more subdued.

A conversation concerning it took place that evening at Nampara where Demelza for the first time since her return had Dwight and Caroline to supper

Demelza, for the first time since her return, had Dwight and Caroline to supper. For this evening only Isabella-Rose had been asked if she would have supper upstairs.

‘It is not that we have anything private to discuss that we don’t wish you to hear,’ Demelza said to her. ‘It is just that we are four old friends, of an age; we have not met like this for so long. We would feel the same if Clowance were here or – or anyone else.’

Bella kissed her. ‘One day I shall be grown up and then I shall have nothing more to do with you.’

They ate a piece of fresh salmon, fricasseed rabbits, a blackcurrant pie and syllabubs, with cherries after. At one time Demelza had been a little on edge even when entertaining such old friends; now perhaps her stay in Paris and later at Lansdowne House made things easier; one didn’t worry about a servant’s gaffe. Or perhaps it was that one no longer cared.

The meal went easily and pleasantly; the room became a little corner of comfort in a black world.

Mention of Zacky Martin brought it up. Ross said Zacky was scandalized and upset by his granddaughter’s disgrace, and now by her crazy decision to marry the village idiot.

‘He’s by no means that,’ Dwight said, sharply for him. ‘In fact he never was. Slow-witted and amiable, certainly, and at one time he rather enjoyed being the butt of the village. It was a sort of fame. But in the last few years he’s been trying to grow out of it.’

‘Dwight has been very good to him,’ said Caroline. ‘Spent hours with him.’

‘Half an hour a week at most,’ said Dwight. ‘But he came and asked what was wrong with him. I was surprised. Village idiots, as they are called, don’t usually realize there is anything wrong with themselves; they think it is other people who are at fault. So I thought I would spend an hour or two testing his capacities. I found nothing wrong, physically. He has a good alto voice – but so have other normal people. When he was a child one of his brothers pushed him into the fire and he burnt his feet, chiefly his heels. He got into the habit of walking on his toes, but now he has got out of it. Mentally he’s slow. But so are a number of his friends. Recently he has learned to count, and if he concentrates he can tell the time. He knows the months of the year now, and he’s good with animals and clever with his hands. It may not be a lot, but I think he is sufficiently normal to have the right to live a normal life.’

‘I suspicion that Dwight has been the matchmaker,’ said Demelza.

‘I’m not guiltless. But in this company . . . It is likely that Caroline and I would never have come together again if it had not been for that man’s interference.’

‘It’s too long ago,’ said Ross. ‘I deny responsibility. But if it comes to matchmaking, Demelza is in the forefront of us all.’

‘Well,’ said Demelza, and blew a cherry stone genteelly into her fist, ‘that’s as maybe. But d’you know, the one I regret was the match I *didn’t* make. Betwixt my brother Sam and Emma Tregirls, as she then was. There was such a gap – Sam’s religion, you know – so I suggested they should part for a year . . . Emma went to Tehidy. But before the year was up she married the footman there, Hartnell, and so it was too late for Sam’s happiness.’

‘He’s happy married now,’ said Ross. ‘So is Emma. I do not think it could ever have worked . . . But seriously, Dwight, if you think well of Music Thomas, I wish you might find time to call and see Zacky and Mrs Zacky. They would take greater notice of what you said, and it might set their minds more easy.’

‘I will. I would take Music with me, but I know he would be so sweatily nervous that he would show to the worst advantage.’

‘If ee please, mum,’ said Betsy Maria Martin, of that ilk, coming in. ‘Henry d’say you promised to go up and tell him good-night.’

‘So I did,’ said Demelza. ‘I’ll come in five minutes.’

Supper was all but over, but they stayed round the table chatting in the desultory way that Demelza so enjoyed. Caroline had sent her two daughters to an expensive school in Newton Abbot but she was not satisfied with it and was considering keeping them at home again and employing a teacher-governess.

‘We want someone like your Mrs Kemp,’ said Caroline. ‘Someone with a rod, if not of iron, at least of birch, to stop Dwight spoiling them.’

‘Oh Mrs Kemp was wonderful in Paris,’ said Demelza. ‘She was a rock. But do not suppose that she is so highly educated that she would suit for Sophie and Meliora. Have you asked Mrs Pelham’s advice?’

‘Oh my dear darling aunt is at last showing signs of age, and although she loves to have us all there I do not think she would willingly undertake the semi-permanent custody of my two lanky brats.’

‘I wasn’t thinking that. I was thinking she might know someone. You need someone more like Morwenna, who was so good with Geoffrey Charles.’

They sipped their port. Then Demelza rose.

‘Well, I suppose I must not keep Henry waiting.’

‘The future Sir Harry,’ said Caroline.

‘Yes, that’s so.’

‘Though I trust a long way in the future. And always I suppose subject to whether Cuby’s child is a boy or a girl.’

‘Oh?’ said Demelza. ‘Oh, yes.’

‘Have you heard from Cuby?’ Dwight asked Ross.

'I think she plans to come down next month.'

IV

In bed that night Demelza said: 'Is that true, what Caroline said about Cuby's baby?'

'What was that?'

'That if it should be a boy, he would inherit the title, not Henry.'

'Yes, I suppose so. Does it matter?'

Demelza thought it over.

Ross said: 'It is of little moment to me that I should have a title to pass on. Do you care?'

'I'm not sure, Ross. I think I do. I certainly care that you have a title, as you know. And Cuby's son is your grandson, and it would be well enough if he inherited. But . . . I think that Henry is your *son*, and it would be more proper for him to have it.'

'Maybe. I hadn't thought. It is not important. Anyway nature will make up its own mind.'

The window was open on the warm night, and a moth flew in. It began to make perilous circuitous reconnaissances round the candle.

'Old Maggie Dawe used to call 'em meggyhowlers,' said Demelza.

'What? Oh, did she? That's a name even Jud didn't know.'

'Have you seen him since you came home?'

'No. I must go tomorrow.'

'I went early on, but it was in the first shock and I do not suppose I was as attentive to their complaints as usual.'

After a pause Ross said: 'Did you know that Cuby was in Cornwall?'

'No! Is she coming here?'

'I avoided a direct answer when Caroline asked. Cuby promised to come here for the birth of her child, but that is three months off. She is staying at Caerhays with her family.'

'Oh.'

'She did not mention it when I left her. Perhaps there has been a change of plan.'

'Who told you?'

'I saw John-Evelyn Boscawen in Truro yesterday. He knew Jeremy well, of course. They were of an age. He assumed I knew about Cuby.'

Demelza thought this over too. 'I think she might have written.'

‘Perhaps she will.’

‘She was some nice to me when I was in Brussels.’

‘She may feel a few weeks at home will be good for her first. She was still in a state of shock.’

‘We all are.’

‘Indeed.’

‘Shall you go over and see her, Ross?’

‘Oh no. I think the decision to communicate with us must come from her. We must give her time.’

‘Time,’ said Demelza. ‘Yes, I suppose we all have lots of time . . .’

In the warm night you could hear the thunder of the sea on the beach. It was there almost all the time but only on quiet nights did it penetrate to one’s consciousness. ‘*Rum-a-dum-dum,*’ said Ross to himself. ‘*Rum-a-dum-dum.*’ Pray God that sound would never be heard again.

‘What were you muttering?’ Demelza asked.

‘I was cursing under my breath.’

‘What for?’

‘Because I have to get up and push your meggyhowler out of the window. Its suicidal tendencies will prevent me from going to sleep.’

‘Put out the candle.’

‘Then it will flutter round our faces in the dark.’

‘Looking for another flame,’ said Demelza.

Chapter Seven

Moses was a good mount. He was mettlesome and took some controlling at first but after a week or so he took to his new owner. Stephen was not the easiest of riders: he didn't really know how to gentle a horse along, persuading him instead of ordering him, he didn't talk to him enough. (When Clowance, the unloquacious, rode with Nero alone she talked to him all the time.) But they came to understand each other. It is probable that Moses' former owner, if he was a cavalry officer as well as a huntsman, had treated his horse well, ridden it hard, and lacked finesse. If so Moses, who had a hard mouth, recognized a new and similar-minded master. 'Geldings always make the best jumpers,' Stephen said.

He was delighted. He was noticeable on this horse wherever he went. He temporarily neglected his shipping interests and galloped each morning with Clowance over the moors west of Falmouth. He couldn't wait for the next hunting season to begin. He couldn't wait to show his horse to Harriet.

An opportunity for this occurred earlier than he had expected. Sid Bunt had put in to Penryn, and after reporting and checking his stores he was off with the *Lady Clowance* like the delivery van he was, to complete a half-dozen commissions up the Fal.

Most of these were workaday, but the big house at Trelassick had ordered a harp and two paintings, two late Opies – the painter had been dead several years but his work was becoming still more prized. Stephen was interested enough to see that these all travelled well, and in the ordinary course of events, if he had been free of his other vessels, he would have sailed with the *Lady Clowance* as far as King Harry Ferry for the off-loading. This time, because he was so proud of his horse, he rode overland to meet the *Lady Clowance* there. He superintended the landing of the cargo and met the owner of the house and took a glass of sherry with him before he started for home, full of the satisfaction of having made one more influential acquaintance.

Trelassick is not far from Cardew but it is separated from it by the Carnon Stream. Having dropped down to stream level and crossed by the old bridge, he

scream. Having dropped down to stream level and crossed by the old bridge, he let Moses amble along at his own pace enjoying the sunshine and the warm air. On impulse he turned into Carnon Wood, remembering the hunt had once taken them through there, and the hair-raising ride – almost literally hair-raising – they had had among the low branches. The wood was not above twenty acres in extent but it had only one decent path through it and a clearing with a workman's hut, part ruined, in the middle. At an earlier season the ground was ablaze with bluebells and wild daffodils. Rabbits abounded and lots of game – hares, badgers, woodcock, snipe.

As he came into the clearing he saw a woman pacing cautiously round the perimeter. She was tall and well dressed, in a purple riding cap and waistcoat with nankeen-coloured skirt, worn short enough to show purple shoes and embroidered stockings. It was Lady Harriet Warleggan. Her rich black hair was in a queue. She carried a riding crop.

'Harriet!' called Stephen in surprise.

She stopped and looked at him, scowling into the sun. At first she did not look well pleased as he rode up and dismounted, taking off his hat.

'Well, well, so it is our conquering hero!'

'What a vastly agreeable surprise!' he said, taking her gloved hand. 'I had not hoped to meet you here – and out walking in your . . .'

He hesitated. Because she was tall and well built, her figure only just showed the child she carried.

'In my present condition, you were going to say?'

'Well, me dear, maybe I should just say I'm gratified to find ye out walking.'

'I shall be out walking for some time yet. Being in whelp is not so disabling as I supposed it was going to be. But do not be concerned: Nankivell is at the edge of the wood, holding Dundee for me. Also Castor and Pollux. I am well mounted and well escorted.'

It was not in Stephen's nature ever to feel awkward – it was one of his charms – and he explained his presence here and what he had been doing this morning and asked her what she was seeking in the wood.

'Foxes,' she said simply. 'We cannot hunt 'em for two months yet, and by then, God dammit, I shall be too far on to participate. But I can still keep an eye on 'em, see what cubs they have. Even if you can't catch 'em at play you can usually tell by the billet they leave. You've spoiled my quest, Master Carrington.'

'I'm not sure I follow.'

'Simple enough. Why else do I leave my escort a quarter of a mile away? It is not the exercise of walking that I so much enjoy. But I had hopes I might see one or two of my little friends and gauge their health and numbers. That is not best

done in the company of two clumping horses and a brace of boarhounds.'

Stephen laughed. 'Well, since I've spoiled a part of your quest, can I not help ye with the other part of it?'

'What is that?'

'Counting the droppings.'

She smiled at this. He tethered Moses to a suitable tree.

'A fine horse,' she said.

'Aye,' said Stephen, bridling. 'I wished for ye to see him. Something I bought last week in St Erme. He is quite a special animal.'

'A bit heavy in the hindquarters, do you not think?'

'Nay, 'tis the breed, Harriet. And he has a fair weight to carry.'

They moved towards the hut, but Harriet turned off sharply to where there was a rift in the ground and a couple of gorse bushes, still in semi-flower.

'You see, there's an earth here. Badgers have made it but foxes are living in it. I'll lay a curse there's a handsome lot of cubs in there. I was hoping to catch 'em at play.'

'I'm in disgrace, eh?'

'No matter.' She allowed the gorse bush to fall back into place and brushed some prickles off her gloves. 'We'll look in this hut and then be done.'

They walked across the clearing.

'How is Clowance?'

'Well and fine, thank ee.'

'She must have been much upset by her brother's death.'

'Oh she was. So was I. Jeremy was a sterling fellow.'

'I gather that while he was fighting Napoleon you were fighting the French in a more profitable way.'

He glanced at her and laughed. 'You speak the truth. I had me narrow escapes, I can vow. But, thanks to you, I got the opportunity to make the venture.'

'Thanks to me?'

'Well, ye must know that Sir George and I fell out – or maybe it is more true to say that he soured of me for some reason and threatened to withdraw all credit. I was as good as a ruined man. Then, for some other reason, he changed his mind and allowed me to continue to function on restricted credit. 'Twas that that brought me to a situation where I had to go for all or nothing as a privateer.'

'Indeed,' said Harriet at the entrance of the hut, 'so that's how it was.'

'That's how it was. And I have *you* to thank for it.'

'I am at a loss to know why you should think so.'

'I b'lieve Clowance told ye something of our straits and that ye intervened with Sir George on my behalf.'

‘What a quaint thought!’ She led the way into the hut.

It was a wooden structure, with part of the roof gone and the door fallen in. Inside there was a lot of etiolated grass, a few brambles, some small bones, ashes from a fire.

Harriet stirred the grass with her foot. ‘Some tramp has been sharing it with the foxes.’

‘Foxes?’

‘Oh, they’ll come in places like this, especially if their earths have been stopped. We have been led this way more than once and the scent has gone cold. I wonder . . .’

‘I mind once last year,’ said Stephen, ‘last December, we came this way, dashing through the wood. I nearly came off! As usual, you was in the front.’

‘Dundee is very sure-footed. And we’ve been together a long time; since before I married George. We don’t often make mistakes in the field.’

‘Was your first husband a great hunter?’

‘Oh yes, he lived for it. He was Master for a time, not of this pack, of course, but in North Devon. Nearly ruined himself – and in the end broke his neck at a gate. Well, God rest his soul, it was as good a way as any to go.’

Stephen had not been alone with this cool, articulate, downright woman in quite this way before. She was physically very attractive; pregnancy had given her an extra bloom. She had never spoken so openly and personally. It excited him.

She was stooping, stirring over the bones with her crop. He bent beside her, aware of her perfume, of her queue of black hair, of the flush in her normally sallow cheek.

‘Do you see anything?’

‘These rabbit bones are new. And these are chicken bones and something bigger. Mme Vixen has been sharing her vittles with someone else.’ She straightened up, and he straightened up beside her.

‘Harriet.’

‘Yes?’

‘’Twas your doing, was it not, keeping George from bankrupting me? Don’t deny it. I have to thank ye.’

‘Is it not better to forget it all? Or why do you not give George the credit?’

‘Because it is *yours* and I have to thank ye.’

She had her back near the wall, and he put a hand on the wall each side of her, imprisoning her. The wooden shack creaked under the weight of his hands.

She looked at him coldly, great eyes very calm.

He kissed her, first on the cheek and then on the lips. It was a long kiss. Then

she put hands on both his shoulders and pushed him away. It was slow but firm; she had strong arms.

She took out a handkerchief and dabbed her lips. Then she picked up her crop, which she had dropped and stooped to turn over the bones again.

‘I heard a parson once in the pulpit,’ she said, ‘state that man was the only creature that killed for pleasure. Damned nonsense. A fox will kill anything that moves, that flutters, that shows signs of life. So will a cat. So will a leopard. Foxes are nasty little brutes, but I love ’em.’

‘I can kill things that flutter,’ said Stephen.

He followed her out of the hut.

‘I think we will rejoin Nankivell.’

Stephen unhitched Moses and followed the tall smart woman through the trees. They came out into the field beyond, where the little groom was waiting with two horses and two dogs. Nankivell got to his feet, taking off his hat; the two big boarhounds rose and stretched and made whining noises. Harriet did not have to bend in order to rub their ears.

‘Nankivell, take the dogs back by the road. It will do them good to trot with you. Mr Carrington and I will canter back across country.’

‘S, m’lady.’

Harriet put out a hand and Nankivell helped her mount. The two horses, Dundee and Moses, eyed each other. Harriet gathered her reins, adjusted her cap. She had not looked at Stephen since they came out of the hut.

‘Well, be off with you.’

‘S, m’lady. Beg pardon, m’lady, but Sir George did tell me to see as ee did not go cross-country galloping. He says to me, Sir George he says, mind you see her leddyship don’t do any jumping or galloping—’

‘Never mind what Sir George said. It is what I say. Mr Carrington will see me home.’

‘Willingly,’ said Stephen.

‘That’s if he can keep up with me.’

In silence they watched Nankivell mount and trot reluctantly off, with Castor and Pollux on long leads behind. It was obviously a routine the dogs were used to. Stephen was still standing beside his horse, but now he essayed to mount. Harriet watched with a critical eye as he struggled into the saddle.

It was not so warm out here. The wind was picking up from the east, and they were not sheltered by the trees. But Stephen was warm.

Harriet said: ‘If you wish to know, I did influence Sir George in his decision not to withdraw banking credit from you. But I did it for Clowance, not for you. To suppose that I am in any way interested in you as a man is an unwarranted

assumption. I have a debt of friendship and gratitude towards Clowance, which I discharged. That is all.'

Stephen patted his horse's neck. 'Maybe I've a debt of friendship and gratitude towards you just the same. Maybe once in a while you'll let me show it.'

Harriet said: 'Your horse is heavy in the haunches. If you're not careful he'll grow fat. I know the type.'

'I reckon he's a wonderful horse,' said Stephen stiffly. 'Every bit so good as yours.'

Harriet tightened her reins and looked across the smiling summer countryside.

She said after a long pause: 'When you married Clowance, it was a big thing for you, Stephen. Be content with it. I do not think it time for you to consider moving farther up-stream. Good-day to you.'

She turned and went off at a fair pace, which soon turned into a gallop.

'C'mon, me lad,' said Stephen angrily. 'We'll catch her.'

He set Moses to the task, and for a short period gained on her. It was uphill and the bigger horse made ground. Then Harriet took a low hedge very gracefully and Stephen followed. Now it was level ground and the two horses galloped at about the same rate, Moses some three lengths behind.

Another hedge, a Cornish wall this, not higher but much broader. Over went Dundee. Moses dislodged a stone as he followed. Harriet looked behind and laughed. Stephen dug in his heels and whacked the hindquarters of his horse with his crop. It was lovely open country, between wooded slopes and tall individual trees. They were galloping now at a thunderous pace.

He knew she should not be galloping like this, and knew that if he halted she would probably slow down. But he could not bring himself to check his horse. Harriet's words had bitten into him like a serpent, the poison seeping and spreading. She had even sneered at his horse.

He knew he must overtake her soon and then, having caught her, he could slow her down and be magnanimous. His horse was bigger than hers and must have more staying power; besides, a woman, unless she is a dare-devil, cannot ride side-saddle at the speed of a man. Harriet was a daredevil. She bobbed up and down, her queue of hair streaming behind her. Now for the first time she used her whip.

They were coming to the next obstacle. Woods on either side narrowed to a gap protected by a high fence. Beyond it was a deep ditch. Harriet half checked, then slapped Dundee's neck; the horse took a sort of double stammer of hooves and took the obstacle in huge style. He just landed in the rubble and stones on the far side, stumbled and came to his feet as Stephen prepared to take off.

Stephen had been nearer Harriet than he thought; their hesitation, which had really been only a gathering of muscle and determination for the leap, became in him a real hesitation; then he forced Moses forward with a stinging crack of his whip and the great horse took off half a stride early. He made a tremendous effort, cleared the fence by the narrowest margin. But both front feet landed just in the ditch and he fell. It was a great weight of animal to fall, and Stephen was flung off him, clear off him, and landed with a heavy crunch among the rubble and stones. Thereafter the world went black.

Chapter Eight

I

It was on the Wednesday that Ross called on Dwight. It was the first showery day after a long fine spell, and the wind was getting up. Dwight was writing a letter to a Doctor Suttleffe, who had recently been called in to see if he could help the aged King. Dwight and Suttleffe had met in London and had kept up a sporadic correspondence. Suttleffe was prescribing a herbaceous tranquillizer, which he had found successful with many patients far gone in mania, but Dwight, though he did not say so in the letter, was not optimistic of its success when given to a blind man suffering from advanced dementia and now becoming deaf too. The only treatment Dwight would have prescribed was a far greater freedom for the harmless old King to move or be moved around his castle. He could do no damage to the realm.

When Ross was shown in Dwight got up, pen still in hand but smiling his welcome.

‘I find you alone?’ Ross said.

‘Yes, they are all out – I believe on your beach. I think Caroline has gone rather against her will, as she is not fond of sandy feet. You’re better?’

‘Oh yes. Thank you. We both are. It’s – something we shall learn to live with. Or live without.’

‘Demelza may be with Caroline. Have you come from the house? They are sure to have called.’

‘No, Demelza is away. She has gone to see Clowance. Troubles do not come singly. Stephen Carrington has met with a riding accident.’

‘I am very sorry. When did this happen?’

‘Yesterday morning. He has recently bought a new horse and, it seems, was putting it through its paces when it fell at a fence and he with it. He was flung clear, but he has hurt his back, possibly broken it. At present he cannot move from the waist down.’

Dwight made a face. ‘Where is he now?’

‘At his house – his cottage. That is where Demelza has gone. Matthew’s Mark-

At his house – his cottage. That is where Demelza has gone. Matthew Mark Martin has gone with her. They—’

‘Was Clowance with him at the time?’

‘No. Harriet was. I mean Harriet Warleggan. She fetched help from Cardew and he was carried home on a stretcher.’

Dwight stroked his chin with the quill of his pen. ‘Who is attending him?’

‘A man called Mather. Recently arrived from Bath. He did wonders for Andrew Blarney – old Andrew – when he was ill.’

‘Stephen may be better in a few days. Sometimes the shock paralyses as much as a real breakage . . .’

‘But if it is a real breakage?’

‘Can heal well enough in a few weeks or months. There is always the risk, of course.’

‘I’m sure.’

‘It depends very much where the injury is . . . Ill luck for him after such a triumphant voyage.’

A shower of rain beat on the windows. Soon over, but it couldn’t be the best day for a romp on the beach.

Ross said: ‘It does not seem so very long since Stephen was ill before, and you went across to advise and prescribe, and Clowance nursed him back to health.’

‘It is not so long.’

Ross said: ‘Of course Clowance thinks there is only one doctor in Cornwall.’

‘I was afraid you might be intending to say that.’

‘I have the unenviable task of passing on her message to you. She said: “Do please implore Uncle Dwight to come.”’

Dwight stroked his chin again.

‘Of course I’ll go. It is too late today, but perhaps tomorrow.’

‘Thank you. I know how grateful she would be.’

‘But I do not know how grateful this Dr Mather is likely to be! To preserve medical etiquette, it should be *he* who invites me to see his patient. Last time it was just an apothecary.’

‘If you were intending to go tomorrow, I would send someone over to tell them. I am sure that Clowance, helped by Demelza, would be able to convince any surgeon of the lightness of this course.’

Dwight laughed. ‘I’ll try to be there by eleven. Mind you, Ross, in the case of an injury of the sort you describe – if it is such an injury, there’s precious little anyone can do – surgeon or otherwise – except tell the patient to keep quiet and wait. Is he in much pain?’

‘I don’t know.’

I DON'T KNOW.

'Shall you be going to Penryn also?'

'I think not, at least until I have heard what you say. It is a small place and I don't want to overcrowd them. Also, Demelza must not be away too long.'

'Oh?'

'Cuby is coming to stay.'

II

When Dwight saw Ross out he saw Katie moving rapidly away among the trees of the drive, as if not wanting to be noticed. The shower had gone and Dwight was reluctant to return immediately to his letter, so he strolled towards the gates, enjoying the sun and the wind in his hair.

It occurred to him to think that perhaps Katie had brought another summons from Place House, but if that had been the case Bone would have come hurrying. In any event when he had last seen Selina she had seemed to have recovered her health and at least a degree of her spirits. Dwight guessed there had been a part reconciliation between husband and wife. However complex a character Valentine might be, and however mixed up in his own life, he had a great way with women, and there was no reason to suppose that Selina had become immune.

Suddenly Katie was in front of him. She must have dodged round the corner of the drive, and it was as if she came upon him unexpectedly.

'Dr Enys . . . I was nearby and then I seen Cap'n Poldark.'

'He's just gone,' Dwight said. 'Did you wish to see him?'

'Nay, 'twas you, sur, as I 'ad thoughts to see. But then I thought I'd no right nor reason to come'n bother ee.'

'What is it? Are you unwell?'

'Nay, sur, I'm not unwell. Leastwise, not as no one could say so.'

'I'm glad of that. What is it then?'

Katie's face was down, but he could see enough of it to observe the hot flush colouring all her visible skin.

'I don't hardly know 'ow to tell ee.'

Dwight waited. 'Would you like to come inside?'

'Oh, nay, sur, tedn that. But mebbe yes, maybe yes, I did oughter come in, not bawl'n out in the middle of the garden for everyone to 'ear.'

'Good. Well, come in, then.'

He led the way and she followed for a few paces and then stopped again. He waited

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She looked up and looped a tangle of hair away from one eye.

‘I don’t reckon ’tis proper, but maybe ’tis proper and right. I thinks only Surgeon d’know, so only he can tell me.’

‘Tell you what, Katie?’

She put a hand to her mouth as if willing herself not to speak.

‘Reckon I’ve begun me courses again.’

III

‘Well, Katie,’ said Dwight, ten minutes later, ‘without a thorough examination, which I do not think you would wish to subject yourself to, I cannot tell what has been wrong with you. All I can say with certainty is that you are not going to have a baby.’

‘My dear life,’ she said, breathing out a sob. ‘I don’t know how’t ’as ’appened!’

‘Nor do I. But if what you now tell me is an exact description of what passed between yourself and Saul Grieves, I do not think you could possibly *be* pregnant. You see, merely the male seed . . . Well, there must be a much more definite penetration of the . . . Well, no matter. There are such things, you know, Katie, as false pregnancies. They can be brought on by hypnosis, hysteria, a wishful desire to have conceived, or a tremendous feeling of guilt. And the last is, I think, in your case the one to blame.’

The intense flush was dying from Katie’s sallow skin.

After a few moments she said: ‘What about this ’ere?’ pointing to her swollen stomach.

‘I shall expect it to go down naturally, now that you are convinced you have no child to bear. If it is a dropsical condition it can be treated. If tumorous it may be removable. But I am strongly of the opinion that in a healthy young woman such as yourself it is simply a symptom of hysteria and that it will very soon disappear.’

Katie rubbed a hand across her eyes. ‘Jerusalem, it d’make me feel some queer, just to think on. All these months – months of sorrow and shame! They was all for naught.’

‘It should make your relief the greater.’

‘Oh, it do, it do. But I d’feel such a great lerrup. Gor ’elp me, what a great lerrup. Why . . . why I never needed tell nobody nothing! Nobody never needed to know I allowed Saul Grieves any liberties ’tall! Folk’ll laugh me out of house an’ home. Gor ’elp me. ’Tis enough to make you fetch up!’

‘These things have happened before, Katie. There was a queen of England long ago called Mary who was just newly married and desperately wanted an heir to the throne. She convinced herself, and all the important Court doctors, that she was with child. Alas for her, she was not.’

‘She *wanted* a child,’ said Katie. ‘I *didn’t*!’

‘It is probably derived from the mind in a similar way. I am sure your feelings of intense guilt – and your fear – produced the same symptoms.’

There was the sound of horses outside. Caroline and the children had given up their trek on the beach. At the clatter Katie got up.

‘Did she never have no children?’

‘Who? The queen? No. Her sister inherited the throne.’

‘Well . . . that’ll be your family come back from riding, Surgeon. I’ll not keep ee no further. ’Tis for me to live my life – begin it all over afresh.’

Dwight got up too. ‘Don’t worry. Try not to be upset. It will be a nine-day wonder in the village and in no time at all everyone will forget it.’

‘My dear life!’ Katie stopped as if she had been bitten.

‘What is it?’

‘Music!’ said Katie, and slapped her thigh. ‘I shan’t have to wed Music!’

There was a moment’s pause before Dwight spoke. ‘No. You don’t have to wed Music.’

‘My dear soul! Well, now, there’s a relief for ee! Jer-us-alem! I don’t have to wed no one ’tall!’

They went to the door.

‘Music will be much upset.’

‘Ais, I s’pose. Do you think he ’ave ordinary feelings like a real man?’

‘Emphatically so. Did you not realize that?’

‘Ais, I s’pose. Ais, I d’know he be very fond of me. I like him too. There’s no ’arm in him. Never a bad thought. ’E’s gentle and kind. But I don’t wish to wed ’im.’

‘Well,’ said Dwight dryly, ‘it is your own choice. It always has been.’

There were more heavy clouds blowing up like angry fists clenched in the sky, but as she was let out of the side door, Katie squinted into a shaft of the expiring sun.

‘I can’t wed ’im *now*. ’Twas a convenience. ’Tis too bad for him maybe. I’m sorry for him, I really am. But there ’tis. He knew how ’twas. He’ll ’ave to put up with un.’

After leaving Dwight Ross took out the letter Cuby had written.

Dear Lady Poldark,

I am writing this from Caerhays where I have now been three weeks with my family. Perhaps I should first have written to you, but in truth it is hard to know what to say to the mother of the man I loved so dearly and who I know held him at least as dear. When we met last you were much concerned for the safety of Jeremy's father – and thank God he has come safe home – yet I remember it personally as a happy time when we first came to know each other and Jeremy was there to make our friendship complete. Now all is lost, and I propose to come to you carrying his child and carrying the grief of a bereavement we both equally share. Sir Ross told me I would be welcome at Nampara, to stay until after the birth of my child, and I feel sure that you would echo that welcome. But my constant presence in your household may come to be a too constant and irksome reminder of Jeremy's death, a lodestone dragging you ever back to your feeling of sorrow and loss.

So with your permission, dear Lady Poldark, I would like to come for perhaps two weeks, to begin, then perhaps to return to Caerhays for a little while. Let it be how it seems best and most seemly to you.

If it were convenient I would come next Monday, the 17th. I would like to bring my sister Clemency for company, who would stay the night and return with the groom on the following day. But pray make some other suggestion should this not be convenient. I am, as you well understand, entirely a free agent.

Believe me, dear Lady Poldark, I am so much looking forward to seeing you again.

Your loving daughter-in-law,
Cuby

Demelza had sent a note back saying she would be most welcome.

This was just before the young sailor had arrived to tell them of Stephen's accident.

V

In the afternoon Ross walked up to Wheal Grace, changed into mining things and went over it with Ben Carter. There was not much fresh to see, and what there was was depressing. For years the mine had yielded riches from several

floors of tin and now was played out. The south floor had been closed for two years. The north, after appearing to be bottomed out more than once, had raised hopes by revealing smaller pockets and platforms from time to time, but none had more than postponed the evil day when the mine had to close.

While in captivity Ross had had plenty of time on his hands to make calculations, and he had come to the decision that if or when he got home the mine should be immediately shut down. By now there were only forty men working in it; all the others who had left had been absorbed into Wheal Leisure as that mine expanded. They could probably now take on another ten.

But Jeremy's death had knocked his calculations – like many other things – out of joint. He told Ben that for the time being the old mine should continue to operate but that the sixty-fathom level – the lowest there was – should be abandoned and such work as there was could be concentrated on the forty-fathom and above. The bottom pumps – installed by Jeremy – were to be disconnected and brought up – and anything else of value before the old floors were submerged. Beth, the engine built by Bull & Trevithick twenty-five years ago, and modernized by Jeremy in 1811, could continue to function on a reduced scale and under reduced stress. Labour force could be pared down to about thirty. It was more than maintenance, but not a lot. It would cut his profits on Wheal Leisure by about twenty per cent.

Ben asked if he would go over Leisure with him tomorrow, but Ross said it would have to be one day next week. There was no reason for this – he was not busy except that Leisure in the last five years had become so much Jeremy's mine (the whole decision to reopen it, the design of the engine, the leats to bring the fresh water, the development of the rediscovered Trevorgie workings) that he just did not wish to face it again. He had made a perfunctory tour when he first came home, but then the wound had still been so raw that it couldn't be made worse.

It was only about four and a half years ago, just after he had returned from Spain – and they had been down Wheal Grace and were walking back to the house together – that Jeremy had made the suggestion that they might consider reopening Wheal Leisure. He had interlaced his remarks with seemingly innocent queries about the Trevanions – apparently he had just then met the girl for the first time and was besotted with her. Ross knew nothing of this then – Cuby and Jeremy had first met when Jeremy was returning from some adventure he had undertaken with Stephen Carrington and they had come ashore near Caerhays. An ill-fated affair if ever there was one; yet it seemed to have contained within it a short vivid few months of brilliant happiness. Perhaps that was better than nothing at all. And Cuby, although in some ways wilful and nervous, had been a girl worthy of his love.

perverse, had been a gift worthy of his love.

The other thing Ross had not known that chilly morning in February 1811 was Jeremy's intense preoccupation with the development of steam – and the gift that he had for harnessing the latest ideas. Ross never failed to blame himself for this lack of knowledge, this lack of perception in regard to his son. Yet, as Demelza had said, Jeremy had preserved such secrecy about it that there was no way of knowing. It had, as so often happened between father and son, been a breakdown in communication rather than a breakdown in sympathy.

And then, before he died, so very young, he had even begun to distinguish himself in a military career, picked out by Wellington himself for promotion. Another Captain Poldark. Somehow the art of war was the last thing one would have ever expected him to excel at, the tall, thin, gangling, artistic young man with the slight stoop, the joking, flippant manner, the distaste for bloodshed.

God, Ross thought, what a *waste!* what a *loss!* – for Demelza, for Cuby, for Isabella-Rose, above all for Jeremy himself . . .

He was about to leave the shelter of the mine when his temporarily blurred sight picked out the figure of another young man approaching. As tall as Jeremy, younger by three years, long-nosed and narrow-eyed and thin-shanked, dark of hair and skin, a lock showing over his brow from under his hat. His cloak and features were glistening from the latest shower.

'Well, Cousin Ross or I'll be damned! What nasty weather! Were you in the mine? Good fortune for you. I wasn't, as you observe. These clouds just dip the water out of the sea and empty it like a child with a bucket!'

His glinting, easy, charming smile. But just the wrong moment for Ross, remembering Jeremy.

'I thought you were back in Oxford.'

'Cambridge. No, we leave at the weekend. Ghastly journey, but Selina will not go by sea. A pertinent disadvantage to making one's home in Cornwall is the monstrous distance it is from everywhere else!' He got off his horse, glancing at Ross's gaunt, grim face. 'We wrote, of course, as soon as we heard.'

'Of course,' said Ross. 'Thank you. I'm sure Demelza replied.'

'I believe Clowance did. It is a sad loss for us all.'

'Thank you.'

Valentine had dismounted. Ross noticed the slightly bent leg.

'Are you walking back?'

'Yes. But I have to warn you, Demelza is from home. She is staying with Clowance for a few days.'

'It was about Clowance that I was come to ask. Or if not Clowance, then Stephen. I have heard he has had an accident.'

'Bad news travels fast' As they began to walk downhill Ross told the young

Bad news travels fast. As they began to walk downhill Ross told the young man what he knew.

Valentine said: 'That is cursed luck. I have come to know Stephen over the last couple of years and find him an energetic, versatile feller. He will not take kindly to a long spell of invalidism.'

'Dr Enys is going tomorrow, so perhaps we shall have more information then.'

The small angry clouds marching in from the north-west had separated, like a military procession before an obstacle, and between them the sky above Nampara had become sea-green and shot through with sunshine. Valentine took off his hat and flapped it against his cloak, knocking away the moisture. He asked about the progress of Wheal Leisure and Wheal Grace, and spoke of his own new venture, Wheal Elizabeth, which by the beginning of next year was likely to need an engine.

'I had been going to seek Jeremy's advice on this. Alas . . .'

'When shall you get your degree?'

'Next spring. We hope to be permanently in residence at Place House from then on. May I ask you one or two questions?'

A change of tone.

'Questions? Of course. If I can answer them. Will you come in?'

'Let us walk down to the beach. Maybe the open air will be better for any confidences which may pass.'

They skirted Demelza's garden and came out on the rough ground leading to Nampara Beach, where the mallows and the thistles and the rough grass grew. The tide was out, and the expanse of sand stretched to the Dark Cliffs, smooth, pale brown, uninterrupted by rock or shelf or gully. The sand nearby was well pitted with footprints, but beyond a few hundred yards even they disappeared. In the distance a solitary figure moved along the high-water mark.

'Paul Daniel,' said Ross.

'What?'

'Paul Daniel. He shares this part of the beach with three others who go up and down the high-water mark seeing what's come in. When he finds something on the way out he does not pick it up but makes a double cross beside it in the sand. Woe betide anyone who makes off with it.'

Valentine laughed. 'We are both Cornish to the bone, you and I, Cousin Ross; yet I suspect you understand the villagers far better than I ever shall.'

'My early life was more earthy. Certainly until I left to go overseas in my early twenties I had never been further than Plymouth.'

' . . . I have been away so much.'

They leaned on the gate.

‘What did you wish to ask me?’

The breeze was not interrupted for some time.

‘You mentioned Dwight Enys just now. He attended my mother when my sister was born.’

‘I believe so.’

‘Did he attend her when I was born?’

‘No, he was at sea – in the navy.’

‘You know I was an eight-month child?’

‘I have heard so.’

‘Premature in all things. But you say you have *heard* so. Did you not know so, as you lived so near by?’

‘My relationship with the Warleggan family has never been friendly. At that time it was at its worst.’

‘Why?’

‘Why what?’

‘Why was it so bad just then?’

‘Is this an examination I have to face?’

‘If you please.’

Valentine was tapping on the gate with his long fingers. This young man had been a figure in Ross’s thoughts, frequently forgotten and then painfully, poignantly central again, for more than twenty years. Yet in all that time they had never had a personal, intimate discussion. Their contact had been superficial. It seemed peculiarly maladroit that Elizabeth’s son should tackle him in this way so soon after Jeremy’s death. He had always tended to dislike the young man: his sardonic humour; his mischievous jokes; his great charm; his automatic assumption that all women would succumb to it. He had been particularly disagreeable at Geoffrey Charles’s party, had brought Conan Whitworth uninvited and greatly upset Morwenna, had half-drunkenly smiled and sneered through the tense encounter following, when Ross and George had almost come to blows again. Rumour had it that he had married Selina Pope for her money and was already being openly unfaithful to her.

‘What are you looking at?’ Valentine asked.

‘At you, Valentine, since you ask. At the time you were born, the natural antagonism between me and your father was at its height because I had not wished your mother to marry him. He must have known this.’

‘You were in love with my mother, were you not?’

‘At one time.’

‘At that time?’

‘I held her in high esteem.’

Ross watched a parade of crows which were waddling in judicial procession towards the cliffs of Wheal Leisure as if about to open the assizes.

Valentine said: 'Did you know – I suspect you did – that I was a constant bone of contention between my mother and father?'

'Later, yes.'

'So you must have known why.' When Ross did not answer Valentine said: 'Because he suspected I was not his son.'

'Indeed?'

'Yes, indeed. All my childhood I lived under this cloud, though of course I did not know what it then was. After my mother died it lifted a lot. It was as if Ursula's birth – at seven months – had allayed his suspicions. After that he made an effort in his own dry dusty way to become an agreeable father. But by then the damage – so far as I was concerned – was done. I feared him and hated him. There was little he could do by then to change himself in my eyes. I . . . I have always felt he was in some way responsible for my mother's death.'

'I do not think that could be. Your – George – was very attached to your mother; no doubt, as you say, in his own dry dusty way; but I believe it to have been genuine. Do not forget that it was twelve years before he remarried.'

Paul Daniel had moved out of sight. Ross felt a surge of fruitless anger at the tangle of love and hate and jealousy which had surrounded this young man's birth and distorted his childhood. Whose fault was it? His as much as anyone's. Elizabeth's too. And George's. The one blameless person was surely Valentine. Through the years, and always at a distance, Ross had watched the boy's progress to manhood. Yes, what he had seen and heard had been unfavourable.

But too seldom had he faced the facts of his own responsibility, psychological or actual, for the situation as it had come about.

This unsought meeting stung him emotionally, made him feel as if the central fact of his whole existence, the hub from which all the spokes of his later experience led away, lay in the few minutes of anger and lust and overpowering frustration from which Valentine could have been born.

He put his hand on Valentine's arm, briefly. It was an uncharacteristic gesture.

'Why have you come to see me today?'

'I felt that before I left again I had to meet you, try to straighten out certain events in my own mind.'

'I do not think I can help.'

'That was what Dwight Enys said when I spoke to him a few days ago.'

'On this subject?'

'Related to this subject . . . Do you think my mother was unfaithful to George Warleggan after they were married?'

‘Good God, no! You demean her memory.’

‘I cannot help but speculate. It would explain his extraordinary changes of mood.’

‘I’m sure that is not the explanation.’

‘Do you then feel equally certain that my mother went with no man between the time her first husband died and the day of her remarriage?’

Ross had seen this question coming. ‘Your mother was an upright and honourable woman. I saw little of her, but I should think it highly unlikely.’

Valentine coughed dryly. ‘Well, may I ask a final question, then. It is the one I came to ask, difficult as it may be to ask it. Is it possible that you could be my father?’

Ross found he was gripping the top of the gate too tightly. He slackened the grip and then flexed his fingers, looking at them. He knew how much might depend on his reply. And how necessary it was *instantly* to lie, without the *least* hesitation. Instantly. And yet how *impossible* it was to lie whatever the consequences.

‘I have no intention of answering your question, Valentine.’

‘You mean you can’t or won’t?’

‘Both.’

Wheal Leisure was coaling. Black smoke rose and merged with the cloud drifting above it and began its journey of dispersal inland.

Valentine said: ‘Then it is a possibility?’

‘God damn you, boy!’ Ross stopped and swallowed, trying to contain his anger, aware that it was as much directed at himself as at his questioner. There was silence for a few moments. ‘Damn you! . . . Yes, it is a possibility.’ As Valentine was about to speak Ross went savagely on: ‘But *only* a possibility. No one will ever know for certain. I do not think your mother ever knew for certain. It is a question that I cannot answer for I do not know the answer. Does that satisfy you?’

Valentine said thoughtfully: ‘Yes, thank you. I think it does.’

It seemed as if, because of what had happened that moment, the world was moving in a different way, as if a few words uttered into the wind, spoken by a single voice, heard by one person alone, would prevent its ever being the same place again.

Ross said: ‘But let me warn you. Let me warn you of this, Valentine. If at any time you speak of this – in public or in private, claiming something or denying something on the strength of what I have said, there will be two men wanting to kill you. That is George Warleggan and myself. And I swear to you one of us will.’

Valentine leaned back against the gate in his usual cynical attitude, as if nothing was more important than that he should seem to care about nothing in the world. But his face was deeply flushed. Returning the gesture, he put a hand on Ross's arm.

'Understood,' he said, 'Cousin Ross.'

Chapter Nine

I

When Dwight reached Penryn the following morning Clowance opened the door and showed him into the tiny parlour, where a thick-set blond boy was standing hands in pockets.

‘This is Jason Carrington, Stephen’s nephew. He has just called to see Stephen.’

They shook hands. Clowance was rather untidy, her eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep.

After an awkward moment Jason said: ‘Well, ma’am. I reckon I’d best be getting back. I’ll be here tomorrow for sure.’

When he had gone Dwight said: ‘I can see the relationship.’

‘Yes . . . He is very fond of Stephen.’

‘Tell me how it all happened.’

‘He was thrown from his horse in the woods below Cardew. Lady Harriet was with him. According to the groom they had not met above fifteen minutes before and were galloping towards Cardew. They came to an awkward fence and Stephen’s horse fell. Harriet went for help and he was put in a farm cart so that he could lie flat and be brought home. Even though the distance was much greater than Cardew, they considered it better to bring him straight here.’ Dwight thought there was a touch of bitterness in her tone.

‘And now? He is conscious?’

‘Oh yes. Has been since Thursday. But sometimes confused still.’

‘Can he move his legs?’

‘He can move his left but not his right. Dr Mather has put him in what he calls a spinal jacket and has bled him constantly. Mama is with him at the moment.’

‘And Dr Mather knows I am coming?’

‘We told him this morning. Of course he knows your name. He said he would try to be back by eleven, so that you can see Stephen together.’

Dwight took out his watch. It was only 10.15. ‘Does Dr Mather live near? Perhaps I could call on him.’

Perhaps I could call on him.

‘At Flushing. I suppose it’s three or four miles.’

There was a step outside and Demelza came in. She was wearing a white muslin frock with a black sash, and Dwight thought her looks were already a little returning, almost in spite of herself.

They kissed. Demelza said: ‘He is thirsty, and I came down for more lemonade. ’Tis that good of you to come, Dwight. Caroline did not ride with you?’

‘No. She thought it would make a crowd.’

After talking for a few minutes it was Demelza who said: ‘Dr Mather is an understanding physician. I do not believe he can be too put about if you go up without him.’

Stephen looked a big man lying in the small trestle bed, much bigger than when Dwight had attended him for the peripneumonia. His face was heavy and flushed. Demelza put the lemonade on a side-table and said: ‘I will wait downstairs.’

Stephen’s body was bound up in splints, and he grunted as they turned him over on his side. Dwight’s fingers travelled lightly over his back, pressing to see where there was pain. The right leg was swollen and useless, the skin dark and bruised-looking. The left leg he could bring up to bend his knee.

They turned him again on his back, and Clowance propped him up a few inches with a couple of pillows.

Dwight took out a glass tube with a small bulb at one end, attached to a thin cane rod for strength. He put this under Stephen’s arm. The clinical thermometer had been invented nearly two decades ago but was not in general use. When he withdrew it he saw the mercury well up the scale.

‘I’m steering a fair course,’ Stephen said. ‘Full canvas soon. Rest for a day or two more. That’s all. Gi’ me the lemonade, Clowance.’

He could hold the glass but his hands were shaky. Dwight lifted his eyelids.

‘You should mend,’ he said, ‘but it will be a slow process. You will need to possess patience. Dr Mather is following the right treatment.’ He said to Clowance: ‘I think the bruising on the right leg would be reduced with a liniment of camphor dissolved in oil of cloves. But do not cover with a flannel cloth, allow the air to reach it. And I will write a prescription for Peruvian bark. Then I must see Dr Mather.’

‘They sent up from the Royal Standard last night,’ Stephen said, ‘wishing me well. Eh? And Christopher Saverland, the Packet agent, sent his wishes. And others’ve called. It just shows.’

There were adverse signs here and Dwight wondered whether Mather had been alert to them – and if he had whether he had kept them to himself

been alert to them – and if he had whether he had kept them to himself.

‘There’s some spinal damage,’ he said as they went down the stairs, ‘but the recovery of movement in the left leg is a good sign. The oedematous condition of the right leg will have to be watched. I believe bleeding will serve a useful purpose, though at the base of the spine, not on the leg itself.’

‘How long will he be bedridden?’ Clowance asked.

‘It is impossible to know, my dear. Three months, if he is fortunate.’

‘Three months!’

‘It may be less. He is a very determined man. But first . . .’

‘First?’ said Demelza, studying the face of her old friend.

‘Can he eat? He should be kept on an antiphlogistic regime. Lemonade is the ideal drink.’

‘First?’ said Demelza.

‘There has been some internal bleeding. It may have already stopped.’

‘And if it has not?’

‘Let us hope it has. When are you returning home?’

‘Me?’ said Demelza. ‘I don’t know for certain sure. But I have to go Monday.’

‘I think Mama should return home soon in any case,’ said Clowance. ‘She has enough troubles of her own without bearing mine. And Jeremy’s widow is coming to Nampara to stay.’

‘Can you manage him on your own?’

‘Jason will be here Monday to stay as long as I need him. He can help me with any of the heavy work of nursing.’

‘After I have seen Dr Mather,’ Dwight said, ‘perhaps I might come back and take a bite to eat with you before setting off home?’

II

Aristide Mather said: ‘There is a definite fracture of the vertebrae. Palsy was total when I saw him first. I made an incision yesterday in the right thigh and drew a quantity of blood.’

‘Yes, I saw that.’

‘The swelling was reduced and he seemed eased by it. I also raised the sacrum by means of a levator. That too you will have observed.’

‘Did it cause him great pain?’

‘He grunted a deal. He is not one, I think, over-sensitive to pain.’

‘The right thigh is the greatest concern,’ Dwight said.

‘Internal haemorrhaging?’

‘Yes.’

‘I thought of the femoral artery.’

‘So did I. But if it had been ruptured he would have been dead by now . . .’

‘Well, there’s little we can do for that. There is no way of applying a tourniquet.’

Mather was about forty, short, brisk, red haired, with that capable confident air Dwight had always lacked.

‘I should like to see him again, perhaps in a couple of days, if that would be agreeable to you.’

‘Perfectly. Pray come when you wish.’

‘Lady Poldark will, I think, be riding home on Monday. If you would send word by her – in a letter, I mean – that would keep me informed.’

‘Certainly. If he is still alive by then.’

Dwight raised his eyebrows.

‘Well every day is a day gained,’ he said drily.

As they reached the door Mather said: ‘I read your article on malign and benign growths and the tubercles of phthisis in the *Edinburgh Medical & Surgical Journal*. I am honoured to meet the author.’

‘Ah,’ said Dwight, almost apologetically. ‘That was last year. I have recently come upon one or two new points, which might slightly amend the argument. But thank you.’

‘In the meantime rest assured I shall do all I can to bring this young friend of yours to a recovery. I have always found it as well to fear the worst – in my own mind – so that I am fully prepared to fight it.’

‘It is a principle I follow myself,’ said Dwight. ‘So I am not likely to quarrel with it. I shall await your letter, Dr Mather.’

III

When he got home it was after six and Music had been waiting for him three hours.

Dwight had eaten well at Clowance’s, so, having satisfied Caroline’s inquiries about Stephen, he was able to delay her thoughts on food until he had seen the young man.

Music said: ‘Tedsn right fur me to bother ee, Surgeon, but her said yes, Surgeon, her promised me. Her promised.’

He had been crying, but that was a time ago. His light eyes, in which intelligence had only its intermittent leasehold, were dry enough now.

prominent, but for him quite hard. He kept swallowing his Adam's apple as if he were trying to get rid of it.

'I'm sorry for you, Music. There is little I can do to help.'

'I d'know that. Thur be nothink nobody can do. But what can *I* do, Surgeon? It d'leave me out of the cold. Worked every hour on that thur cottage. She've been over him wi' me time an' time. 'Tedn as if I'd *changed*. Bain't no change in me. I 'aven't gone moonstruck nor mops an' brooms, nor nothink. She've just broke 'er promise, that be the whole truth of it!'

Dwight said: 'You realize, I'm sure, that she believed herself to be pregnant and was going to marry you partly for the sake of the child. When it turned out all to be a mistake, the main reason for the marriage had been removed.'

'Please?'

'She is a virgin, Music, if you know what that means. She has never had proper intercourse with a man. She finds herself a girl again. Life for her is beginning afresh. She has total freedom of choice and at present prefers to choose no one – to be what she was before all this began, Katie Carter, a parlourmaid at Place House.'

'Please?'

Dwight's mouth turned in a grim smile. 'Come, my friend, do not step back so quickly. But do not think I don't sympathize with you. She agreed to marry you and—'

''Twas a promise!'

'Yes, it was, and she has broken it, and she should not have done. But she thinks everything has changed and that that releases her from her undertaking. I suppose she explained this to you?'

'She said this an' that. This an' that.'

'And did she not say she was sorry?'

'Oh aye. She said she was some sorry and tried to pertend we'd be friends. But that bain't the same thing 'tall.'

'I know. I know how disappointed you must be. And since I encouraged the match I must bear some responsibility. I am very sorry and disappointed this has happened. It is a lesson to me not to interfere in other people's lives.'

'Please?'

'But, Music, you must not allow this to be an excuse for back-sliding. You came to me for advice and help long before your involvement with Katie – or at least long before it became serious. And I *have* helped and advised you, haven't I?'

Music scratched his head. ' . . . Ais.'

‘So there is no excuse to allow all that to slip away again. You must *not* let your disappointment get the better of you and so return to become the young man you were three years ago. You are so much better. You are normal in nearly every way. You must remain so – even if it means leaving Place House and never seeing Katie again. You must be your own man. Understand?’

‘Ais.’

‘Now go home and tell yourself you are going to make the best of it. Will you promise me?’

With a large slack hand Music pushed the lank hair out of his eyes.

‘Cann’t promise to leave Place House.’

‘I don’t ask that. I only suggest it as a last resort. Promise you will keep up your present efforts to be a whole man.’

Music blinked. ‘I *be* a whole man, Surgeon. That d’bring me no comfort.’

IV

When she rode home on Monday there was a conflict in Demelza’s mind. The black gaping hole of Jeremy’s death was still there in the very depths of her body, like a canker that ate away any sign of a return of her natural high-spirited interest in life as soon as it stirred in her. She was much concerned about Stephen who, if no worse, was certainly no better, and she carried Dr Mather’s letter for Dr Enys and was tempted to open it and see what his real opinion was.

But aside from these troubles was an altogether less worthy worry, which she knew Ross would despise her for. Her daughter-in-law was coming to stay.

And bringing her sister, whom she had scarcely met.

The two weeks in Brussels, where Cuby and Jeremy had made her and the other three so very welcome, had passed off beautifully, and if it had not been for her worry about Ross – when in the last six months had she ever been free from worry? – she would have enjoyed herself. The very first time she had met Cuby – only last year – she had felt a certain affinity with and liking for the girl. This had been much enhanced in Brussels, and she had looked forward to seeing more of her whenever she could. After the loss of Jeremy she had fully endorsed Ross’s suggestion that Cuby should come to live at Nampara at least until the baby was born.

But now that it came to the point, old feelings related to her humble birth stirred in her.

Cuby had never been to Nampara, which, to face the truth, was only a large farmhouse with a fair range of outbuildings common to a farm, and only one

room really, the library, to give it the claim to be called something better. Nampara Manor? It wouldn't do. It wouldn't be true. You don't elevate a thing by giving it a better name.

She had never been to Caerhays, not even to see it from the outside; but Jeremy had spoken of it quite often – a great castle (even if an imitation one which they had not yet been able to afford to finish), set in a superb park, with footmen and grooms and all the panoply of aristocratic living. Demelza knew such houses. She knew them well. Tehidy, Tregothnan, Trelissick. She loved them and enjoyed the company of the people living in them. Bowood, where she had taken Clowance, was the greatest of them all. And she had stayed in Lansdowne House only a few weeks ago. She had mixed with the best. And she was now Lady Poldark.

So why this worry? Well, Cuby had never seen Nampara. It was an earthy place, with a down-to-earth master and an up-from-the-mines mistress. Cuby had been over last year to the party at Trenwith. Now *that* was a suitable house, belonging to Geoffrey Charles. Perhaps Cuby expected Nampara to be another Trenwith. If so, it would be a horrid come-down for her. It seemed that she had become reconciled with her family. Probably after a couple of weeks she would gratefully return to Caerhays and stay there. Even though her mother-in-law was Lady Poldark.

And there was a sister coming. Demelza had seen her at the Trenwith party, along with a rather bumptious brother (with whom Cuby had recently been staying in London). Demelza seemed to remember that Jeremy had spoken well of the sister, though whether this was the same one remained to be seen.

With Jeremy none of this would have mattered. He would have jollied everything along, filled up the awkward pauses, adorned the house, in Cuby's eyes, with his presence. Now there was only Ross, who in his existing mood was more than ever inclined to disregard the niceties.

So she left Penryn very early on Monday, accompanied by the same young sailor who had brought the last message, and was home by eleven. In her reply to Cuby she had invited them to dinner at three, and now wished she had not. There was little enough time to prepare, first, two bedrooms, and then a meal which, while not pretentious, must be pleasantly elegant and well chosen.

All this, as she had instructed before she left, was in train, but much needed still to be done. The parlour was untidy, the dining-room cheerless, the *washing* had to be taken in; and the whole house lacked flowers. To make matters worse a strong south-easterly wind was blowing – always the most difficult to cope with – making windows rattle and doors bang. The tallest sandhills beyond Wheal Leisure were smoking as if they had volcanic properties.

She flew about the house, even making a heart-hurting tidy up of Jeremy's bedroom, so that if Cuby wanted to see it it should look its best. She had given Clemency Clowance's room and Cuby the better of the two new rooms built above the library when that part of the house was altered in '96. This, if she eventually chose to stay, would be where she would bear her baby. It was the least used room in the house and quite the most genteel. Only five years ago they had bought new rosewood furniture, the bed had pink quilted satin hangings and furnishings, with window curtains to match, and there was a maroon turkey carpet.

Into the garden to gather flowers; but they were sparse and looked tired. Cornish gardens were at their best in the spring: the light warm soil favoured all kinds of bulbs, roses, broom, lupins, wallflowers and flowering shrubs like lilac and veronica. But there was not enough humus to sustain the summer and autumn flowers at their best. (This year, of course, the hollyhocks had quite failed.) Dahlias were becoming all the rage and might have done well in this sandy soil, but Demelza could never grow them because of memories of Monk Adderley.

She had gathered what to her looked a tattered bunch, had thrust them into a jug in the parlour, and hastened out to see if she could find something more, when Ross came into the garden by the gate leading to the sea.

'Back so soon?' he said as he kissed her. 'I had not expected you till twelve.'

She told him between stoopings and snippings the latest news on Stephen.

'I brought a note for Dwight from Dr Mather. I had no time to deliver it on the way home, and I did not like to trust it with the sailor. Perhaps Matthew Mark would take it.'

'I can take it myself.'

'No, Ross, if you please, I would rather you were here when Cuby comes.'

He took her arm. 'It is not the old bogeys rising again?'

'A small matter maybe. But I have never had a daughter-in-law before, and because of what has happened it is bound to be difficult.' She gazed round disparagingly at her garden. 'If I had time I could do better with the wild flowers on the cliffs! There's heather in plenty, and knapweed – and there's lovely fresh gorse at the top of the Long Field.'

'Well, it will take you no more than half an hour. I'll hold the fort while you are gone.'

Demelza shook her head. Sick fancies these days: she had a sudden vivid picture of coming into this house, before she married Ross, a servant girl carrying a sheaf of bluebells, and finding Elizabeth had called.

'Why are you shivering?' Ross asked.

'What is it? I'm a little nervous. I think Stephen is a little bit ill. Ross, I don't like it.'

'Was it? It is or no moment . . . I think Stephen is gravely ill, Ross. I wish I knew what Dr Mather had written to Dwight.'

'I will go myself tonight and ask him. He'll tell me. But in injuries like this the surgeons can do little. It all depends on the patient and how bad he is hurt.'

'My dear life!' said Demelza.

'What is it?'

'I think they are here.'

V

'He don't seem to get rid of the fever,' said Jason.

'No. I hope Dr Enys will come again soon.'

'Reckon he did no more than Surgeon Mather.'

'It is just that I have known him so long and trust his judgements. I had hoped . . .'

They were eating some fried soles that Jason had bought, with potatoes and a pease pudding. Clowance had listlessly prepared the meal and ate without appetite. It was the evening of the Tuesday, still light because the sun, though setting over the land, reflected an incandescence from the water of the bay. Dr Mather had been in this afternoon and given the patient a draught which had put him to sleep, and had left another for the night. They were taking it in turns to be with him and had put up another trestle bed in the room so that each in turn could spend the night there. Stephen was in some pain now, but he was too weak to be irritable. All the same his weakness had not prevented him spending a part of the morning planning with Jason the boat that he intended to buy or have built, a smallish brig or a twenty-five-foot lugger, for Jason to command until he was experienced enough to merit something bigger.

Nor had it prevented him seeing three visitors: Andrew Blamey, Sid Bunt and Timothy Hodge. The first had been just a friendly call, a hail and farewell, for Andrew was sailing for New York on the morning tide and came to wish him well. The last two had been on business, for trade had to continue even with the owner laid up.

Clowance had hardly spoken with Tim Hodge before: he was so swart, so dark of eye and skin and tooth, so squat, that it took a time to overlook his appearance; then you couldn't fail to appreciate his practical talents. If Stephen was to be laid up for a long time he was the obvious man to help to run things. If she had not been so preoccupied with Stephen she might have had time to wonder how a man of such parts, now in his mid-forties, should still have had to enrol as an ordinary deckhand in a makeshift privateering venture.

error as an ordinary deckhand in a makeshift privateering venture.

Jason said: 'Father's a real popular man. Folk stop me in the street, say, how is he, seem real concerned.'

'He has a way with him,' said Clowance. 'He gets on well with everyone.'

She looked across the table at Jason, whose appetite was good and who ate with a relish worthy of a starving sailor. Since Stephen's accident she had seen a lot more of his son. He seemed the natural person to help her at a time like this. She saw in him some of Stephen's traits, both disagreeable and endearing, particularly among the former his tendency to fantasize on his own prospects; his ability in his own mind to rearrange the world to his own wishes. He would never be as good-looking as Stephen, nor, she thought, as physically, as vitally, attractive; but he had an engaging manner, an optimism, a resilience that reminded her very much of the man upstairs.

Thinking these things, Clowance said to him: 'Tell me about your mother.'

Jason blinked, then smiled. 'What do ye wish to know, ma'am?'

'Well, do you think you are like her?'

'Nay, she were dark and thin – real thin in later years – and small-boned – like a quail. I've taken from my father.'

'You are not quite as big as he is. Did she have any special abilities?'

'Abilities?'

'Well, I mean, was she, for instance, a good cook? I'm not a very good cook.'

'Good 'nough, ma'am. I'm sure my father love the food you give him.'

Mother? Yes, she did for us well. How my father liked it I don't know, because, of course, he left.'

'Yes, he left.'

Jason took a draught of ale. 'She was a good sewer.'

'Knitting and weaving?'

'Knitting special. She helped bring me up wi' selling things she made wi' her own hands. This jerkin, f'instance.'

Clowance looked at it and smiled. 'It was the one good thing you were wearing when you came. The stitch is very even.'

'Well, she made it for me. She made many things for me – stockings, gloves. This jerkin was one of the last things she made for me, more'n two years ago.'

Clowance put a piece of bread in her mouth. It was home-made and light, but it lacked something. Perhaps it was salt. She cut another slice from the loaf.

'Two years ago?'

There was a silence.

Jason said: 'Hark, was that him tapping? I thought I heard—'

'No, I don't think so . . . Did you say your mother knitted this for you two years ago?'

years ago.

‘Oh, nay, ’twas a slip of the tongue. ‘Twas much longer than two year.’ Jason had gone very red.

‘How much longer?’ Clowance asked.

‘I think I’ll go see if he is awake,’ Jason said, pushing back his chair. ‘I wouldn’t wish for him to think he was alone.’

He went out, and Clowance cut the piece of bread into small cubes. But they still tasted ashen and saltless.

After a while Jason came back. ‘No, he’s fast asleep still, but I have lit a candle. The light is failing, and when he wakes it will be good to see a light.’

‘Jason,’ Clowance said. ‘When did your mother die?’

‘What?’ He blinked. His eyes were smaller than Stephen’s, sandy lashed.

‘She isn’t still alive, is she?’

‘Who? My mother? God’s sake, no, she died – oh, some long time ago.’

‘When?’

He scratched his head and then took an uncomfortable swig of beer. ‘I don’t rightly remember.’

‘You don’t *remember* when your *mother* died? Oh, Jason, I don’t believe that! Did your father tell you to lie to me?’

‘Oh, nay! But he just said – well, not to talk about her – said it would be like to upset ye.’

Without getting up, Clowance began to tidy the table, putting plates together and gathering spoons. She was doing it instinctively, with no awareness of her actions.

‘Well, it does,’ she said. ‘It does upset me a little to hear your mother died so recent. But now I am upset, I think I would like to know the whole of it.’

‘’Twas a fool thing!’ said Jason. ‘A damn fool thing to let it out wi’ a slip of the tongue! ’Twould distress Father greatly to think I had been gossiping behind his back, like.’

‘You are not gossiping. And I will not tell your father. Was it last December she died?’

‘God’s sake, no! Long afore that.’

‘I thought perhaps as soon as your mother died you came to tell your father, and so turned up here last January?’

‘Nay, nay, she died in the winter.’

‘Last winter?’

‘Nay.’

‘The winter before? You may as well tell me, as I can easy find out.’ (She did not know how, but it was a point to make.)

‘The winter before.’ said Jason. ‘I remember snow was on the ground.’

'Twould be in the January.'

'January 1814?'

'Yes . . .'

'Two years ago your father went back to Bristol for a time. Five years ago he *came* from Bristol here for the first time. Was your father living with your mother, or visiting her there?'

'Lord no, we never seen him! I'd never seen him, not for twelve or more year before I came here this January, and that's God's truth! We didn't live in Bristol but ten mile outside. We never heard tell of him until I heard of him at Christmas time, last Christmas time. Then a man, a Cornish sailor called Tregellas, he said he knew my father was newly wed and living in Penryn and was well found with a fleet of ships. So I thought to come, and come I did, as you well know.'

Clowance got up now, carried the plates across to the scullery.

When she came back she said: 'Did your father know of your mother's death?'

Jason looked startled. 'Oh, yes! Oh yes! Well he must've, mustn't he. Before he could wed you.'

Chapter Ten

I

The arrival had gone off quite well, and five of them sat down to dinner: Cuby and Clemency, Ross and Demelza and Isabella-Rose. Henry, who usually ate the main afternoon meal with them, was taking it with Mrs Kemp in the kitchen.

In spite of her pallor Cuby looked well. She showed the coming child more obviously than a taller lady on the south coast, who was about as much forward; but like Harriet pregnancy was doing no hurt to her looks. Nor did her bereavement show. Possibly it was the effect of coming to see her late husband's family in their home for the first time that made her vivacious and talkative – much more so than her quieter, plainer, gentler sister. From her green riding costume she had changed into a plain dress of blue dimity, with blue and white ribbons, velvet shoes. No mourning except for a small posy of black artificial flowers pinned to her breast. She had changed her hairstyle, Demelza noticed, grown it, wore it in bracelets of braided hair. Her rather sulky face lit up when she smiled: good brilliant teeth, warm lips.

They were eating hare soup, a green goose, pickled salmon, cheese cake, almond cream, with cider and beer. It was not elegant enough, Demelza thought, but Ross had said it was right.

Cuby said on the way over she had noticed the barley and wheat had been cut but most of the oats were still standing. The ground had been very wet, Ross said; this wind would soon dry it. He supposed crops were a week or two ahead on the more sheltered south coast? Cuby spoke about the excellent carriageway that had been laid between Truro and Shortlanesend, she swore it was the best in Cornwall. Ross said, yes, yes, it was the work of that man from Ayrshire, MacArthur, or MacAdam, was it? Clemency asked about a mine they had passed near Truro, and Ross said, oh that would be Guarnek, re-started last year; it was said to be doing well. Cuby said, was this your mine, the engine that was working as they came down the valley? Yes, said Ross, industry passes too close here to achieve elegance . . . Cuby said she was sure everyone would welcome some industry close to Coombe if it could contribute to their income

some industry close to Caernays if it would contribute to their income.

‘In fact,’ said Ross, ‘the mine you passed, though it has made us a small fortune over the years, is now costing us money to maintain. At one time we employed more than a hundred and forty people, now it is down to thirty. Wheal Leisure, over on the cliff, is the profitable one.’

‘But you keep this other, this . . .’

‘Wheal Grace. Just in operation. It is partly sentiment, partly that I don’t want to throw men out of work. While I was interned I thought it over and decided it must close. But coming home, with later events in mind, I have kept it open. I think Jeremy would have wanted it kept open.’

The name was out. No one spoke for a few moments. Knives and forks chattered instead.

Cuby said: ‘Lady Poldark, did you hear that Lady Fitzroy Somerset had her baby in Brussels? In May. It was a girl, but I do not know how she has been named.’

‘No,’ said Demelza. ‘After I left Brussels I did not see her again.’

Ross said: ‘I’m told Fitzroy will continue in the army and a brilliant future is foretold for him. He seems completely to have overcome the loss of an arm. The Falmouths say he is in fine fettle.’

‘It is not so bad as losing a leg,’ said Isabella-Rose brightly. ‘Though it may be worse, I dare suppose, than losing only a foot.’

They all looked at this inconsequence in slight surprise, but she was not abashed. ‘Do you know what happened yesterday, Cuby? A kite was hovering over the chicken run, quite close, when Ena – one of our maids – rushed out to save the chick. The kite came down and stuck its claws in her cap and carried it off! It was so comical! We was convulsed with laughter.’

You used always, Demelza thought, to be able to rely on Bella to keep the conversation going on a jolly note; but since learning of Jeremy’s death and Christopher Havergal’s maiming she had been very mopish; often over a meal she hardly uttered a word; so it was a startling and welcome surprise to find her with recovered spirits at such an opportune time.

Now she was asking if Cuby sang, saying that Jeremy had told her she did – using the name without embarrassment – and that Clemency played; so tomorrow they must try duets together before Clemency left; they had a lovely piano – not that old spinet – but a lovely new one in the library that Papa had bought a couple of years ago; and no doubt they would be given permission to play on it for such a special guest.

Demelza went on with her dinner, picking at this and that, and noticing that Cuby was not eating heartily either, but watching her lips part in a smile. Those crescent dimples appeared and disappeared at the sides of her mouth –

crescent dimples appeared and disappeared at the sides of her mouth – something which had so enchanted Jeremy, and not surprisingly. She heard her laugh at something Bella said; and she thought: this girl is here in place of Jeremy, my tall handsome dearly loved son, and she was married to him for only six months and is already laughing; and perhaps in a year, two years she will have almost forgotten him – as I shall never forget him – and will likely marry again and bear more children by some other man; and the episode of her brief marriage to Jeremy will fade into a sad little corner in her early life.

And looking at Cuby in this way, Demelza felt a spasm of resentment within her that in a flash turned almost to hatred.

Judas God! she thought, aghast and sweating, bringing herself up short, what is this I am *thinking*, what is it I am *feeling*? This girl was the love of Jeremy's heart, and in an ordinary life not cut across by bloody war, would have remained so. She is a *nice* girl, and bearing his child. How can one look beyond that? She has been warm and affectionate to me. Is this feeling I have because, like Clowance, I suspect that if it had not been for her reluctance to marry him, he would not have gone into the army? Or is it something more earthy, more primitive, something every woman feels about another woman who steals her son? In any case it is wrong, wrong, wicked, evil and wrong, and if it is natural to feel it, then I must be unnatural and not *allow* myself to feel it!

I am Ross's wife and Jeremy's mother, not some village woman with mean and narrow and carping thoughts. I am my own person too, separate from Ross, able to choose and decide for myself. Evil thoughts, jealous, mean and petty emotions should be treated like blow-flies, not allowed to settle, driven away. Demelza did not really believe in Sam's circumstantial heaven, with God the Father waiting to greet her; nor really either in Mr Odgers' pallid faith; but if Jeremy's spirit was in any way alive, how humiliated he would be to know that she had harboured such thoughts, even for a moment, about Cuby!

'My dear,' she said, 'if Clemency would wish to stay for a few days we should be some pleased to have her. Of course you must use the piano whenever you want. It will, I suspicion, be badly out of tune, for I have not used it since – we came home. And even Bella has not been quite in the mood. But it would be lovely to have the sound in the house again.'

'That is kind of you,' said Clemency. 'But Mama will be expecting me home. But if I could come again – and soon . . .'

'Then let us make the most of today,' said Bella boisterously.

They made the most of the day, playing and singing for an hour after dinner, and then, under Bella's leadership, took a walk on the beach. Though it was one of the least favourable of days to venture on it, Cuby professed herself delighted with the expanse of sand and sea and rocks and her cheeks were glowing in an

with the expanse of sand and sea and rocks, and her cheeks were glowing in an uncommon way for her when she took tea with saffron buns and almond cake in the parlour. Ross talked about the problem of blown sand, especially with north-west winds; down towards Gwithian the sandbanks in some places were nearly two hundred feet high and a mile wide. He went on to speak of the plan to extend the pier at St Ives and build a breakwater and the nuisance that town suffered from blown sand. He did not know if his listeners were interested – or indeed if he was very interested himself – but it was something to say and it kept the ball rolling while someone thought up another subject unconnected if possible with the late war.

So the day passed, pleasantly enough as far as it could, nobody upsetting anyone else, but still inevitably much of a social occasion. Nothing could change that except day to day contact on a basis of ordinary living.

In the evening after supper the three girls had gone to sing duets at the piano, but presently Cuby slipped away, walked through the drawing-room, across the hall and into the parlour, where she found Demelza sitting alone reading a letter.

‘Oh, pray excuse me . . .’

‘No, no, please to come in. You do not disturb me.’

Cuby moved over to a chair, not sure all the same of her welcome.

Demelza said: ‘It is a letter from Geoffrey Charles. I am only re-reading it. It came on Saturday.’

‘Oh.’

‘You met him of course at his party . . . But not since?’

‘Not since.’

‘He is now in the Army of Occupation in Paris. His wife and daughter should be with him by now. He fought all through the Peninsular War and was wounded two or three times, but survived Waterloo without a scratch. Could you do something for me?’

‘Of course.’

‘Those other candles. They will make it more cheerful. Bella and Clemency are playing on alone?’

‘Bella is practising that song she sang at the party. “Ripe Sparrergrass”. She has a fine voice.’

‘Well, an unusual one. And strong. Her father does not much care for it.’

‘We all loved it at the party.’

‘Yes, it is at times like that it shows at its best.’

‘Do you sing, Lady Poldark?’

‘Not now . . . Oh, well, I sang last Christmas – that was the last time. But Bella has quite taken the wind out of my sails!’

‘I hope you will sing sometime this Christmas.’ When Demelza did not reply.

‘I’m sorry. I should not have said that.’

‘Perhaps we should all sing because the war is over.’

‘Yes. I lost my brother at Walcheren.’

‘I did not know.’

Cuby finished lighting the rest of the candles. The old room came into clearer focus, still shabby in spite of new furnishings over the years. It was the room in which all the Poldarks had lived for over three decades. It was the room in which Demelza as a child of fourteen had hidden from her father when he came to take her home to Illuggan.

Demelza was frowning at the letter. ‘It is strange about Geoffrey Charles that he has made such a fine soldier. He seemed at one time a rather spoilt boy. It was not until he went away to school that he grew up of a sudden, began to change . . . But then . . .’

Cuby sat down and waited. Demelza had been going to say: ‘Jeremy was the same.’ But it was dangerous ground to walk on. It could not safely be explored yet, if ever.

‘He has written to us before – since Waterloo, I mean. In this he just says, “I nearly and dearly sympathize with you all in your grief.” It is a long, long letter – I think he has specially tried to make it long and interesting – and begins with his account of his march from Waterloo to Paris. He says they marched thirty miles a day! He describes the French peasant women. “They wore lofty white caps with long flaps hanging down to their shoulders, their exposed stays often not closely laced, bosoms covered with coloured kerchiefs, coarse woollen petticoats striped with pink and reaching only to their calves, with white woollen stockings and sabots. Gold and silver rings in the ears and gold crosses on black ribbons round their necks.” It is a good picture. He says the English troops were welcomed everywhere as a protection against the pillaging of the French soldiers in retreat and the devastation of the brutal Prussians, who tore down doors and windows and burned the furniture in the streets.’

‘Lady Poldark,’ Cuby said.

‘Yes?’

‘May I come and sit next to you?’

‘Of course. Of course.’ Demelza turned over a page. ‘When they reached Paris they were first encamped in the Bois de Boulogne. Mostly the Prussians, Geoffrey Charles says, were allowed into Paris. He says he is now at a village called St Remy, about twenty-five miles from Paris.’ She stopped and looked at Cuby, who had come to sit on a stool next to her chair. ‘But he says he mounted guard in Paris, Geoffrey Charles says, when the Group of Horses which had been stolen from the Venetians were removed from the Arch of Triumph to be

returned to their proper owners. Cuby . . .’

‘Yes, Lady Poldark?’

‘You cannot go on calling me Lady Poldark. I am Jeremy’s mother.’

‘It does not matter. I just want you to know . . .’

‘What is it?’

‘How much I grieve. Underneath. I put on a pretty show. But underneath.’

Demelza said: ‘Perhaps without him we are both a little hollow.’

Cuby put her wet eyes against Demelza’s hand.

‘I wish I could die.’

II

Harriet had sent over twice to ask after Stephen’s health Now she wrote:

Dear Clowance,

I understand Stephen is confined to his bed and therefore not suitably to be visited. When he is, pray leave me know, and I will defy the Wrath of God and come to see him. There was a pretty to-do when it was discovered I had been jumping a ditch or so in my present gravid condition; George could not have been more consumed with anger that Stephen had met with an accident *riding in my company* had Stephen been his dearest friend – which needless to say we all know he is not. A Council of War was held – hardly less than a Star Chamber – with Drs Behenna and Charteris in attendance, in which it was virtually laid down as a Statute that I should not ride again until after I have foaled – though Lord save us, it is probably two months yet to that dreary event.

So I send sincerest wishes for your husband’s recovery, and pray let me know at once if there is anything you lack that I may provide.

Cordially yours,
Harriet Warleggan

When Clowance showed it to Stephen he grunted.

‘She may keep her charity. We are well enough without it.’

‘I do not think she meant charity in any ordinary sense – rather, perhaps, books to read or peaches from their hothouses.’ Stephen grunted again. His face was flushed and his leg painful. ‘I want nothing more of her – or any of ’em. I hope she bears him a horse: that’d suit her, I’ll warrant.’

Clowance said: ‘Always before you have been kindly disposed towards each

other. We know that she helped to deflect George's intention to bankrupt you. What did she say to you that so upset you?'

'Forget it.'

She waited. 'Well, I must reply, thanking her for her note. When you are better, if you do not wish to see her then, we can always make an excuse.'

'Can you get me more lemonade? I'm that thirsty.' When she had been for it he said: 'Where's young Jason?'

'He went down with Hodge to see the agents. You remember? He should be back soon.'

'Oh, aye, I *remember*. I'm not going to slip my wind yet. Clowance, I been thinking.'

'Yes?'

'This Truro Shipping Company that opened up last year. The shares were twenty-five pounds when it began. They're up to thirty-three now. I thought to buy some. Maybe some folk would see them as competitors, but I know the main shareholders and they're friendly along with me. By buying into their business I help my own!'

'So long as you don't overstretch.'

He shifted into a more upright position and winced with the pain. 'When Swann came up from the Falmouth Naval Bank yesterday he told me what some of the other cargo of the *Revenant* had fetched. Even with the share-out I shall be a richer man than ever I thought. *We* shall be richer. Have you been to the house this week?'

'You know I went yesterday.'

Stephen frowned, then half laughed. 'Ah, yes. And it is coming along well?'

'Well. Most of the outer structure will be finished by Christmas. We could move in, say, March or April.'

'Sooner'n that. Sooner'n that. When am I going to get the use of this leg back? What did Mather say this morning?'

'Yesterday. He said it was only a matter of time . . .'

'Ah, but how much time? That's what I want to know. To come through that privateering venture, wi' folk exploding their muskets in my face, and a French frigate near capturing us, to be floored by a damned horse is the ultimate. Really it is the ultimate . . .'

To calm him Clowance went into details of their house. She had told him them when she came home yesterday, but it lost nothing for him with repetition. Indeed she did not know how much of it he recalled. But when it was over, when she had told him all she could, he was silent for a while. Then he said:

'What'll we call our house, Clowance? Our big beautiful house where we're going to live for the rest of our lives. When we've got those stables up and

going to live for the rest of our lives. when we've got those stables up and planted our garden and, maybe, raised our children.'

'I don't know,' said Clowance. 'It's hard to think on a good name.'

'Well,' Stephen said, 'I've a notion. Maybe 'twill surprise you. But I've a notion to call it Tranquillity.'

Clowance looked at him and half smiled.

'Do you think that's what we shall find there?'

Stephen put a hand up to his brow. She came quickly and wiped it for him with a linen towel.

'I don't know,' he said. 'But that's the name I've the fancy to call it.'

III

The sudden improvement in Isabella-Rose's spirits was not without cause. The letter from Geoffrey Charles, which had arrived while Demelza was away, had been accompanied by a second letter addressed to 'Miss Isabella-Rose Poldark', and as her father was out of the house at the time she had been able to spirit it upstairs without anyone seeing it. It was from Christopher Havergal. She did not recognize the writing, and after she had opened it and peeped at the signature she held it to her breast in youthful anxiety before she could bring herself to read.

My dearest, dearest Bella, (*it began*)

Since I had the inexpressible pleasure of seeing you last, much has happened – most of it disagreeable. I was devastated to hear of the loss of your dear brother. Do you know, I never met him, much as I should have wished to do so. In a large army I suppose it is not surprising that your brother and I did not meet. He was in the 52nd Oxfordshires and I was drafted late into the 73rd Highlanders. On that fateful Sunday his regiment was holding the ground east of Hougoumont whilst we were defending the Ohain road – a distance perhaps of a mile and a half, but a mile and a half more than a little congested with fighting soldiers! (I was nearer Geoffrey Charles, but never saw him either until the Tuesday after.)

I have also lost a part of myself – though not so large a part as rumour, I understand, first had it. We of the 73rd had had a real set-to at Quatre Bras on the Friday (to think I once complained that I had missed most of the war!) but it was not until Sunday afternoon that a cannon-ball arrived and carried off my foot at such a rate that I was never able afterwards to find it, diligently though I searched. My life was saved by a Mrs Bridget O'Hare, wife of Rifleman O'Hare who, like others of her sturdy kind, always follow their husbands into

battle. Mercifully no surgeon was about, so I did not lose half my leg; she applied a tourniquet and bound the wound up in dirty rags, and by the time I was picked up by a hospital cart I did not merit surgical attention.

The outcome is that I am minus my left foot, but otherwise intact. I was very soon on crutches, and now, as the breach has healed over, I am beginning to walk with a leather strap and an iron support which I am told will soon be exchanged for an artificial foot. In time maybe even a stick will be superfluous!

I am writing this, as you see, from lodgings in London, where I have had a wonderful convalescent time being fêted and dined in the best houses as one of the young heroes of Glorious Waterloo. In the last five days I have presented myself at my lodgings punctually for breakfast at 9 a.m. – before I went to bed.

Dearest Bella, before you cut me out of your life for such incontinence, I beg to assure you that very, very soon I shall become sober-minded again. But for a little while I have just rejoiced at being alive and so much in the swim!

I have to confess to you also, dearest Bella, that I am at present living with a lady! . . .

But she is my landlady – forty years old if she is a day, with bad teeth and a stooping posture – a truly curvilinear old maid, who feeds me well when I am there to be fed and who in all other ways is mercifully unobtrusive. I have seen many charming and pretty and taking young persons since I returned to England, but none has engaged my fancy because in front of them all as I look at them is imposed the utterly enchanting face of my beloved Bella, whose like in the world there is not.

Isabella-Rose Poldark. It reads and speaks most excellently. Isabella-Rose Havergal. That in due course of time, if you will have me, it shall be changed to. But Bella Poldark will always be your stage name. It runs on the tongue. It runs in the mind. As the owner of it will run on the tongue and in the mind of those who eventually see her.

Three months more I shall spend perfecting my New Foot. Riding shall, I swear, be no obstacle. Dancing may prove a trifle more perverse for a while. Aside from that, and a somewhat loping walk, I swear to you I am a whole man – and wholly yours. In three or four months – perhaps in the spring when your flowers are out – I shall come and sample the salutiferous air of Cornwall. Then, my lovely poppet, I shall hope to see you again!

Your devoted friend – who wishes in due time to be more,

Christopher Havergal

Chapter Eleven

I

It was Music Thomas's wedding day.

Or rather it was the day on which it had been proposed he should be joined in holy matrimony to his dearly loved and admired Katie Carter, when they would cleave together and be of one flesh – or at least live together and be of one cottage – until death did them part. Now, alas, not a death but the failure of an expected birth had prevented the union being proceeded with. Katie had let him down, as no doubt she'd the right to do, or so Surgeon Enys said, and he did ought to know. But the rights or wrongs of the situation helped Music not at all. The desire of his life – although it had seemed far out of his reach – had suddenly been promised him. Now it was as suddenly withdrawn. And he had become the laughing stock of the village.

At twelve noon on his wedding day Music stood in his cottage staring round it, all so clean and so tidy and lovingly repaired. Night after night, and whenever he could get away, he had worked to make the place suitable for his queen. Now it was empty except for his four cats.

It was worse being so clean, so tidy; and his brothers would be sneering. The sun was falling through the new windows he had put in. Good glass had been hard to come by, so he had puttied in a piece of bottle-green glass for the lower panes; with the sun shining through it it looked the colour of sea water with bubbles. (Upstairs in the bedroom he had had to make do with oiled paper.)

And the privy was clean and the steps to it new laid, and the back plot was as tidy as could be expected with three hens roaming it, and beyond that Will Nanfan's field and then the moors leading to the cliffs with the Queen Rock looming out at sea.

He knew he should be at Place House, for it was not his official time off, but he did not stir. If he was sacked he didn't any longer care. He'd get a job, some sort of a job, to keep himself fed – if there was any purpose now in staying fed. Many folk, of course, had been against the idea of his wedding Katie; her mother had and her brother had and her grandfoll had; they'd all thought he wasn't

had and her brother had and her grandolk had; they'd all thought he wasn't good enough. There was a time when he had greatly admired Ben Carter – still did in some ways: that there organ he'd built all by his self in his own bedroom. They was clever folk, the Carters, not like him, the village fool, singing alto and walking spring-heeled and anyone could make a butt of him.

Yet she'd promised. She'd scat her promise. She said she'd wed him and now would not. The Carters were no betterer than the Thomases. In fact worse, for he'd never gone back on no promise to no one.

He'd helped Ben Carter when he'd been in trouble that time, when he'd met him coming out of The Bounders' Arms, with Emma Hartnell propping him up and him as drunk as a newt; he'd helped him back to his mother's shop and helped him upstairs, and Katie had come upon them and had given Music a rare old talking to for helping himself to the asparagus in the walled garden of Place House to take as a present to Dr Enys. But it had all ended beautiful. It had all ended with Katie giving him a kiss – the only one ever, and he had galloped back to Place House like a man who'd found a gold mine.

That was the best day of all. It had never been so good after, with Katie only having eyes for Saul Grieves and Grieves only having eyes for any slip or mistake or shortcoming Music might have or make. It had been sneer, sneer all the way.

Music had never seen Ben Carter tipsy drunk before, nor never since, and his brother John had said it was because Clowance Poldark had gone off to wed that up-country sailor feller, Stephen Carrington. Crossed in love Ben had been, not just so different from Music's own plight now. But ne'er as *bad*. Ne'er as *bad*. Music would have taken his oath Miss Clowance Poldark could *never* have promised to wed Ben, let alone scat it up at the last minute. Ben had got tipsy drunk all the same. Why not? Why shouldn't *he* get tipsy drunk today? He'd pennies enough. He'd been saving for the marriage day, and Surgeon Enys had been generous about those shelves. And that wonderful lady whose dog him and Miss Clowance had helped to bring home in the snow last February, that wonderful lady, Lady Something, had given him more money than he had ever had before in his life.

Rum. That was what Emma Hartnell had said Ben had been drinking all day. Music had only touched spirits three times in his life but he'd never tasted rum. Maybe 'twas the best thing to fill up a hollow heart.

But where to get it? There was Sally Chill-Off's, just at the head of the Combe. Emma's the other way, past the church. A half-dozen more to choose from. But which might turn him away afore he had had his fill? They cared naught, none of 'em cared naught so long as he had the pennies and they didn't have to chalk up his debt on the side of the bellows. Ned Hartnell was the most

have to chalk up his debt on the side of the bellows. Ned Hadden was the most likely to see him away too soon. The Bounders' Arms was a bit superior against the rest. But that was where Ben had gone. That was where Music thought he was least likely to meet the village lads. If Ned and Emma would let him he would drink himself quickly into a state where everything would be forgot.

II

Three hours later Ned edged him out of the side door of the inn. Music was a mite frustrated, because he had wanted to be just so far gone as Ben had been, and then Emma could've helped him all the way home. It would have been nice to have leaned on Emma all the way home, because she was soft and kindly and he might have got his arm around her waist even if only in the most chaste way. In fact, though he did not know it, Ned had substantially watered his rum, not wishing to have the young man snoring under his table for the next twelve hours.

Still, he was distinctly merry and the emptiness and grief had disappeared. And he was unsteady enough for Ned to lend him a stick. *And they'd been all strangers in the inn – that is from places more than a mile away, like Marasanvose and Bargas – so they'd not tormented him with jokes about the wedding.*

In the left pocket of his rough smock he carried a small flask. When he got home he reckoned if he finished that off he would sleep his way into oblivion for the rest of the day.

Fine morning, wet evening, that's what it was going to be. The sun had sneered its way behind some mackerel clouds, and there were heavier ones creeping up.

Creeping up, that was the word. Something hit him on the shoulder. It was a clod of earth. He turned slowly, trying to keep his balance, and there was a titter. It was a girlish titter and after a moment or two another piece, half stone, half grass, hit him on the leg. He recognized the black tousled head of Lily Triggs. Then he saw Mary Billing and Susie Bice. Others began to appear out of the rough gorse and outcroppings of rock.

'Goin' church, Music, are ee? Can we come 'long and see the fun? Like to wed one of us, would ee, now? How 'bout Mary 'ere? She'm a fine maid, she be. Just ripe for ee! Heh! Heh! Heh!'

He waved his stick, half in menace, half in fun and then went on. But in front of him he found five big lads barring his way. Another Bice, another Billing, and Joe Stevens, who was one of his long-term tormentors.

'Let's all go church shall us ' said Stevens 'Be ee bride or groom Music?'

Let's all go church, shall us, said Stevens. Be ye bride or groom, Music.
He tried to hang a lump of turf with trailing ends on Music's head. 'Crown 'im, crown 'im!'

Music knocked the turf away and lost his hat. He pushed his way through the lads and went on his way. He was near the church, and was almost up to the churchyard when his arms were seized.

It was the girls who had got hold of him – hard and noisy as the lads – but because they were women he could not very well knock them away. He struggled to be free, but his fumed head let him down and he fell. Hands grabbed him again and he was yanked to his feet. Laughing, jeering faces.

'Come us on, me dears. Getten wed are ee? Set 'im down in church porch, and ye can wait for yer bride!'

Struggling they lugged him into the churchyard and half-way to the church. Stevens tore up another hummock of grass and clumped it on his head; it stayed there while they howled with laughter. There were now a dozen or more, dancing round him, jeering at him and thumping him. He aimed a couple of swinging blows: one landed on Stevens, the other floored Mary Billing, who got in the way at the last moment.

They didn't dare frog-march him into the church, but Mary Billing, scrambling to her feet, screamed: 'Put'n in the stocks! That'll learn un. Let'n spend 'is wedden day setten in the churchyard!'

Not far from the porch of the church was a pair of stocks and beside it a whipping post. The post was not often used but the stocks were accepted as a valuable corrective for the minor miscreant.

Struggling and wriggling and dizzy with drink, Music was hauled towards the stocks; he would have been a handful to force into them, but at the wrong moment Mary Billing charged him head down like a bull and knocked all the wind out of him. By the time he began to get it back his ankles were secured, and then it was only a bit more struggling before his arms were fixed into the appropriate holes.

The lads and the girls – six of one and nine of the other – now stood back and looked at their victim. They screamed with laughter, disturbing the rooks overhead. It was the best joke they'd had for years, and into it came a half-realized resentment against the village fool who had striven to shake off his image. While he had been ready to play the idiot, singing alto at the head of any procession they got up, capering like a loon on the balls of his feet, ready to be laughed at because it was the only claim he would ever have to notoriety, he was a popular figure. But these last two years the fun had gone out of him; except for church he wouldn't sing at all; he had begun walking more or less ordinary; he'd put on a few airs, trying to distance himself from his old reputation; and all this

had come to a head by him having the cheek to think he could wed a capable girl like Ben Carter's sister. Now she'd jilted him and good luck to her; that'd learn him. And this'd learn him too.

Of all people it was Susie Bice who threw the first handful of gravel at him. The Bices were not a nice family – shiftless and ailing and far from honest – but Susie had always been thought to be the best of a poor lot. It is doubtful now if she thought to start anything serious, but that was how it began. One after another the group began to pick up anything they could find in the churchyard and pelt Music with it.

Then Joe Stevens said: 'Nay, let's play fair. Let's draw a line, see. No one afore that line. No cheaten. We tak it from this yur line, see who scores a hit. See —'

'Stick a pipe in 'is mouth!' screamed Mary Billing excitedly. 'Make 'im into an Aunt Sally!'

'Nay, he'd never 'old un. Leave'n be.'

'Nay, let's dress im all golden like wi' gorse prickles, ready for 'is wedden.'

But Stevens and Bert Bice had no time for frills. They had drawn their line and were beginning to aim. And the one thing available was just beneath a headstone to old Dr Choake. The grave was covered with grey pebbles.

III

The Warleggans – Valentine and Selina, that is – had engaged a housekeeper called Mrs Alice Treffrey to take charge of Place House while they were in Cambridge. Mrs Treffrey came as senior parlourmaid from Tehidy, with the highest references, and there was not likely to be a repeat of Saul Grieves's misbehaviour. Because she was new to the job she did not notice the absence of the stableman; but others did. Katie – whose waistline had by now almost resumed its normal dimensions – could not get away until well on into the afternoon; then she went in search of him. She thought it might be his 'purty chets' that were keeping him. Or, the day being what it was, he might just be sulking. Anyway there was no call for him to lose his job: she would soon root him out, knock some sense into him.

The cottage was empty. Even the cats were not to be seen, though when she went out of the back door she thought she spotted a vanishing tail. She went through and out to the front. In the next cottage were the formidable Paynters, and Prudie was leaning over the wall.

'Looking for lover?' she asked with a leer.

Katie caught a glimpse through the open door of the lamentable Jud filling his pipe.

‘I be seeking Music, if that’s what ye d’mean.’

‘He be gone that way,’ said Prudie with a sweep of a fat wobbly arm.

The sweep covered an area of about a quarter of the compass, but there were virtually only two tracks leading in that general direction: one towards the ruined engine house of Grambler and thence to Nampara, the other to the church. Katie chose the church, and very soon heard excited cries and whoops from inside the lych gate. A few strides inside and she came on a group of lads and girls, in their late teens and early twenties, excitedly, hysterically egging each other on to stone her *ci-devant* fiancé imprisoned in the stocks. There had been a number of good hits and blood was running down his face. He was struggling to get out.

Not far from this scene was an open grave, ready dug but not yet occupied. Beside the mound of clay and stones (some of the stone bearing unmistakable gleams of mineral) was the shovel Jan Triggs, the present sexton, had been using. It was a type known as a ‘lazy back’, having a long handle and a heart-shaped blade. Katie picked it up, twisted it round in her hands to get a firm grip, walked back and knocked Joe Stevens unconscious with a tremendous swing to the head. Then she swung back the other way and caught Bert Bice in the chest, breaking two of his ribs. Mary Billing just dodged a blow that would almost have decapitated her, and the rest simply dropped the stones and fled.

Katie flung the shovel aside and went up to the stocks. Music blinked up through the blood at his new tormentor.

‘Get out o’ thur, ye great drunken fool!’ she shouted in a fine temper. ‘Cor, I can catch your breath a mile away—’

‘Katie, I done me bestest—’

‘Bestest, is it, an? My dear soul, I’d dearly not wish to know your worst! Come us on, come us on! . . .’

She lifted the wooden frame and helped him out of the stocks. A stray stone hit the woodwork as she did so, but she looked up with a glare so fierce no more followed. Two youths were kneeling beside Joe Stevens, who was stretched out on the grass just beginning to groan. Bert Bice was being helped away, holding his chest.

Free of the stocks, Music fell back on the grass and then made an effort to struggle to his feet.

‘Lay still, ye gurt fool! Blinded your eyes, ’ave they? I’ll see the magistrates ’bout that; have ’em up—’

‘Nay, Katie, I can see well ’nough. ’Tis only the blood from these yur cuts on me ’ead. See.’ He smeared his face with the back of his hand and blinked up

apologetically at her. He might still smell strongly of rum, but his ordeal had gone a way to sobering him up.

Katie took off her yellow kerchief and began to wipe his face. It emerged through the blood and the dirt.

‘Stinking great labbats,’ she said, stopping to glare behind her. Two lads were half helping, half carrying Joe Stevens out of the danger zone. Presently they were all gone. She stood hands on hips staring belligerently around her, then turned her attention to the wounded man.

‘Get on up, can ee?’ She helped him to his feet. He lurched against her, then straightened himself. ‘Come us on; I’ll put ee home.’

It was not a long way – nothing to the distance Music had aided Ben to walk on a previous occasion. They reached the cottage. Luckily Prudie had gone in, and all the people in the cottage on the other side were at work. It was beginning to rain.

‘Ye gurt *fool*,’ said Katie again. ‘What d’ ye want to go get drunk for? Sit *down!*’ she commanded. ‘I’ll get ee a dish of water to bathe off your face. And I’ll boil a pan – make ee some tay. Not as I’d not be above one myself!’ Her own hands were trembling with the spent anger.

She brought him a bowl and then while he dabbed at himself she lit the fire with some shavings and pieces of driftwood.

She sat back on her heels, looking at the fire. ‘My, don’t it draw!’

When she had come back from the pump for a second time with water to make the tea, she glanced at Music who had finished dabbing and was drying his face on a duster.

‘That won’t do! That’s a halfy job. ’Ere, take yer shirt off. And yer breeches. You’re all caked and cabby.’

He reluctantly removed his shirt and she looked at the muscles rippling in his arms.

‘My, what a gurt man ye are! Look, I reckon Surgeon Enys should tend this wound in yer ’ead. ’Tis gaping like a little mouth.’

‘’Tis narthing, Katie. Reelly. I’ll go Irby’s and he’ll put some salve on it.’

‘We’ll see ’bout that. Now yer breeches.’

Music looked at her sidelong. ‘Cain’t do tha-at. I got no slights on.’

‘Well, land sakes, ’fraid o’ me seeing something, are ee? Giss along. ’Ere – this cloth’ll do. Draw off yer breeches and wrap’n round like a skirt. ’Ere, I’ll tak yer boots off. If ye bend too far ’twill open up the bleeding.’

So presently he was sitting with a piece of old tablecloth round his middle and a potato sack over his shoulders while she made the tea. There were two clean cups he’d bought for the wedding and a half jug of milk the cats had not been

able to get at.

They sat there in silence for a few minutes, drinking the hot tea. It was raining heavily now and a rising wind beat the rain against the coloured window panes.

‘Them Bices, them Billings,’ said Katie, ‘they should be learned a lesson.’

‘Reckon they ’ave been,’ said Music with a half-giggle. ‘An’ Joe Stevens. He’s always one in the lead.’

‘Ah. Well, I’ve give ’im a sore ’ead.’

‘I’ll mind it fur a long time,’ said Music, sipping at his tea. ‘I’ll mind it fur a long time. You thur striking of ’em, this way, that way, they went down like ninepins.’ He relished the phrase. ‘Just like ninepins.’

Katie poured out more tea, stirred each cup with the one wooden spoon. ‘I’d best be getting back. Else they’ll think I’ve fell down a shaft. I’ll tell ’em ye met wi’ an accident. Mind you come first thing tomorrow.’

‘Ais. Oh ais, I will that. I will that, Katie.’

‘Not that Mrs Treffrey will scold. She’m easy-going for time so long as the work d’get done.’

‘I’ll be there, Katie, sure ’nough.’

Katie looked at him. ‘You’re a fine figure, ain’t you? Gotten more clothes upstairs, ’ave ee?’

‘No. Well . . . I’ve a jacket and breeches ’anging on the wall, but that’s for Sunday.’

Katie went up and fetched them. She held them up for inspection and dropped them on the table. ‘Let’s look at yer ’ead.’

She examined him again. ‘You should see Surgeon for that. It d’keep welling up. Aside from that . . .’

‘Ais, Katie.’ He smiled at her.

She stared at him again. ‘Reckon if I’d wed you you’d ’ve drove me mad.’

‘Stay a space longer,’ urged Music. ‘Look at’n. ’Tis enting down.’

‘Put yer clothes on, then,’ said Katie. ‘You’ll catch yer death.’

He dragged off into the scullery and presently emerged in his Sunday best. His face was a mess, three bruises and two cuts, but his eyes clear again, at their most dazed blue.

‘Reckon ye need someone to look for you,’ said Katie contemptuously. ‘You’re as fazy as yer cats.’

‘No,’ said Music.

The firmness of his voice surprised her. It was the first time he had contradicted her.

‘I want to look for *you*,’ said Music. ‘All the time – from daystrike to nightgleam. Tha’s what I allus wanted for to do. All the time. ’Tis still what I

want for to do.' An extra flurry of rain lashed on the glass.

'You reckon that, do you?' said Katie.

'Yes, I do.'

Katie thought for a long time.

'You'd drive me mad,' she eventually said.

A smile cracked his battered face. 'Nay, Katie, I wouldn't. Honest I wouldn't.'

Chapter Twelve

On Friday, the 13th October Stephen was brighter than he had been for several days, and he seemed no longer in pain. He talked a lot to Clowance, though it was not always coherent.

‘I’ve come a long way with you already,’ he said, ‘and there’s big plans for next year and the year after. I been thinking them over all this time I’ve been laid up. For you and Jason and the Carrington line. I shall build another vessel, that’s what I shall do, one to me own specifications, give the *Lady Clowance* over to Jason. Now the war’s really over it looks as if we shall have peace in our lifetime, so we must bend our ways to make the *best* of peace. Peaceful trade’s profitable if you get in when the tide’s making, before your rivals. Great thing is not to work for other folk but to work for yourself. Then ye don’t get paid per week – per month – ye get what ye’ve earned and it goes into no one else’s pocket. I’m thinking to start a Joint Stock Company.’

‘What is that?’

‘‘Tis a more modern way of adventuring as in a mine. Or taking shares in a privateer. You establish a Joint Stock Company of say five thousand pounds and you keep three thousand of the stock in your own hands. Others invest in the shares and take a share of the profit, but you always keep control. That way you have the use of two thousand pounds of their money at no cost to yourself. It was the same sort of idea I thought on when I was in hock to Warleggan’s. Then no one wanted a share. It will be different now.’

He licked his lips, and she wiped his face and gave him a sip of lemonade.

He chuckled. ‘I’ve been clever in me life, y’know. Clever this last year or so. I reckon you’ve brought me luck, dear heart. All along, you’ve brought me luck.’

When did your first wife die? she wanted to ask, and was she dead in 1813, when you were first going to marry me, or were you just resolved to take a chance on not being found out? She wanted harshly, desperately to ask, but instead she wiped his brow again and moistened his dry lips.

He said: ‘I’ve been in one or two scrapes, as ye well know. And some ye know not of. That first time when we were at the races and Andrew recognized

KNOW NOT OF. THAT FIRST TIME WHEN WE WERE AT THE TABLES AND ANDREW RECOGNIZED me as the man in the bar at Plymouth Dock . . . It was a nasty moment. I've never been too sure of Andrew, y'know. He means well, most of the time, but he talks too much and is leaky in his liquor. Let him drop the wrong word when George Warleggan or one of his creatures is around . . . But now I no longer fear his indiscretions. He's sobering up with Tamsin, and it is all disappearing into the distant past. Like – like something else that happened that he was not concerned in. Others were. Ye'd be surprised if I told you who the others were. Someone quite close to you. But I never will, never can now . . .'

Jason put his head round the door. 'I'll spell you while you take your dinner, ma'am.'

Clowance went to the door. 'I cannot come yet. And – I think you should go for Dr Mather.'

'Why? Is he . . .?'

'Tell him I would like him to come.'

When she returned to the bed Stephen was smiling again.

'Ye're real good to me, dear heart. I don't know what I did to deserve a wife like you. What was I saying?'

'It does not matter, Stephen. Try to rest.'

'Oh, I know. About me old luck. Look you, there was Plymouth Dock, and I was well out of that. Then there was the stage – the other thing, and I was well out of that. Then George Warleggan and his toadies tried to bankrupt me and drew back at the very last, and I was well out of that. Then there was the privateering adventure, which has made our fortune. And a Frenchie discharged his musket full in me face, and the charge was wet . . . Now I have fallen off a damned, cursed horse and hurt me back, but that is over now and I will soon be well out of that. We're turning up the aces, dear heart, aren't we now?'

'Yes,' said Clowance, sitting quietly down again.

'A leaky ship and the anchor's down. Hurrah me lads, hurrah.' Stephen was trying to sing.

'Hush, my dear, do not tire yourself.'

He was quiet for a minute or so, then he said: 'I reckon twelve pounds for a spring be too much. Why I can take it Plymouth and get it done for less. I reckon 'is always the way; your local port'll try to charge too much. In dry dock, ye say? I'm paxed if she needs dry dock.' Then a little later: 'Swedish pitch at eleven shillings a hundredweight and Russian tar at twenty shillings a barrel. Can ye match that?'

Friday the 13th. Clowance was not superstitious but the day had the lowering look of the end of summer, the end of hope. From this window she could see a corner of the cottage roof next door. a piece of sky with clouds as dark as coal

smoke shredding across it, and a lip of the harbour curling with spiteful little waves. She was filled with dread for the future; all the warm hopes of last year were gone and she lived in a spider's web of sadness and suspicion. Everywhere where there had been certainty there were shifting sands. She had never felt so much alone in an alien world.

'What I want,' said Stephen, addressing someone outside the room, 'is a smart little cabin for the master, bulkheads half panelled in maple and teak. And then in the corner a fine settee upholstered in crimson plush, see? A neat fireplace and maybe a tiled surround wi' a brass mantelshelf.' Now he turned his head suddenly: 'That suit ye, Clowance? Care to come wi' me across to Brittany? What shall we name her, eh? Now we've got a *Lady Clowance*, maybe we could call her the *Lady Carrington*? The flagship of the Carrington line!'

'I'd love to come,' said Clowance, 'when she's built. Get well first.'

'Oh, I'm coming along fine. Where's Jason?'

'Just gone out to fetch me something.'

'Reckon she'll carry a crew of eight, the *Lady Carrington*. That is about the style . . . Frame shall be of English oak planks; deck, I reckon, of Quebec yellow pine. Very even and hard wearing. The oak can be got from the Tamar River and shipped from Plymouth. Masts of Canadian red pine; yards, topmasts, jib-boom the same. Diameter? I can't tell ye that till we've got the full plan! Where's Jason?'

'He'll be back soon.'

Stephen looked at her with a strange expression in his eyes. 'Tell him to hurry.'

'I will, I will.'

'She shall be laid down in Falmouth,' he said. 'Bennett's is a better yard than Carne's in Looe, bigger. Sorry, for your father has a money share in Carne's.'

'No matter.'

'Will ye hold my hand,' he said.

She drew her chair nearer to the bed and took his hand, which was moist and had no strength in the grip.

'That Frenchie,' he said, with a chuckle that rustled in his throat. 'Ye should've seen his face when the musket did not fire. I stabbed him through the chest. Blade went in so far I could not withdraw the knife. Biggest killing I've ever done, yet folk *praise* me for that. Don't make sense. Clowance, ye're a rare good wife. Where's . . . young . . . Jason?'

His head sank back on the pillows and his breathing became heavy and irregular. When Jason came back with Dr Mather, Stephen was unconscious. It was a long fight then; a man, still young, whose powerful body struggled against

the forces of disintegration that attacked it. The hours passed and the night passed in this tremendous contest while the passionate need to live was slowly eroded by a relentless escape of blood. Dawn broke before it was over.

BOOK FOUR

Chapter One

I

Letter from Jeremy Poldark to his mother, handed to her by Cuby Poldark the day Cuby returned to Caerhays.

Brussels, 1st June 1815

Dearest Mother,

I do not suppose you will ever receive this letter – certainly I trust you shall not! – but just in case I thought to leave it in safer hands than mine.

In January 1812 I indulged in an adventurous caper that I feel by some alchemy of your own you have already partly apprehended. I will not go into details, for whatever I said your apprehension would never become comprehension. For I do not altogether understand it myself. A serious law was broke by three persons, of whom I was one. I will say no more except to make it clear – and this is one of the purposes of this letter – that I was not unduly influenced by the other two. If anything I was rather the motivating force, and I worked out the plan that was carried out. If you suspect who the others might be, do not consider them more to blame than I and indeed rather the less.

Nor should adverse circumstances be held to carry any more than a small load of responsibility. Of course I was disturbed and restless and unhappy. But that was only a scattering of gunpowder on the floor: there was no need to scrape it together and light a fuse! I wish I were able to explain it better than that – I cannot. Did I have an ancestor who ended up as a highwayman dangling at the end of a rope?

One thing is certain. You are in no way at all to blame, nor is my father. I had a splendid childhood and a carefree youth-time. Any worm in the bud existed before the fruit was set.

That is all – let us not be pompous about it. If, as I trust, I return with Cuby to set up house together near you, you will never see this – though perhaps it

assuages something in me merely to write it down, believing that it will never be read by the Person to whom it is addressed. But then, on my return to Nampara, and at an early stage, I shall reclaim from you a little Loving Cup that you say you found one day on the beach; and I shall look on it as a cup of good fortune and keep it somewhere safe in my own home. If you *should* read this letter, then perhaps it has rather been a cup of Ill-Fortune, and, since you say you picked it from the sea, to the sea it should be returned.

By the way, last Christmas Valentine was asking me about installing an engine for his new mine, Wheal Elizabeth. If I am not about, tell him to approach Arthur Wolff, who is really the first man nowadays. Tell Valentine on no account to put in a plunger poll engine; they work excellent to begin but the exposure of the whole piston to the atmosphere at every stroke is unsound practice and will lead to excessive wear.

Well, this is about all I have to say! It is my usual custom to end my letters on a jolly note, but clearly this cannot be so in a letter which, if jollity prevail, you will never see! So may I just end with a charge to you and Father to care for Cuby and for our child? I *know* you will do this without any request from me, so pray take any more as said. Cuby is a wonderful girl and a wonderful wife – there could be no better – who is only just coming into her own. I would not want her to regress under any Influence her elder brother might exert. You, Mama, I think, would be the greatest influence – after me! – in inducing her not to do so.

Love, love, love to you all.
Jeremy

II

Letter to Sir Ross Poldark from George Canning.

Caldas, Portugal, 25th September 1815

My dear Friend,

Thank you for your letter in reply to mine of the 8th July. In expressing our sympathy to you and your wife and family over your grievous loss we were only joining in the chorus of loving friends who must have written in the same vein to try to support and comfort you all. Though I have met none of your family – except briefly your beautiful daughter at the Duchess of Gordon's Ball – I feel that you have always been a close and loving entity, and the loss of your eldest son will be a sword thrust that will wound you to the heart.

But my dear friend, this second letter of yours grieves me in another way because it speaks of your intended withdrawal from public life and your decision to live henceforward in your Cornish home seeing to your own affairs. In large – at least in part – I can only commend such a decision – for what else have I done? – and I know of your long formulated intention to leave Parliament at the successful conclusion of the French wars. That is as it should be. You are not the political animal I am.

But you have so much to bring to public life in *some* form – a strength of character, a rare integrity, a thinking brain which does not allow itself to be diverted from its true concerns, a passionate belief in freedom and justice, a resolution in all good things: these are in such rare supply today that they cannot, *shall* not, I hope, be altogether lost to those of us who inhabit the world of affairs.

Peace, I have no more to say, except to ask you in due time, in God's good time, to think carefully on what I write. As for myself, what you may imagine am I doing with my own life to preach to a better man? The answer is little enough. At the end of June I wrote to the Government offering my resignation as Ambassador here, and a month later they accepted it. Now that the menace of Napoleon has finally been removed there is no need to keep such a large embassy in being in Lisbon, so they are going to scale it down and leave it to a chargé d'affaires. And I have become a private citizen!

One of my main reasons for accepting the post in Portugal in the first place was on account of George's delicate health, and in the hope that the warmth should suit him. It does. So I have brought him to Caldas to the warm baths. You will understand – and forgive me for – such a preoccupation with our eldest son. Here it is even hotter than Lisbon, and Joan and the little ones have fled to Cintra where the sea breezes blow. But George prospers in the heat, so I shall stay as long as he is happy here.

For the future? Of course I must return to England, temporarily or permanently, in the new year, if only to assuage my Liverpool constituents, who have seen nothing of me all this time! I do not yet feel ready to resume my political career (nor is there any inducement to do so), so probably I shall return to Portugal and then we shall travel into other parts of Europe – Madrid, Rome, Naples, Florence. Do you know you are luckier in one respect than I am, for I have never been to Paris.

But one day early next year I may of a sudden arrive in Falmouth – on my own, the family will stay here – and I do not know how far your home is from that port but in so narrow a county it can hardly be farther than a day's ride.

By then, my dear friend, I trust you and your wife will have come through

the worst of your tragic bereavement. At least let us talk, and if you are adamant in your decision I shall henceforward hold my peace.

Believe me, with all sympathy and much admiration,
your Sincere Friend,
George Canning

PS I am sure you will take great satisfaction from the news that Fouché has now fallen – disgraced, I hear – and Tallien with him. So the stables are being cleaned at last!

III

Stephen Carrington was buried at St Gluvias Parish Church on the 19th October, the Reverend John Francis Howell officiating. A great many people turned out. In his short time in Penryn Stephen had become widely known, and on the whole well liked. Falmouth and Penryn, being ports, were more used to the abrupt arrival and departure of strangers and therefore were less clannish, at least on a superficial level. Stephen had had a ‘way’ with him, had been free with his money, talked with high and low alike, had put business in the way of the towns, and most recently had achieved a remarkable privateering success which had enriched both those who had put money into his adventure and the men who sailed with him.

There were also mourners from Truro, and Andrew and Verity Blamey, and a large north-coast contingent which included Ross and Demelza and Isabella-Rose, Dwight and Caroline Enys, Will and Char Nanfan. There were a few of his gambling and hunting friends – Anthony Trefusis and Percy Hill and George and Thomasine Trevethan. His nephew, Jason Carrington, stood beside Clowance all the time, tears running unchecked down his cheeks. On the edge of things, sidling into a corner of the church and keeping her distance at the graveside, was Lottie Kempthorne. Neither George nor Harriet was there, but a slim nervous lawyer called Hector Trembath had come to represent them.

Clowance went through it all with a white, drawn face but tearless eyes. When it was over the Trevethans, whose large house was near the church, invited relatives and friends to a light meal, then everyone dispersed. Clowance had been staying with Verity: she said she would ride back with her father and mother that night and stay two or three days at Nampara, then she would return to Penryn where there was much to see to. Demelza said: ‘Let your father do it; he will willingly do it; there is no reason for you to return at all, except to pack a few belongings.’

NEW ARRIVINGS.

‘I want to see to things myself, Mama. There is so much to think about; I haven’t decided what to do about anything yet. *Anything.*’

She stayed three nights and then rode home. She had an open invitation from Verity but she decided for the time being to live at the cottage at Penryn. Demelza persuaded her to take Betsy Maria Martin with her, a solution Clowance said she willingly accepted of. She liked Betsy Maria, and another woman for company was welcome. She told her mother that she would stay at Penryn at least until after Christmas.

Demelza said to Ross: ‘I think she may be stopping away because of Cuby.’ Cuby was returning to Nampara in November.

‘It is not so simple as that,’ Ross said. ‘I know there is this little bitterness on Clowance’s part. But Clowance has suffered two of the hardest blows a woman can receive – the loss of a brother and the loss of a husband – within a bare four months. She’s a very brave, honest person, and I think she just wishes to face it alone.’

‘Cuby too has lost a brother and a husband,’ said Demelza. ‘She is more hurt than she shows, Ross.’

‘The child may help *her* – it must help her.’

Demelza sighed. ‘We are a sorry lot. Thank God for our children – what is left of ’em . . . Bella continues to bubble – she has quite recovered her spirits. And little Henry is a joy. One day, maybe, we shall learn to be happy with the blessings that are left.’

IV

In November the weather turned foul; there were storms up and down the coast, accompanied by the usual shipwrecks. A barque was wrecked off the Lizard with a loss of eight lives; she carried woollens and worsteds and refined sugar. Another vessel foundered near Padstow, with Indian spices, ivory, tea and sandalwood. A third with timber ran on the rocks at Basset’s Cove. Hendrawna, wide open though it was to accept suitable offerings, only received some of the flotsam from ships lost elsewhere.

Katie and Music were to be married on Saturday the 11th November, which was Martinmas. When the news leaked out that Katie had relented and was taking Music from choice and not from necessity, the neighbourhood heard it first with derision and then with resignation. Sentiment is as changeable as the wind, and apart from a few of the girls and youths who had taunted Music, the

general feeling swung in his support. The lad must have *something* about him for Katie to show him this favour. Maybe he'd proved a thing or two to Katie that we don't know nothing about. Maybe she'd best make sure of her man this time before something *really* turns up!

The only actual resentment came from Bradley Stevens, Joe Stevens's father, and some of the girls. Joe Stevens still had dizzy spells and Bert Bice's ribs were mending slowly. The week before the wedding, when the banns had been called for the third time, they got together in a group after church and thought out how best they might disrupt the wedding. They could create a disturbance in church, but Parson Odgers was so much in his dotage he would hardly notice, and anyway Music would only grin feebly and Katie glower; the ceremony would be carried on even in a pandemonium. Also it was rumoured that Dr Enys was going to be present, and although he was not a magistrate he knew all the magistrates. You didn't if possible tangle with the gentry. After the ceremony as they came out of church you could pelt them with mud, of which there was plenty after last week's storms, but again Dr Enys might be there and receive an ill-directed volley. Before the ceremony offered the better chances. Katie had to walk up from Sawle with her mother and her step-father (supposing they agreed to accompany her – Ben would certainly not be there); Music had a much shorter distance to come and might come alone (it was rumoured he'd had hard words with his brothers). They could get some liquid manure ready in pails and swamp him as he came up the hill. Then when he'd gone into church all sodden and stinking they'd barrow in a dozen loads of pig shit and dump it all over his cottage. This plan, the brain-child of Mary Billing, was acclaimed by all.

The day before, Ross had ridden over to the Blowing House near Truro, in which he had a substantial share. He had dinner with two of the other partners and then met Dwight Enys at the Red Lion and they rode home together.

Dwight said: 'From the beginning there was nothing any surgeon could do for Stephen except wait. If a man is injured in the head, one may attempt a trepan, if one of the limbs, at worst one can amputate; for the spine there is virtually nothing. In his case – though neither Mather nor I thought it suitable to ask that we might open the body – we were both certain it was internal bleeding which led to his death.'

'Clowance was devoted to him,' Ross said, 'and they were happy together. He was a brave man and was becoming a successful one. After all his adventures and risky enterprises it is a cynical tragedy he should die in this useless and silly way.'

'I understand from Caroline that Harriet was much upset by the accident and has been more or less confined to the house since, not by infirmity but by

George's edict. He is putting much store on the birth of this new baby.'

'They tell me he made a fortune out of Waterloo,' Ross said drily.

"'Dost thou laugh to see how fools are vex'd to add to golden numbers golden numbers?'"

'What is that?'

'Something I was reading last night.'

'Isn't there a verse in the Bible about the ungodly flourishing like a green bay tree?'

Dwight smiled. 'We all must learn to flourish as best we can, I suppose. And it's good to be able to survive, even in a more modest fashion, as we both do, with somewhat clearer consciences than George must have.'

'I do not suppose that George's conscience ever caused him the loss of a moment's sleep. What would cause him loss of sleep would be if he felt he had paid half a guinea too much for a horse he was buying from a starving farmer.'

The track separated them. The mid-afternoon was frowning towards evening, and it would be dark before they reached home.

When they came together again Dwight said: 'You will have heard that Music Thomas is to marry Katie Carter tomorrow.'

'Yes.'

'I hope it may turn out well. I think it might. For Katie to marry Music willingly makes an altogether better prospect of it.'

'Ben does not feel so.'

'It was about that that I wanted to speak to you, Ross. I know you've long had an interest in the Carter family, as indeed I have. We both remember our visit to Launceston gaol.'

'I often think', said Ross, 'it is due to your ministrations that Zacky is still alive.'

'Zacky is alive because he has a constitution which will not give way; my medicaments are no more than a useful prop. But I think Katie will be grieved if no one of her family – except her mother, and she reluctantly – comes to the church . . . I suppose Ben is unrelenting . . . and I doubt if Zacky could walk that distance. But Mrs Zacky is a devout Wesleyan and goes regularly to church. Do you have any leverage you could exercise?'

'Only persuasion. Which I will exercise since it is you that asks. Betsy Maria is in Penryn with Clowance, but there are a half-dozen uncles and aunts – some of them younger than Katie – who might be willing to go. And of course there are the Nanfans. I'll see what I can do.'

'Thank you.'

'I don't recall having seen Music for a couple of years, and then he was still

very much the village fool.'

'I've no doubt that if you were to call to see him now, he would be so overcome with embarrassment that you'd think him no better. And I rather fear that the excitement of the wedding may tip his balance tomorrow. But not only has he improved, he is still improving. Rather than being mentally retarded, as we all thought, I am convinced he is just a very slow developer, whose development has been much held back by the part he learned to play and what the village expected of him. I think with Katie's understanding and companionship he may become at least as normal and intelligent as most of those who taunt him.'

By the time they separated the night's cloak had been drawn over the sky with just a scarf of daylight reaching into the sea. Ross made a short detour to Mellin and knocked at the Martin cottage. So he had come one morning thirty years ago in search of cheap labour to work his neglected fields, and so had met Jinny for the first time and become involved in the fortunes of the whole Martin family.

All those years ago Zacky Martin had been a small, tough, wrinkled man – wrinkled far before his time; now with real age and the long struggle against miners' tussick he had become tiny: a cashew nut instead of a brazil. Somehow Dwight kept him alive, mixing hot vapours for him to inhale at bad times, or potions of nux vomica and strychnine as a tonic for good ones.

This was a good one, and Ross, stooping into the small living room, greeted them both and sat down. Mrs Zacky, who had delivered Demelza of Julia and helped at the births of Jeremy and Clowance, and who had had eight children of her own, had not shrivelled with the years: she was a stout, white-haired, bespectacled, flat-faced, rubicund, vigorous seventy-one. In the room, as it happened, were Gabby and Thomas, now both married and living at Marasanvose. They had been collecting driftwood (which Ross had stumbled over in the dark outside). The wrecks around the coast were breaking up and distributing their flotsam. Fortunately – from their point of view – old Vercoe, the Customs Officer at St Ann's, was known to be laid up with an ulcer on his leg.

Mrs Zacky said: 'Well, I 'ad thought to go, an' then I thought not. Katie be very wilful; always 'ave been, will not be told. She've never even brought 'im round to see us. I mind 'im in church, o' course but he never come to no prayer meetings.'

'She'm shamed of 'im,' said Thomas. 'That be the truth and no two ways o' looking 'pon it.'

'I aren't so sartin he's so dead'n alive,' said Gabby. 'He's a treat wi' horses. An' I seen him quick 'nough 'pon times.'

Zacky said: 'Katie be wilful but she have her head commoned on Mellin's side'

Zacky said: 'Katie de wirtu but sne nave ner nead screwed on. Mayde 'twill turn for the best.'

There had been many improvements in the cottage since those early days: a good smooth planchen laid over the earth floor, and rugs on that; three comfortable upholstered chairs, a dark oak table, a mirror, a new fireplace; the ovens moved into the scullery. Zacky had prospered with his master. Ross had pressed him to move into a place less cramped for size, but as their family had grown and gone and his own active life became restricted Zacky had been less and less inclined to move.

Gabby relit his pipe. 'I 'ear tell there's like to be trouble.'

'Trouble?'

''Twas only a whisper I picked up but they d'say them lads that was always baiting Music, they d'plan to upset the wedden.'

'Upset it? How?'

'Dunno. There's three or four lads, half a dozen girls, mischief bent, ye might say.'

'What time is the wedding?'

'Nine o'clock,' said Zacky. 'After it they go back to work at Place House.'

Mrs Zacky clicked her knitting needles. 'Reckon I'll maybe go up to the church, if 'tis your wish, Cap'n Ross.'

'Maybe I'll come along wi' ee, mam,' said Gabby. ''Tis slack time an' I can steal a hour.'

'We'd best not be late leaving this eve,' said Thomas. 'There's a couple loads wood outside. If we can have the lend of your handcart, Father?'

'Anything of value come in?' Ross asked.

'Two spars o' good timber, sur, looks like black spruce or some such. Naught else you'd say of *value*.'

'Think you they've come from the *Kinseale*?'

'They're small pieces, ten foot long, but there may be better on the morning tide.'

'What time is high water? Ten or a little after? Well, it's worth keeping an eye open.'

His mission accomplished, Ross led his horse home. He found Demelza seated before the fire reading to Henry; Bella and Cuby heads together over a piece of needlework; their latest cat, Hebe, licking a delicate back leg at Demelza's feet and Farquhar, nose in paws, drowsing in the steady candlelight.

When he came in all was commotion, movement, talk. Demelza went off immediately to see that supper should soon be served. She still hadn't learned the ability to delegate.

Against the probabilities, her relationship with Cuby had ripened into an easy

Against the probabilities, her relationship with Cuby had ripened into an easy friendship. There had been some moment of crisis, Ross sensed, soon after Cuby arrived, but that had passed. This peculiarly fraught, uneasy situation could so easily have failed because of the special tensions that operated within both women; and it was a testimony to Cuby, he thought, as well as to Demelza, that they spoke understandingly and affectionately to each other, considerate but not over-polite; they even sometimes differed on things, even shared a joke.

Next Monday Demelza was to go to Penryn to spend a few days with Clowance, and he knew she would try to persuade her to spend Christmas with them. Ross's instinct was against it, but he did not utter a word. The second loss, coming so hard on the heels of the first, had left a raw edge that couldn't yet begin to heal. It was twisting the sword in the wound to attempt to keep up Christmas in any way whatever. If Clowance came she might find it hard to reconcile herself to the prospect of a new baby in the house and a sister-in-law about whom she still had resentful reservations. Dwight said he thought Cuby's child would be likely to be born in mid-January. As soon as possible then Cuby would want to show the baby to her mother. That would be the time to press Clowance to come to Nampara. The longer the girls were kept apart while the first wounds healed, the better chance there was of their finding harmony and understanding.

V

Day came up about seven, with angry clouds which seemed to be a residue of some quarrel of the night. Ross took his spyglass to the window of his bedroom but the sea and beach were calm and unencumbered.

They breakfasted at 7.30, when Bella was full of some rhyme or jingle she had learned, supposing it to be the sounds a nightingale made when in full song. At eight Ross strolled out of the house as if going to Wheal Leisure, but instead walked up the Long Field and its promontory of rocks at Damsel Point which divided Hendrawna Beach from Nampara Cove. The unbroken sand of Hendrawna Beach was a creamy white as the sun broke through, the placid sea, so wild a few days ago, turning gently over at its edge, playful wavelets bearing no visible cargo. The two Martin men had got the best last night.

He wondered how Katie's wedding would go. He hoped the village lads, who could be spiteful enough, would not interrupt the ceremony, or turn the evening into some sort of a noisy riot. He turned to go back to the house and then stopped to stare into Nampara Cove. By the freak of the tides practically all wreckage was washed up along the great beach; the cove scarcely ever gathered anything

was washed up along the great beach, the cove scarcely ever gaugered anything of note. Today the position was reversed. The cove was choked with wood.

He clambered down the side of the gorse-grown cliff and came out on the small beach, part sand, part pebbles, bisected by the Mellingey Stream. It took no time to recognize the wood as being good quality timber, more black spruce, red and yellow pine, oak and probably beech. There were also tar barrels and bales of rope and oakum floating around.

He touched nothing but began to limp quickly up the narrow green valley to the house. There were a half-dozen able-bodied men about the farm. They would be mainly in the fields by now. And Sephus Billing. Sephus Billing was this morning repairing the fowl house. He was a fair carpenter but his intellectual attainments would not have put Music to shame. And he was a member of the Billing clan who pullulated in one of the larger cottages of Grambler village.

‘Sephus!’ Ross called as he came into the yard.

‘Ais, sur?’

‘There’s a lot of good timber washing in in Nampara Cove. Go and tell the other men, I want them to stop work and go down to see what they can salvage.’

A gleam lit up Sephus’s dull eyes. He wiped his nose with the back of his hand. ‘Ais, sur, that I’ll do.’ He put down his hammer. You never had to tell a Cornishman twice to down tools if there was booty to be had.

‘And Sephus!’ as he made for the gate.

‘Sur?’

‘When you have told the men you may go on to Grambler and tell your family of it. There should be a little bounty for all.’

Ross walked to the gate and shut it after the fleeing man. With an ironical gaze he saw Sephus running in the direction of Cal Trevail, who was pulling carrots in the field beyond Demelza’s garden. Soon there would be plenty of willing helpers. All Sephus had to do then was alert the village of Grambler.

VI

Music and Katie went to church through a deserted village. No young men or girls waited by the wayside to douse them in liquid manure. They were married in an almost empty church, the only people present being Parson Odgers – and Mrs Odgers to remind him not to read the burial service in error – Jinny and Whitehead Scoble, Dr Enys, Mrs Zacky Martin, Char Nanfan, and a half-dozen old women who were too infirm to rush down for the pickings in Nampara Cove.

In the cove itself a fair element of chaos reigned, for the haul was bigger than

it first seemed. A freak of tide had carried the cargo of the wrecked *Kinseale* out of Basset's Cove and deposited it several miles north. The way was narrow and people were trooping down and back, some with mules, some with wheelbarrows, some with boxes and sacks – anything that would carry or contain more than a pair of hands. Often they plunged into the water to grab some item of flotsam, often there were arguments, sometimes fights. Everybody came peaceable, but not everybody could contain their greed.

After appropriating for himself two or three nice lengths of wood, Ross left the villagers and his farm labourers to it. Let them have their fun while the going was good. It was doubtful if Vercoe would have hastened to put in an appearance if he had been well; as he was not, there was no risk at all. Cuby went with Demelza and Isabella-Rose to the edge of Damsel Point to watch. Just for half an hour there was the risk of the crowd getting out of control, but Ross said: 'Let them be. There's no liquor. They'll have cleared everything as clean as a whistle by nightfall.' And they had. Demelza wrinkled her nose at what she expected she would find trampled down in the muddy track of her special cove when she went to look in the morning.

Meantime Music and Katie had returned to their cottage, changed out of their Sunday clothes and walked to Place House to resume their duties. Katie was normally a living-in maid, but as master and mistress were away had been given permission to sleep out for a few nights. So in due course, which was late in the afternoon, they returned to the cottage together, tramping unspeaking through the windy dark. An hour before they returned, unknown to them, the lads and girls, tired out with a day of collecting timber and pieces of panelling and rope ends and paint brushes and a roll of calico and a man's jacket and other odds and ends, had bethought themselves of their old malice and decided – coming giggling out of a kiddley – that, well, they might just so well dump the pig shit as waste it, and they would be passing the cottage anyway on their way home. But they were thwarted by the startling and unexpected presence of Constable Vage, who happened to be taking a stroll in Grambler village at that time. It was the first time he had been in Grambler for a month. Ross, not being a magistrate, had no authority to call him out, but a discreet guinea sent over by Matthew Mark Martin had been enough, and he had whiled away the time talking and drinking with the Paynters until the drunken laughter of the lads alerted him afresh to Ross's request.

So the happy couple slept undisturbed, Katie in the upstairs room once occupied by the three brothers, Music stretched out below in front of the dying fire.

He was perfectly, perfectly happy. She was his wife. She was upstairs in his

house, along of him.

If it never came to no more than that, he would be content. If it someday came to the as-yet-unthinkable he would be enraptured. But for the time being he was perfectly, blissfully satisfied with the simple fact that they were wed. Beyond that his patience stretched away into the illimitable distance.

Chapter Two

Lady Harriet Warleggan was brought to bed on the evening of Wednesday, the 12th December, and her labour continued into the morning of the 13th.

Things had not been easy between Harriet and George. Harriet was tetchy all the time, plagued by thoughts of the accident and made more angry by George's reactions to it. He seemed to take it as a breach of convention, even an insult to himself, that his wife and this upstart he disliked so much and whom Harriet well knew he disliked so much, who had been guilty of highway robbery against him – that they should have been defiantly and openly riding together; and that she had put their son at risk for the sake of some stupid and high-spirited gallop across hunting country . . . It never quite emerged whether Harriet had challenged Stephen or Stephen Harriet, but there had been some sort of competitiveness involved, of that George was sure. And he was not at all certain that there had not been some sexual undertones.

Indeed he had nurtured a number of suspicions ever since Harriet had virtually blackmailed him into withdrawing his bankruptcy notice. Her overt reason, because Clowance had rescued her dog, had never convinced George. Being a man who disliked dogs and only tolerated hounds because they contributed to a national sport, he was unable to fathom the feelings of a woman who felt as Harriet did. Stephen was a personable man – if you liked the braggart type – and he had made a fuss of Harriet. She clearly had a soft spot for him, and had blown up her obligation to Clowance to hide her real feelings. The fact that they had gone riding – galloping! – together was proof enough that something had been afoot.

Well, serve them both right if he'd broken his damned back. It was a miracle that she hadn't fallen too and taken with her his hopes of an heir.

George had mixed feelings about Stephen's death. It was good riddance, of course, and it wiped the slate clean. All the same it would have been better if he could have somehow been arrested for the crime he had committed and ended his life dangling from a noose. Now he had escaped. And with him had gone any hope there might have been of tracking down his two accomplices. The chapter

hope there might have been of tracking down his two accomplices. The chapter was over and done with. Only Clowance was left on whom he might vent his spleen.

But that George had no intention of doing. Ross Poldark was winged by the loss of his eldest son. His eldest daughter – yes, there was another one; that one with the raucous voice – seemed bent on continuing to live in Penryn for the time being; and George thought he might well make some gesture to befriend her. Although she was a Poldark with her share of Poldark arrogance, he had always been attracted by her, ever since they had first met at Trenwith when she had wandered barefoot into the great hall, blatantly trespassing. Indeed it might be said that it was his encounter with the fresh young Clowance, carrying her bouquet of stolen foxgloves, which had first aroused him to recover his appreciation of women in general, a process which had led to his courtship of Lady Harriet Carter and their eventual marriage.

Of course, apart from a salacious look or two, George had not the least serious sexual intent towards the young widow; but if he did find a way of befriending her it would, he thought, make his old rival irritable and suspicious and might even raise a tremor of annoyance and jealousy in his own wife.

During the period of waiting that dark December night George paced the wide drawing-room of Cardew and nursed his hopes and his grievances and listened for noises from upstairs. His latest grievance was but an hour old. When Dr Charteris had arrived to join Dr Behenna, who was already in attendance, George had gone into the bedroom with them for a moment or two. There had been sweat on his wife's brow, and the midwife was holding her hand. Looking up and seeing him, Harriet had said between her teeth: 'Get out of my sight!'

He had at once retreated, fuming at her rudeness. Very well, it was a painful business and women suffered a great deal and sometimes they were driven to unwarranted comment; and of course as a woman of blue blood Harriet was accustomed to expressing herself coarsely; but it was inexcusable for her to address him thus in front of both surgeons and the midwife! Over the years he had become a man of whom all those with whom he mixed were wary and respectful; even a man like Behenna, who was used to riding roughshod over his patients, deferred to Sir George. Only his wife, his lady wife, could ever have dared to speak to him in this way, and he felt insulted and demeaned by her.

He passed little Ursula's bedroom. Little Ursula was not there, being at school, and was no longer little, being a hefty, heavy-legged, tight-busted girl of sixteen. It had been her birthday last Sunday, and they had given her a party despite the imminence of her step-mother's 'time'. A select group, carefully chosen from among the best in the county; some had stayed overnight because of the distances involved. A nity Ursula was not a more becoming girl. with the

blonde hair, frailty and long slender legs of her mother. Instead she was like her paternal grandmother in looks, and sadly looks counted for so much in a girl. She was a chip off the old Warleggan block. But fortunately not at all like her paternal grandmother in a practical or sagacious sense. George's mother, born a miller's daughter with simple beliefs and a country understanding, had never quite moved into the world of opulence her husband had made for her, had always preferred making jam and baking bread to riding in a carriage with two postilions or entertaining on a grand scale.

Such matters would not be likely to worry Ursula. If not intellectual – and who wanted her to be? – she was sharply intelligent and fascinated by commerce and money. An ideal child from George's point of view, if only she had been a son. And, being a girl, it were better had she been more prepossessing.

All the same, he thought, it would really only be a matter of arrangement when the time came. An heiress would have plenty of suitors. It would be a question of his picking the right one; they'd all fall over themselves.

It did not occur to him to recap that the one chink in his own personal chain-armour of self-help had been his weakness for a pretty face. Yet he expected that Ursula would find the ideal husband chiefly on the strength of an enormous dowry, just as he had expected his son to match with a Trevanion in order to secure the land and the castle. *And* there had certainly been no lack of looks on the Trevanion side! Instead Valentine had maliciously and wantonly married a pretty widow ten years older than himself without his father's knowledge or consent. George had made sure that not a penny of his money or property should ever go to Valentine. He had written him out of his will and out of his life.

Now, upstairs at this moment, another life was beginning and if, pray God, it was a son he could begin to reshape his plans all over again. Indeed he had already begun to reshape them. The boy should be called Nicholas after his father. Then he could be called anything Harriet fancied, some favourite family name of her own. Perhaps Thomas, after the first Duke. Nicholas Thomas Osborne Warleggan, that would do well enough.

The house was dark and cold at 2.15 on a December morning. Fires roared upstairs, especially in The Room, and fires roared downstairs, but the house was still draughty; if you crouched within the periphery of one of the fires it was warm enough, even scorching. But if you were too tensed up to remain in one position for any length of time you quickly became aware of the draughts and the dark. Even the candles guttered.

It was a time of night when spirits were low and human nature at its lowest ebb. As he paced about, George recollected that when he had last been in this situation, in December '99, both his own parents had been alive and both

Elizabeth's. Now all were gone. Sixteen years spanned so much of his own life, which was fast slipping away. He would soon be fifty-seven. Many men died at such an age. He was filled with a sense of the impermanence of life, with a premonition of disaster. Trenwith was no longer his, had gone back to the Poldarks. This great house which he had bought and repaired and refurnished and extended a quarter of a century ago was now the centre of his life. How long would it remain in Warleggan hands after he was gone? The renegade Valentine was established on the north coast with his own rich widow and his two stepdaughters. Ursula might marry and live here. Perhaps, who knew, if he found the right sort of husband for her, he could persuade the young man for a consideration to take not only the Warleggan daughter but the Warleggan name.

But all that would be unnecessary if Harriet tonight produced a healthy son. A Warleggan who could come into everything he did not set expressly aside for Ursula, and who would, in addition to being the son of Sir George Warleggan, be also a grandson of the Duke of Leeds! It was a dazzling prospect. True, by the time he was eighteen he, George, would be seventy-five. But – rejecting the dark thoughts of a moment ago – he recalled that the Warleggans were a long-lived family; both his parents had been around eighty, and old Uncle Cary at seventy-six showed no signs at all of closing his last ledger.

Tock-tock went the clock in the hall. It wanted twenty minutes to three. This damned waiting seemed worse even than last time. Elizabeth had never been in labour long. That had never been the trouble. Harriet of course was thirty-four. It was late for a first child. How old had Elizabeth been when she bore Ursula? He could not remember. Thirty-five, was it? But Ursula had been her third.

The candles bobbed and ducked like courtiers. It was a fine night but windy, a big cold empty night with a scattering of stars among the clouds. Half his staff was abed, but the other half was alert for the slightest pull of a bell. At the moment Nankivell was making up the fires.

‘Sur, can I get you something?’

‘No.’ He had drunk enough brandy, and there was a half-glass unfinished on the end of the mantelshelf.

He sat down at his desk, took some papers out of a drawer and irritably pulled a candelabrum nearer so that he could see. It was on a matter to do with his pocket borough of St Michael. Years ago he had reduced the number of voters in the borough from forty to thirty by the simple but drastic expedient of moving ten of them out of their derelict cottages and rehousing them two miles away in much better property which he had had restored especially to receive them. They could not plead hardship, since their new housing was much better than the old; but they were deprived of their sinecure living by no longer having to be bribed

to vote. Their vote was gone, and so was their means of sustenance. As George had dryly observed at the time, some of them might even have to *work*. Since then gradually over the years the remaining number had been reduced to twenty-five, of whom six were members of one family. Mr Tankard, George's legal steward, had called in at the beginning of the month to say that this family was now applying for a loan of three hundred pounds. It was supposed to be to erect a bakery, but everyone knew it was intended to tide them over until the next election, when they would expect the loan to be conveniently forgotten. George had no intention of submitting to this blackmail, in spite of the advice of his friend Sir Christopher Hawkins that he should do so. Hawkins had said: 'It is the price you pay, my friend. Think nothing of it. Think rather of the benefits of having two members in the House to do your bidding.' But George would have none of it. He was not to be held to ransom by a festering family of down-at-heel good-for-nothings, and he was determined to make them pay for their insolence. He felt very strongly about it, and this was why he had dragged out the correspondence, with Tankard's notes, tonight. If anything would take his mind off events upstairs . . .

He pored over it for a minute or so, fumbling for his glasses and feeling the stirrings of old anger; but then he flung the papers down and got to his feet. Even this—

And then he heard a sound, it was a terrible sound, like a wail, like a howl, almost more animal than human. Sweat broke out on him. Supposing Harriet were to die. That would not matter quite so much if the boy lived. But they might *both* die. George found himself confronting a great loneliness which opened up before him like a mining adit. In spite of Harriet's infuriating habits she was a remarkable personality, whose very abrasiveness he would bitterly miss. And if the child were to go . . .

He strode out into the hall and stopped to listen. All was silent now. A log of wood crashed in the hearth and the resultant flames lit up the sombre room where many times there had been so much gaiety and light. Where Harriet and Valentine had organized that great party to celebrate Napoleon's retreat from Moscow; where only a few days ago Ursula's friends—

The same sound again but more muffled. He took out a handkerchief and mopped his brow, started up the stairs toward the sound, then stopped, puzzled, angry, horrified, his heart thumping. A groom crossed the hall, seemed to be coming this way.

'Smallwood!'

'Sur?'

'Where are you going?'

‘Up the stairs, sur, beggin’ your permission. Lady Harriet said as I was—’
‘Never mind what she said, you’ve no damned business above stairs.’

‘No, sur. It was just that she did say I was to look to—’

That terrible sound again, loud now. George’s hair prickled.

‘Get out!’ he snarled.

‘Yes, sur. I just had the thought that the dogs making that noise might be disturbing to her ladyship—’

‘Dogs? What dogs?’

‘Castor and Pollux, sur. Her ladyship give me orders that they was to be lodged in the blue bedroom while she was – while she was in labour, as you might say. Her ladyship didn’t wish for them to be roaming the ’ouse while she was poorly and she thought they’d be best out of your – out of the way. I was to lock them in the blue bedroom and see they was kept fed and watered. That is why I was venturing—’

‘That noise, that howling,’ George said. ‘It was the dogs howling?’

‘Yes, sur. I thought I’d just go see—’

‘Go and see to them!’ George shouted. ‘Stop their damned mouths, stop their throats even if you have to cut them! Give them poison so long as you keep them quiet!’

‘Yes, sur.’ In fright Smallwood slid past his master and rushed stumbling up the rest of the stairs, then with anxious backward glances retreated down the passage towards the blue bedroom.

George went back slowly down, breathing out rage and relief, and more indignation with every breath. An outrageous thing to happen! Putting the dogs in a bedroom! He’d wondered where they had gone to – how typical of Harriet’s arrogance and thoughtlessness for him! He would tell her exactly how he viewed such a ridiculous act. Almighty God, for a moment – for some minutes – he had thought, he had feared . . .

A step behind him.

He swung round. Dr Behenna. Sleeves rolled up. Black waistcoat with gold chain. Grey hair *en brosse*. A silly look on his face.

‘Well?’

‘I am happy to tell you that her ladyship has been safely delivered of twins.’

‘What d’you say?’

‘I had thought this likely since before ten o’clock last evening, but did not wish to raise your hopes. Mother and babies are all doing well. There have been no complications. My sincere congratulations, Sir George.’

George stared at the doctor with astonishment and such a concentration of anxiety and anger as to disconcert him.

‘The second child is slightly smaller but in excellent condition,’ Behenna hastened on. ‘She was born half an hour after her sister.’

‘*Sister?*’ said George. ‘You mean . . .?’

‘You have two fine daughters, Sir George. I am sure you will be vastly proud of them. Lady Harriet has been very brave, and I will give her a further opiate as soon as you have seen them.’

Chapter Three

I

Demelza rode back on the 14th from visiting Clowance again. Cuby was out walking on the beach with Isabella-Rose, Henry was with Mrs Kemp. Demelza found Ross in the garden.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘I did not know you knew one plant from another. I hope you have not been digging up my new bulbs.’

‘Cuby saw to that,’ Ross said, kissing her. ‘I believe since she brought them she has been watching every day for them to come up.’

Demelza knelt and stirred the soil with her finger. ‘These are late tulips, she says. They do not flower until May.’

Ross crouched beside her. ‘Clowance?’

‘Better. Eating at last. She has lost a lot of weight. I do not think she will come home for Christmas, Ross.’

‘Ah.’

‘She said to me: “Mama, I will come – of course I will come with pleasure if you wish me to, if you wish this Christmas specially to have all your family round you,” she said. “But if it were my own choice I would, I believe, better prefer to remain here with Verity. I do not know quite how to explain it,” she said, “but it is certain that this Christmas cannot be a Christmas like last year or any other year we have ever known. So I think it would affect me less if I could look on it as just the 25th of December, another day of the month,” she said, “like any other day of any month and *try* to forget it is happening.” ’

Ross straightened up, aware that his ankle did not like a crouching position. He had had reservations about Clowance coming back too soon for another and altogether particular reason – that is, that in her first bereavement she might see too much of Ben Carter. It was a strange perception for him, and more worthy of Demelza. But under no circumstances would he mention such a feeling to her.

‘Shall you mind so much?’

‘Not if she is with Verity.’

‘How is she dealing with the business?’

HOW IS SHE DEALING WITH THE BUSINESS?

‘Both ships were out. The boy, this nephew of his, was away in the *Adolphus*, which was being captained by a man called Carter. The *Lady Clowance* was sailing for the Thames with a cargo of china clay. At home, in the port, a strange little man called Hodge is helping her. He is almost horrid to look at, but she seems to trust him. He can read and write and do accounts. And the Naval Bank is also helping: Stephen has left quite a lot of money, it seems, all from this privateering adventure.’

‘I’ll go over myself next week; spend a night or two.’

The wind was tugging at Demelza’s hat. She put a hand up to it.

‘She has changed, Ross. I – I think she has been deeply injured – of course by her bereavement, of course, but I suspicion something more than that. It is as if she no longer has confidence in her own judgment – as if she is confused as well as desperately heart-sad. I cannot make it out . . . She is harder than she used to be. I feel she will need careful handling – specially careful handling.’

‘By us?’

‘I hope so. And by life . . .’

Ross frowned out at the sea.

‘Even with the war over,’ he said, ‘the ships should fetch a good price. If, then, she doesn’t want to make her home permanently with us she could travel. She has no family and is still so young . . . It’s a grim travesty that we should find ourselves with two young widows on our hands.’

‘I do not know that she wishes to sell the ships – at least for the time being. She seems to feel Stephen would have wanted her to keep them. I think they would give her a sense of independence greater than she would have just with the money they would fetch. Also she wants to look after Stephen’s nephew, for a few months at least. She says he is utterly lost.’

‘She must have time to adjust herself. It will take months, perhaps years. Of course there will be other men in the world. But not too soon.’

‘Do you know what she said to me? It was the strangest thing!’

‘What?’

‘We were just talking, just talking, and I said like you said, that she was so young, she had all her life ahead of her. I’d never’ve dreamed of saying anything about her marrying again. ’Twould have been premature and improper and impertinent. But she must’ve read my thoughts, or ’twas in the air in some strange way.’ Demelza took off her hat and let the wind ruffle her hair. ‘She said: “I married once for love, Mama. If I ever come to marry again,” she said, “it will not be for love, it will be for wealth or position.” ’

Ross was silent.

Demelza said: ‘Does that not surprise you?’

Demelza said. 'Does that not surprise you:

'It astounds me. You are right to say she has changed. But it means . . .'

'It surely means that her marriage was not altogether successful.'

'A lot of marriages are not altogether successful. Look around. But it is sad if she discovered it so early. And it is the bitterest thing for *her* to say.'

'Yet she clearly loved Stephen. I cannot fathom it.'

Ross took her hat from her and they walked towards the house.

Demelza said: 'Lady Harriet has had twins, I hear. All are well. They are both girls.'

'George will be beside himself with annoyance,' said Ross, not without satisfaction.

'I s'pose he laid great store by having another son. There has been no reconciliation between him and Valentine, has there?'

'Nor ever like to be,' said Ross.

Demelza glanced up at him sharply as they went in. 'Valentine called here once while I was away?'

'Who told you?'

'Mrs Kemp just mentioned it.'

'It was in October. He did not come in. We walked down from Grace together and talked for a few minutes.'

'Did he say they could never be reconciled?'

'He gave me that impression.'

'Never is a long time. I think I rather hope they will . . . Did he want anything when he came?'

'It was just to say goodbye before they left for Cambridge.'

Demelza thought this one through. 'Why did you say they would never be reconciled?'

'A feeling I have.'

'Something he said.'

'Just a feeling I have.'

She was very perceptive of nuances in Ross's voice, but after a moment she decided she should not pursue it.

'I hear Valentine and Selina will not be home for Christmas.'

'Oh?'

'Ben told me. They are going to spend the Christmas vacation in London with her two daughters. Katie has heard and she told her mother.'

'No hint of Ben and Katie coming together again?'

'Not yet. But have you met Music recent? He is quite an improved man.'

'Some people marry and it changes their personalities, it seems. Others marry and it makes not the slightest difference '

and it makes not the slightest difference.

‘How do you think it affected us?’ Demelza asked.

‘We re-made each other after the other’s image.’

‘That’s a little complicated for my small mind, but I hope I know what you mean.’

They went in. He said: ‘So we shall be a reduced company in this area for Christmas. Geoffrey Charles and Amadora and Joanna are in Paris. Drake and Morwenna and Loveday will, I am sure, return to Looe, for he has problems at the yard. So there will be just Dwight and Caroline and the girls and a smattering of Trenegloses and Kellows.’

‘Perhaps Clowance is right and, just for this year, we should pretend it isn’t happening.’ At the parlour door Demelza exclaimed on seeing a vase of flowers: carnations, picotees and lace pinks. ‘Judas! Where did they come from?’

‘The de Dunstanvilles sent them over. They only came this morning.’

‘That is so kind of them, Ross! That is kind.’ Once in a while Demelza’s eyes would fill with tears unnecessarily.

‘They have been put in water just as they came. Cuby said, should she arrange them, but I said I thought you would want to do it. And hot-house grapes!’

‘I will write. Or *you* will write. Yes, a bigger vase, don’t you think? And I can gather some ferns and ivy to go with them. There’s time before dark.’

‘Just time.’

At the door she stopped, wiped her eyes with an inelegant hand. ‘We cannot ignore Christmas altogether. There is little Henry. And Bella. And Sophie and Meliora, who will come over. And Cuby – who may be deeply sad but has a child within her. We shall somehow have to make a sort of, what do you call it?’

‘Compromise?’

‘Yes. How you read my thoughts—’

‘Long association—’

‘Compromise, that is what it must be. No big celebration. But quiet celebration. After all it is to commemorate the birth of Christ.’

Ross smiled at her, for her eyes had briefly lit up in a way he had not seen for some time.

‘Just so,’ he said. ‘Just so.’

II

He went to Penryn the following Tuesday, leaving before dawn and arriving at midday. He had a meal with Clowance and then they rowed down the creek to Falmouth and walked up to Pendennis Castle, where many years ago he had

stayed with Governor Melville discussing defence matters. Just before the miners' riots. There had been a number of smaller outbreaks of violence since, but none with that tragic ending.

He did not call this time, but they turned and walked back down the gorse-grown hill towards the town. Clowance remarked that her father's ankle seemed much better; he replied that if it got bad again he would try three months' internment to improve it. All through his visit they had talked long and amiably on many subjects, including details of Jeremy's death and the consequences of Stephen's. They took supper together and he slept there and left to return home the following morning; he would dine at the Fox & Grapes, near St Day, on the way home.

That night Clowance spent with Verity. Andrew junior was ashore until Christmas Eve when he sailed again for New York, but this evening with Tamsin and her brother was attending a small soiree and dance given by one of the other packet captains. Clowance had been invited but had declined. Andrew senior, having had a minor recurrence of his heart affection, had gone to bed.

Clowance said: 'D'you know, it is quite unusual, but since I – since I lost Stephen I have had more single conversations with my mother and father than I can ever remember in my life before. Before, of course, I met them *constantly* in and out of the house. But never in such a concentrated way, if you take my meaning. Most often if it was anything important the three of us would meet together. You must know the – the triviality of daily life. Now we have talked so much, in a different way.'

'Your father looked better,' Verity said.

'Yes, he was, he was. They both looked so dreadful when I saw them first – after Jeremy. But life has to go on.' Clowance smiled wryly. 'Even for me.'

'More than ever for you,' Verity said.

'Yes, I suppose. But at present I'm in limbo. I don't really want to make any decisions at all if I haven't got to.'

'Give yourself a year, my dear. Stephen has left you money enough.'

'Do you know I grieve so much that he was not able to *enjoy* the good fortune. All his life he had been poor – grindingly poor.' Clowance hesitated. 'At least, I think so.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that just before he died I discovered an important inaccuracy in something he had told me. And that – and that calls into question some of the other things he told me.' Clowance got up, picked up a magazine, riffled through the pages. 'No, I think I am being unfair. What he told me that was untrue was something important to – to our marriage. I do not believe he would have told

me circumstantial stories of his poverty if they had not happened.'

Verity looked up at her tall young cousin. Demelza had been right: the ordeal Clowance had been through, her loss of weight, had aged her but improved her looks.

Clowance said: 'Although I can talk to Papa freely about most things – and I do! – I cannot really talk to him about Stephen, for I do not think he ever altogether cared for Stephen. They were such *opposite* characters, yet in some ways rather alike.'

'Alike? I would not – I don't think I would . . .'

'Well, they were both very strong, weren't they – physically strong, masculine, courageous, stop-at-nothing sort of men . . . After that, no . . . they were not really alike. I wonder why I said that? Perhaps I am trying to make reasonable what to some people was unreasonable, which was my love for Stephen.'

Verity got up to put some coal on the fire.

'Let me do that.' Clowance moved quickly to the fire. Verity saw a tear drop on the coal.

'I am sure your father understands what you felt.'

'Oh, he understands that I loved Stephen. But not why. You see one does not *choose*. I have said this to Mama – oh a year ago, but it comes home even more truly now. One loves a person – feels deeply drawn to love him, and no one else will do. And because you love him you suppose he has all the virtues which he does not have. So one expects more than one gets, and that is wrong . . . I do not believe I am making sense, Verity. It is just helpful to talk to you.'

'Is it Jason who is bothering you?'

'Jason? Oh no. No, not really. You know he is Stephen's son by an earlier marriage?'

'I did not know. Your mother wondered.'

'Did she? Mama has a dangerous intuition. But even her intuition, I believe, will not perceive all that I have in my heart to tell her if I would. But I will not. Nor will I tell you, dear cousin, for I believe it is best buried with Stephen.'

Clowance busied herself with the fire; Verity picked up her embroidery but did not take out the needle.

In a calmer voice Clowance said: 'There was one thing I did not *dare* tell Papa. It happened on Monday. I had a visitor. You will never guess. It was Sir George Warleggan.'

Verity stared at her. 'George?'

'He came with two grooms. I heard the clattering of horses and looked up the street and saw him just dismounted. As he walked down, with one of the other

men – I think his name is Nankivell – I was quite terrified. I thought he was going to arrest me!’

‘What did he want?’

‘Well, when I opened the door he just took off his hat and gave me good-day; I could hardly find the words to speak so I stood aside and he came in. He is not nearly so tall as Papa, but he takes up a deal of room in a small parlour! I said would he sit down and he said no doubt I might be a trifle surprised at his visit, but he just was passing through Penryn and it occurred to him to call to see if he could help me in any way. There had been some ill-feeling, he said, between him and my husband, but now that Stephen was so unfortunately gone he would like to remind me of the goodwill that existed between himself and Lady Harriet and me, and if he could be of assistance to me in my widowhood, either in a social or a financial sense, he would ask me to name it!’

Verity did not speak. She had thirty years of memories of George, most of them bad; but she felt she need not add them to Clowance’s own.

‘Dear cousin, I was – flabbergasted! I have not seen Harriet since the accident; for Stephen had quarrelled with her for some reason and would speak not a single good word of her. I suppose I too felt that day she had behaved not well, but . . . She wrote to us when Stephen was ill and then again to me after he died, but I had not replied. Now George coming like this . . .’ Clowance wrinkled her forehead. ‘I thanked him and said I thought I was engaging myself well enough. He said he understood Stephen had left a little money, but if I should be in need of legal advice he would be happy to have it provided for me. And when a due time of mourning had been observed I should be welcome again at the hunt or some other occasion if I should feel the want of company. It was all very gracious, I assure you.’

‘George can be gracious enough – and generous enough – when he chooses. But usually with a reason.’

‘Soon after that he left, having refused a glass of canary, which was all I had in the place. I have wondered since why he came. Ever since I met him that first time five years ago I believe he has had a very small taking for me. But still . . .’

‘George has a weak spot for a few women. I remember particularly—’ Verity stopped. ‘For fair women especially . . . Though that is contradicted by his second marriage, is it not.’

‘That is another strange thing!’ Clowance said. ‘I offered my congratulations, saying I knew how happy he must be at the birth of his baby daughters, and he glanced at me as if he thought I was sarcastic, or deriding him in some way.’

‘A daughter for George,’ Verity said, ‘is near to a catastrophe.’

There was silence for a while.

Clowance said: 'I think I should like a cup of chocolate. Shall I make you some?'

'It would be nice. But pull the bell. Anna is up till ten.'

Clowance pulled the bell. Thoughtfully she rearranged her hair with both hands.

'Papa thinks Cuby's child will be a boy.'

'Why?'

'He says something about the law of averages. Geoffrey Charles had a girl. Your step-son has just had a girl. Now George and Harriet's two! I do not know if averages work in such things.'

'I do not suppose it matters very much, does it? Either will be welcome.'

'It matters about Papa's title, that is all.'

Anna came in and Verity ordered the chocolate.

III

Demelza said: 'Tell me, Caroline, I have intended to have asked you before; what would you say, how would you feel if either of your daughters wished, wanted to become an actress or a professional singer, like?'

Caroline raised her eyebrows. 'I do not believe either of 'em has sufficient talent to shine even in amateur theatricals. Why?'

'I have a special reason for asking, which I suppose you will guess refers to Bella.'

'She certainly has a remarkable voice – even though her father affects not to appreciate it. But has she shown some sudden ambition?'

'She was quite overcome with the theatre we took her to in London. I have never seen her so enchanted. But there is another reason. While we were in Paris we met a young English lieutenant who must have put ideas in her head . . . Oh, it is all over and done with now, but it was some startling how it happened – and to a girl as young as she is!'

So it came out: the jolly camaraderie, the avuncular courtship, and then the sudden visit and the serious proposal.

Caroline listened in silence, playing with the ears of Horace the Third.

'What does Ross think of this?'

'I haven't told him. To begin I was too – too desolate to think of anything but Jeremy. And then came the news that Christopher Havergal had been cruelly maimed. Then it was all struck out of my mind when I knew nothing would come of it. But I often thought to ask you . . .'

‘Did Bella know of his proposal?’

‘Oh yes. And of course when news came of his wounding she was even more totally despondent: first for Jeremy and then for Christopher. But now more recently she has recovered much of her bounce and good spirits, so perhaps she will forget all about it. But I only wonder if it has not left an impression on her mind which will show in a year or two. And I wondered . . .’

‘You wondered?’

‘What you would say if you were in my place if next year or the year after Bella said she wished to – to become a singer or an actress for – for money. How would you feel if it were Sophie, for instance?’

Caroline let Horace to the floor with a plop. He grunted a protest.

‘You will have to tell Ross sometime, and it will greatly depend on what he feels, will it not. For my part I would look on the prospect with a degree of doubt. Actors and singers are not of any social standing. Some lead a disorganized life and are thoroughly disreputable. Others are respectable but are not generally respected. A few singers, and great actresses like Siddons, they are different; but it will be very few . . . Of course another way to become highly regarded is to become the mistress of one of the Royal Princes. But even then, from reports, it does not seem to lead to a settled or comfortable life.’

Demelza shifted in her chair. ‘Christopher was a very taking young man; but in truth it was perhaps all too trivial, too light-hearted to be taken serious. It was unthinkable anyway. But I am greatly relieved that Bella appears to have recovered from it altogether.’

Caroline said: ‘It shows how easily the young forget.’

Chapter Four

I

‘Sweet, sweet, jug, jug, water bubble, pipe rattle,’ sang Isabella-Rose. ‘Bell pipe, scroty, skeg, skeg, swat, swaty, whitlow, whitlow, whitlow . . . Mama, do you hear me? That is what the nightingale sings. If we could but put it to music!’

Demelza had come into the library. Cuby was at the piano, Bella half dancing beside it.

Cuby said: ‘It is almost nice enough as you say it.’

‘But Mama is good at finding little tunes; she does not play so well but she has a knack of finding funny little tunes!’

It was Christmas Eve; outside a mild grey day, inside more fires than were strictly necessary, lit to enliven the house. The church choir were coming tonight; tomorrow they were all summoned to Killewarren, where the Enyses had ordered a boar’s head for dinner. Aside from the Poldarks, the servants in Nampara had worked their way into a festive mood. Mr Jeremy had been lost, and everyone grieved for him and for Miss Clowance, also widowed. But it did not prevent jollity sneaking in, a condition that Christmas traditionally induced. There were sniggers and flutters and cat-calls. While the Poldarks were out tomorrow there would be a feast in the old kitchen – where Jud and Prudie had once reigned – and gracious knew what noise there would be. Ross wondered how many of his helpers he would find sober when they returned. And little cared.

Demelza was induced to sit at the piano in Cuby’s place and Bella intoned over and over the jingle she had garnered from some old woman. ‘Sweet, sweet, jug, jug, water bubble, pipe rattle.’ So it went on while Demelza tried to find chords to fit it. ‘Bell pipe, scroty, skeg, skeg, swat, swaty, whitlow, whitlow, whitlow.’ Slowly a little tune came out. Bella crowed with delight, and Cuby and Demelza laughed together.

On this scene came Henry, and Bella gathered him up while Demelza played some of the old carols she knew so well.

The library was decorated with holly and ivy and ferns and a few eucaly-

The library was decorated with holly and ivy and ferns and a few early primroses, as was the parlour. Yesterday they had all been over to Sawle Church helping to decorate that too. Although flowers were scarce, some had come from Place House and from Killewarren. Neither Nampara nor Trenwith had a conservatory, and the Trenegloses were committed to St Ermyrn's, Marasanvose. Before going to Killewarren tomorrow they would all go to Sawle Church, where Mr Clarence Odgers would read prayers and preach. For this great occasion of Christmas all the servants from Nampara would attend as well.

Dwight and Caroline had promised to be there, even though Dwight pointed out that the 25th December had been a day of festival in England long before its conversion to Christianity.

Christmas Eve passed peacefully enough, the dark coming early because of the gloom of cloud. At seven Cuby said she did not feel well and retired to bed early. But she heard the choir come, and got up and sat by the window listening. The choir, fourteen strong, sang the Dilly Song.

Come and I will sing you.
What will you sing O?
I will sing One O.
What is your One O?

Twelve are the Twelve Apostles
'Leven are the 'leven will go to Heaven
Ten are the Ten Commandments
Nine is the moonshine bright and clear
Eight are the Eight Archangels
Seven are the Seven Stars in the sky
Six the Cheerful Waiter
Five is the Ferryman in the boat
Four are the Gospel Preachers
Three of them are strangers
Two of them are Lilly-white babes
Clothed all in green-o
One of them is all alone and ever shall remain so.

They also sang 'Noël' and 'Joseph Was An Old Man'.

Afterwards they trooped into the parlour and took mince tarts and ginger wine. Music and Katie were of the party, though Music would now only sing tenor and Katie could hardly sing at all. They stood together through it all with an air of indestructibility.

On Christmas Day Cuby was well again, so the planned programme went ahead. Dawn broke misty wet, but towards midday the lips of the sky opened and a drier breath came. All the same there had just been enough rain in the night to make the cobbles greasy, the yard steamy with animals, the tracks slippery with mud. Both mining engines still worked; it was too expensive to shut them down for a single day. In the quiet air their thump and beat became more noticeable.

At church Mr Odgers wore his best cassock which he kept for special occasions, it being plum purple with brass buttons, very tight now, for he had worn it first at his marriage fifty-one years ago. It indicated no doctrinal or ecclesiastical order, for he belonged to none. That morning he was at his best and got through the service with only two mistakes.

The psalm was part of 22, beginning at verse 11. 'Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.' When it came to verse 20, 'Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog,' Demelza put her hand quietly into Ross's. His hand closed on hers.

After it was over they rode on to Killewarren, a few faint sun-born shadows preceding them on the way.

They had bought Caroline a piece of fine French lace, Dwight a neckerchief, and silk pinafores for the girls; the Enyses had a pair of wine goblets for Demelza, riding gloves for Ross, a finely crocheted child's bonnet for Cuby, a book of songs for Bella, a toy horse for Harry that however much you pushed it over would always swing upright again.

Because of the children they dined early, and laughed a good deal and ate consumedly and drank good wine and generally made merry, though there was ice underneath, ice that clung round the heart. Shut out thoughts of other Christmases, other shadows on the wall. This was an evil year; there would be others that must be better. Life was to be lived – it had to go on. Chiefly for the sake of the young, but even for themselves, it must go on. And the day was fine and mild and the fire crackled, and food and drink and love and companionship were around them. Do not think of Jeremy lying in the cold Flanders clay.

Darkness fell and candles were brought and the fires remade, and the two Enys girls sang a duet with Cuby at the piano, and Bella gave a little recital of her new nightingale song.

Sweet, sweet, jug, jug
Water bubble, pine rattle
Bell pipe, scroty, skeg, skeg,
Swat, swaty, whitlow, whitlow, whitlow.

Her mother did her best to remember the chords she had made up that morning, and somehow it came out as a pleasant little ditty.

By 6.30 Henry was fretful, so Demelza, arousing huge protests from the girls, said they must go. They were away by seven, a small clip-clopping cavalcade, led by Ross, whose old Colley was as surefooted as they came and knew the way blindfold. Bone accompanied them carrying a lantern, though everyone assured Dwight it was not necessary.

A very dark night, unlit by moon or stars, and with a faint freckle of rain again borne on the tired breeze. Demelza carried Henry ahead of her, but as his head drooped in sleep he was transferred to Ross who, riding astride, could keep a firmer grip of him. A quiet ride now, everyone silent after the chatter of the day. In the distance the lights of Nampara already showed up, misting, haloed through the dark. As they clopped down the lane, overgrown with wind-crouching trees, Ross thought how little had changed here from the time he had ridden this way in the autumn of 1783 – thirty-two years ago – returning from the American War to find his father dead and Nampara a stinking shambles with Jud and Prudie in a drunken stupor in his father's old box bed.

They crossed the bridge and dismounted outside the front door. He took Demelza in his arms, then Cuby.

As she slipped close to him Cuby whispered: 'I'm sorry. I think I am beginning my pains.'

II

It was ten days earlier than anyone had supposed, but Ross said, as the lantern carrier was about to turn away:

'Bone.'

'Sur?'

'I am very sorry, but I think my daughter-in-law is unwell. If you would trouble your master to come.'

Cuby went upstairs and undressed at once. It was immediately clear to Demelza that she was not mistaken. Ross went into the kitchen and found less confusion than he had expected. Sephus Billing was under the table and Ern Lobb snoring in his chair, but the rest came to their feet as he walked in.

He smiled: 'You have all dined well? I can see you have.'

There was a relieved laugh. 'Ais, sur.'

'Sure 'nough.'

'Andsome, 'andsome, sur.'

He looked at Matthew Mark Martin. 'I must ask a service of you. Mrs Jeremy is taken with her pains. It is a little premature, but I have sent for Dr Enys. Will you ride to The Bounders' Arms and fetch Mrs Hartnell?'

'Right away, sur.'

Since Emma had moved into The Bounders' Arms with her husband and two children, she had been encouraged by Dr Enys to take over from the elderly Mrs Higgins as midwife to the more respectable houses. It was not unremarked that this 'light' girl (daughter of the rascally Tholly Tregirls), who had at one time been considered to have too blemished a reputation to wed the Wesleyan, Sam Carne, should now in early middle life be looked on as reputable and reliable.

Demelza sat with Cuby to begin, regretting that, not expecting the baby until January, they had let Mrs Kemp take a holiday now, and that Clemency was not expected for another week. She felt nervous and ill-at-ease with this pretty, small, elegant young woman who was about to bring forth Jeremy's child.

Dwight arrived first, but not long behind him came Emma, riding pillion behind Matthew Mark. Demelza kissed Cuby and left the room. She wanted no part in it. She did not want to see her daughter-in-law in pain. Over the months the rapport between the two women had grown; Cuby told her sister she had never met a woman who understood her one half so well as Lady Poldark did; this understanding was almost though not entirely friendly and full of guarded but sincere affection. Perhaps in Demelza's reluctance to be near her daughter-in-law in childbirth lay the seeds of a fear that the hated sensations she had felt once were even yet not altogether vanquished.

Dwight was upstairs half an hour and then came into the parlour where Ross and Bella were playing a card game. Demelza was putting Henry to bed.

'All is very well,' he said. 'I see no complications.'

'Perhaps we brought you out unduly,' Ross said. 'After leaving you so recent.'

'No, no, it was the right thing to do. The contractions are mild and regular. I would think sometime tomorrow morning. Perhaps early.'

'Your lead, Papa,' said Bella.

'In the meantime?'

'In the meantime get a good night's sleep, as I propose to. I have given her a mild sedative, which should help, and Emma is now making her a cup of tea. Give my love to Demelza again.'

'Of course.' Ross led the ace of hearts.

'Emma will stay with her all night,' Dwight said. 'And have one of your boys close at hand and ready to come for me if there is any need.'

'Your trick, Daddy,' said Bella.

III

At five o'clock in the morning of St Stephen's Day Cuby Poldark was delivered of a healthy six-pound child. There were no complications, and, aware that she was in a strange house in spite of all the warmth and affection shown her, she gritted her teeth and bore the pain almost without a sound. Contrary to Ross's predictions, it was a girl. Dwight patted Cuby's hand and said she was very brave. The man who should have sat beside her bed and held her hand at this time was not there, and never would be. Through a mist of tears, part of happiness but more of sorrow, she was kissed and petted by each one of the family in turn. Henry laughed when he saw the baby. 'Smaller'n me,' he said. Despite Mrs Kemp's efforts, he affected a strong Cornish accent.

So there was another child in the house, another Poldark, even if a girl; their first grandchild, Jeremy's daughter; another generation. A Christmas baby, a Christ child, all that was left of their soldier son.

About twelve Demelza said to Ross she would like to walk to the end of the beach, would he come with her?

'It's a long way for me,' said Ross. 'All that sand. Before I get home I shall be limping like Jago's donkey.'

'Why don't we take our horses, then? Not for a gallop, just an amble.'

'If you've the fancy I'll come.'

'I've the fancy.'

Colley and Marigold were both elderly and would not be restive at the thought of walking at a sedentary pace.

Demelza went upstairs for something, so Ross, while waiting for the horses to be brought round, went to his front door and stared over his land. This was where he belonged. The trees edged his view on the right, with the thin stream, copper stained and running under the bridge on its way towards Nampara Cove. The engine house and sheds of Wheal Grace half-way up the rising ground ahead of him; the piled attle spilling down towards the house, with rough weeds already growing over part of it (the two stamps had been gone some years, at Demelza's request – there were plenty in Sawle); his fields, mostly fallow, waited ploughing in February, speckled with crows seeking any scrap they could find; Demelza's walled garden with the gate leading to the beach, and the rough ground between the garden and the sand. Half a mile distant, on the first cliffs, the engine house and other buildings of Wheal Leisure.

And at his back the house, of nondescript architectural design, with its grey Delabole slate roof, except for a patch of thatch at the rear, its disparate chimneys, its thick granite walls, a house that had been put up by rough hands to

chimneys, its thick granite walls, a house that had been put up by tough hands to meet the needs of the family it had sheltered for sixty years.

‘I am ready,’ said Demelza as the horses came round.

They set off at a slow pace, the horses as companionable as the riders. Demelza carried a small canvas bag.

‘What’s in that?’ Ross asked.

‘Oh, something I just brought along with me.’

It was half-tide, going out, and although there was no wind the sea was showing teeth at its edges. For a while they splashed through the surf, the horses relishing the water. Although the distant cliffs were black, those around Wheal Leisure had head cloths of green and feet of black and brown and purple seaweed. Over all was sky and cloud, ever changing. The scene-shifters were seldom idle in Cornwall.

‘So we have a granddaughter,’ he said.

‘Yes.’

‘Does that please you?’

‘Yes, Ross. It pleases me.’

‘And Cuby?’

‘And Cuby. I’m sure it pleases her too.’

They rode on for a while.

Demelza said: ‘When she first came to Nampara – that first time – she seemed so composed, so assured, that I almost found it in me to dislike her. But very soon, within a day, I saw ’twas only a sort of shell. Under it she was soft, vulnerable, damaged, like a hurt animal with bloody and twisted paws . . . Can you imagine what it must be like to have your first child without a husband and among strangers?’

‘Loving strangers.’

‘Oh yes. But if Jeremy had been here the sun would have lit the sky. She said to me the other day, she said, “No one ever said my name like Jeremy. He has a special way of saying Cuby that was all his own ..” ’

Tears were near, and there had been enough for Christmas. Ross said roughly: ‘And so this trumpery title I was so misguided as to accept will descend upon poor Henry.’

‘That pleases me too, Ross, except for your way of describing it. I believe it is more fitting that the honour should come to your own son.’

They reached the drier sand.

‘Has she given you any idea as to a name she may have in mind?’

‘She thinks to call her Noelle. It seems that Jeremy suggested that. And Frances after her mother.’

‘Noelle Frances Poldark. It runs well enough. I’m glad she does not think of

NOELLE FINANCES FOLDING. IT RAINS WELL ENOUGH. I AM GLAD SHE DOES NOT THINK OF following the example of the Hornblower family.'

'Hornblower?'

'Jonathan Hornblower, the man who invented the compound engine; he died in March. His father had thirteen children and gave them all names beginning with J. Jeckolia, Jedediah, Jerusha, Josiah, Jabey, Jonathan. I have forgotten them. I used to know them all.'

'You must tell Cuby. She may change her mind before christening day.'

'On consideration,' Ross said, 'it is a pity that George did not have twin boys. Then he could have called them Castor and Pollux.'

Demelza laughed. It was good to hear that sound again.

'Clowance would agree.'

Ross looked over towards the land. 'You see that sandhill? You remember how you and I and Jeremy and Clowance used to roll down it? It was a special treat when they were small.'

'Too well,' said Demelza. 'It was a lovely time.'

'I cannot imagine myself rolling down it with Harry.'

'Don't worry. Noelle will.'

Ross looped over his rein. 'It is a strange feeling, but I do not think I shall ever *know* Harry the way I knew Jeremy. I am not likely to see so much of his life. The gap of the years between us . . . Sometimes I feel like his grandfather!'

'That is nonsense.'

There wasn't another person to be seen; only the occasional congregation of gulls or sanderlings or plovers were disturbed by their approach, waddling out of their way, or flapping a lazy wing to increase the safe distance.

Demelza said: 'I must send word to Clowance and Verity. I am sure they will be anxious to know.'

'I'm sure they will.'

'Ross, I have been wondering about Valentine and Selina in London.'

'What could you be wondering about them?'

'Whether they may see Tom Guildford.'

'You mean? . . . Oh my dear, it is too early to think of anything like that . . .'

'I do not think of anything like *that*! But Tom is a good kind friend of Clowance's. If he came down I am sure he would be good for Clowance, good for her spirits, good for her – her health generally. And do not forget, he is a lawyer. He could be a great business help to her too.'

Ross said: 'In that case perhaps we should send a note to Edward Fitzmaurice so the two gentlemen may start from scratch.'

'Ross, you are so vexatious! Why do I bear with you?'

'Well, you said she told you that if she ever married again it would not be for

love, it would be for money or position. That would bring Edward strongly into the reckoning.'

'I do not know how you can be so cynical about your own daughter.'

'Is it cynical to face the facts? If Cuby is damaged, so in a similar but different way is Clowance. So we should do nothing, should we, and allow events to take their course?'

They were half-way along the beach by now, past the old Wheal Vlow adit. The Dark Cliffs at the end were coming into perspective; you could see the deep crevices in them, the isolated rocks.

Demelza said: 'And for yourself, Ross. Are you content?'

He was some seconds answering, his face devoid of readable expression.

'What is content? Something more than resignation? I eat and sleep well. I take interest in my affairs. I am content, more than content, with my wife.'

'Thank you, Ross. I did not ask for a compliment.'

'You did not get one. But – I have been home five months – you more. These have been months of grieving. But there is some slow adjustment. Do you not find it so?'

'Yes. And when Mr Canning calls to see us – if he calls to see us – what shall be your answer?'

'My answer to what? He has put no question.'

'But he may do so. He is sure to try to persuade you back into public life.'

'Then I shall not go.'

'Really?'

'Really. I shall continue to look after my own property and my own still considerable family. And my wife, who is not quite considerable enough to please me.'

'Oh, I am putting on weight, little by little. I am having to let out again some of the skirts that I took in.'

'So you too are content?'

'Resigned? – that was the word you used. That is nearer. But you are right: in time it will move by little stages farther away from grief.'

'Perhaps even to happiness?'

'Ah *that* . . .'

'It is not in your nature, my dear, to be unhappy. You are in fine counterbalance with my natural mopishness.'

'Tis harder now,' Demelza said.

They splashed through a pool of shallow water lying among corrugated ridges of sand.

'Old Tholly Tregirls,' Ross said. You know I went to see him just before he

died? He said two things I have remembered. He quoted something my father said to him. My father said to him: “Tholly, the longer I live, the more certain sure I am that the Wise Men never came from the East.” ’

‘I think he may be right.’

‘But something Old Tholly said himself made the deepest impression. It was only in passing. He did not mean it as a pronouncement. He said: “A man is better off to be a squire in Cornwall than to be a king in England.” ’

She looked across and he smiled back at her. He said: ‘Perhaps I have not always appreciated my good fortune.’

IV

Towards the end of the beach they dismounted and climbed up to the wishing well. It was really just a small natural circular pool at the entrance to a cave, with water dripping in plops from the moss-grown roof. It was a place where long ago Drake and Morwenna had come with Geoffrey Charles and silently plighted their troth.

Ross had no idea why Demelza wanted to go there today, picking her way up with greater agility than he could muster among the pools and the sea-weedy rocks. But he went along, content to humour her. When they got to the well they stood for a moment in silence. The cave was in semi-darkness, though the day was bright around the well.

Demelza opened the canvas bag she carried, and took a small silver object out of it. It was the loving cup, bearing the Latin inscription, ‘*Amor gignit amorem*’, ‘Love creates love’.

Ross said: ‘Why have you brought that?’

‘Cuby carried me a little note from Jeremy. It said—’

‘You never told me—’

‘’Twas only a few words.’

‘You never told me. He did mention – in Belgium he did mention something that he had written to you.’

‘’Twas only a note, Ross. It seems he had a sort of superstition about this cup. I cannot explain it any other way. I found it on the beach, you’ll remember; it had been washed up by the sea. Jeremy thought it was an omen for him. If he came back from France he would take it as his own. If he did not I was to throw it back, give it back to the sea.’

Ross frowned. ‘I don’t understand. It was never his, was it? It doesn’t make sense to me.’

‘It is not easy to understand how he felt, Ross. But we talked about it once, when he was home last December. He didn’t say as much then, but when Cuby came she brought this little note.’

‘I’d like to see the note.’

‘I have burned it, Ross.’

Ross thought this so outrageous a lie that he could not dispute it. Demelza destroying any letter of Jeremy’s . . .

‘And now what are you going to do with this cup?’

‘Drop it down the well.’

‘That is not the sea.’

‘To me it is better than the sea. And the well is quite deep. No one will ever find it.’

‘Is that important?’

‘No. Oh no, not at all. But – this is a wishing well. I thought – I really thought it would be most fitty, most suitable.’

‘Well, it perplexes me, but have it as you will. Perhaps you have some Celtic perceptions that I lack.’

‘You are no less Cornish than I am, Ross.’

‘Maybe not. But sophistication has bred it out of me. Or your old Meggy Dawes taught you things only witches should know.’

She smiled brilliantly at him, but there was no laughter in her eyes. She knelt on the stone beside the wall, rolled up her sleeve and put the cup slowly into the water. The cup filled, sent bubbles hurrying to the surface. She closed her eyes as if praying, opened her fingers. The cup sank out of sight. A few last bubbles rose and then it was gone.

It was as if with this symbolic action the ironic tragedy of Jeremy’s life and death, which even she could only partly perceive, had come full circle, had played itself out.

She remained kneeling for about a minute staring into the well. Then she got up, careful not to wipe her arm but to let the fresh water dry. When it had done so she pulled down her sleeve, buttoned it, and drew on her glove. Only then she looked up at her husband with eyes as dark as he had ever seen them.

‘Dearest Ross, let us go home now. There is a baby to see to.’

THE TWISTED SWORD

The eleventh Poldark novel

Winston Graham was the author of forty novels, including *The Walking Stick*, *Angell*, *Pearl and Little God*, *Stephanie* and *Tremor*. His books have been widely translated and his famous Poldark series has been developed into two television series shown in twenty-four countries. A special two-hour television programme has been made of his eighth Poldark novel, *The Stranger from the Sea*, whilst a five-part television serial of his early novel *The Forgotten Story* won a silver medal at the New York Film Festival. Six of Winston Graham's books have been filmed for the big screen, the most notable being *Marnie*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Winston Graham was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and in 1983 was awarded the OBE. He died in July 2003.

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First published 1990 by Chapmans

This edition published 2008 by Pan Books

This electronic edition published 2011 by Pan Books
an imprint of Pan Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited
Pan Macmillan, 20 New Wharf Road, London N1 9RR
Basingstoke and Oxford
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-0-330-52417-9 EPUB

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