The Arrangement

by Genie60

Summary

What if Ross found Demelza in another way instead of a dog fight? What if she came to Nampara under less than perfect circumstances harboring a secret? What if Ross did play "the hero" to help her out and instead found that she redeemed him? What if love came when they least expected it?

Notes

As always I own nothing except the idea. Credit for characters and the roots of this sage to Winston and Debbie. Any errors or omissions are mine alone.
Chapter 1

Ross Poldark brought his borrowed horse to a stop just outside the stone wall of Nampara. He was returning home after three years in America fighting in the war of independence. He came back physically scarred and lame thanks to a musket but in addition to that, as of an hour ago, his heart was broken as well. Upon his arrival in Cornwall, he learned not only of his father’s death six months earlier but also the loss of the girl he left behind. He had assumed he’d come back, propose and move on with his life as the son of Joshua Poldark, mine and landowner. He joined the army at his father’s insistence because the path he was on would most certainly lead to jail or the gallows. Now he returned a hero, with a title. As he traveled home, he had hoped that the change in his status would make his father proud and allow him to marry Elizabeth Chynoweth.

Instead, he walked into Trenwith, his family home, to find his cousin betrothed to this girl and his estate in shambles. He was unprepared for this homecoming. As he stood in front of the seemingly abandoned structure he should call home, Ross wondered if everything he touched was cursed, including his own life. But he was back now, his mislaid plans forcing him to find another life to live. He walked around the house wondering where his father’s servants were. There were no lights burning in any of the windows and while he knew they were not expecting his arrival, he hoped for some sign of life. Coming around to the front door, he pushed against it, finding that it opened without resistance. He took this to mean that Jud and Prudie were somewhere to be found. Leaving his cloak and tricorn in the foyer, he was pleased to see that the house was still in some kind of order. The furnishings were worn and perhaps there was a hint of mustiness in the air, but at least it retained the feel of the house he left three years before.

He made his way to the kitchen expecting to see the servants passed out from the rum his father acquired from his old friend Trencrom, but they were nowhere to be found. The room was dank even with a fire in the hearth heating a pot of what looked like some kind of soup or stew. The sight and smell made it seem less cold and unwelcoming but there was still no sign of who left this. He also saw a mug on the table along with a small pitcher of ale indicating that someone was here or had been there recently. Pouring a draught, he took a long swallow as he realized he had not had anything since leaving Falmouth, especially since his visit at Trenwith ended abruptly. He poured another mug when he heard a rustling behind him. The door to the box bed that the servants used on occasion was closed and the sound seemed to come from there. Ross assumed that Jud and Prudie were in there either sleeping or doing god knows what, but clearly not working. Finishing the last of his drink he walked to the piece and slid open the door eliciting a scream from the occupant. He expected it to be his father's old employees. What he saw was someone else.

“Who the devil are you?”

A young woman with a shock of red hair was cowering in the corner of the bed, one hand holding a fire poker, the other clutching the bodice of a very worn shirt. She was kneeling and ready to pounce.

“Speak up child! Who are you and what are you doing in my house?”

Ross was practically screaming at this point, his patience wearing thin. What had these servants done now?

“I…I…”

The girl stammered before Ross reached in and pulled her out into the kitchen. She wobbled as she tried to gain her footing, so he automatically took a hold of her arm. The girl yanked it out of his
grasp, then rubbed the spot he had held, forgetting for a moment that the clothes she wore barely covered her.

“Either tell me your name now or I’ll ride you to the constable.”

Ross saw that the intruder was barely older than a child. No more than a teen, it appeared. Regretting his harsh tone, he moved towards her wanting to allay her fears.

“Can you please tell me who you are and what you are doing in my house? Where are Jud and Prudie?”

The girl’s green eyes shone brightly in the light of the candle and Ross couldn’t help but be drawn to the sadness in them. Yet behind that, he saw something akin to fire; this gangly girl had something that intrigued him.

For her part, the child’s breathing evened out as she looked into the warm brown eyes of this soldier. She had never seen one up close and expected him to whip her as most men had done. This one didn’t seem interested in that. He just wanted to know her name.


“I’m Ross Poldark. Now tell me what are you doing in my house?”

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After Ross had taken the poker out of her hand he led the girl to the table, sat her down and took a seat opposite her. As he walked behind her he saw the remnants of bruises. Some looked like a strap had been taken to her; the others looked like she had been hit with a heavy object. Any anger he felt towards her was quickly dissipating. He still didn’t know what she was doing in his house or where Jud and Prudie were, which had Ross wondering if the two situations were related. For her part, the girl kept her head down, not daring to make eye contact with him. Ross poured another mug but this time handed it to the girl.

“Demelza is it?” he asked gently.

“Yes, sir.”

“Tell me Demelza, what are you doing here?” he repeated. “And where are Jud and Prudie?”

His hand held the jug while he watched her, waiting for an answer.

“I don’t know ‘bout Jud or Prudie,” she said.

“What do you mean? How did you come to be in my house?”

“Oh, they told me to come to help with chores. I didn’t have no place to go so Garrick and me made our way here.”

Ross was still confused and now wanted to know who Garrick was.

“Garrick? Who’s Garrick?”

Finally lifting her head to look at her questioner she stood and left the room to go into the pantry. A few moments later she returned with a honey-colored mangy mutt tied to a piece of rope.

“This be Garrick sir. Him and me be friends. Where I go, he goes.”
Ross leaned over the table to see the girl’s friend, then shook his head.

“I won’t have him in my house if he’s got crawlies,” Ross said sternly.

“He ain’t got no crawlers. I wash him every day,” she offered.

Demelza saw that this man didn’t believe her so she told him the truth.

“Well, mayhap not every day. But he ain’t got no crawlers,” she said.

“Do you?” Ross asked with a smirk.

The girl was shocked at his forthright question and yet she seemed to trust that he would not be angry with her answer.

“I ain’t got crawlers!” she cried.

“Because you wash every day?”

“Not every day…” she said.

Garrick pulled on the rope forcing Demelza to bend down to wrangle him. As she did, the shirt she wore started to slip. In order to keep herself decent, she let go of Garrick who immediately took off for through the house.

“Garrick!” Demelza called.

Scrambling to get herself together, she clutched her shirt and ran out of the room to the parlor. Ross followed and saw the dog sitting in front of the hearth as if he had always been in the house with Demelza crouched next to him.

“I’m sorry sir. It’s just that when I heard someone come in the house I locked him in the pantry. I suppose he’s mad at me,” she explained as she pet the dog.

Ross could not bring himself to reprimand her.

“I see. For the time being, we will leave things be. You still haven’t answered the question about where in the world are Jud and Prudie.”

Sitting down on the settle, he crossed his legs and waited for a reply.

“I dunno sir.”

Demelza rose to her feet and waited for him to tell her what to do next. Ross appreciated her reserve for one so young. As she stood in front of him, Ross assessed this young person who seemed to have taken up residence in his home. She was a comely girl, in a rough, urchin kind of way. While she was understandably shy, she was not fearful, which, considering what he must look like, he found surprising. He wanted to question her more about her circumstances and physical condition but first, he needed to try and get to the bottom of his servant's disappearance.

“Let me understand this. Jud and Prudie brought you here, put you to work and then left?”

“Yes.”

“When was this?”
“About a week since I seen them last,” she answered

She shifted her weight from one foot to another which had Ross looking down. On her feet were worn leather shoes, the laces missing and one toe visible through a hole. She must be uncomfortable but said nothing.

“Demelza, sit down and tell me exactly everything.”

Shocked, Demelza did as she was told and took her place on a small stool by his feet. She didn’t ask and so did what she assumed he wanted. Her fingers twisted the material of her skirt as her eyes remained downcast.

“Look at me child and speak.”

Ross’s voice was commanding. Demelza looked up at him but did not reveal any fear. Her face remained neutral as she began to tell her story. Ross listened intently as she related how she came to meet Jud and Prudie in Truro while she was trying to survive. They saw her begging for scraps and offered her a place to stay if she wanted to work along with clothes and food. Not having anywhere else to go, she agreed, bringing Garrick with her. At this point, Ross stopped her.

“What were you doing in Truro in the first place? Don’t you have a family?”

She nodded.

“Yes. Father and six brothers. But they don’t care about me,” she said quietly.

“Who beats you Demelza?”

Her eyes widened at the realization that he knew that fact about her. Ross leaned towards her, his hand wanting to take hers but knowing better he restrained himself.

“Father,” she replied.

“Beats you?”

“Most days.”

“Is that why you left?”

Demelza hesitated in answering because she knew the real reason most likely would see her sent on her way again. Yet for some reason she couldn’t lie to this man so again, she nodded silently.

“I see. And Jud and Prudie just brought you here and left?”

Relieved that he wasn’t pursuing information on her running away she offered him an answer to the servant’s departure.

“No. They were here as well for a while.”

“And then?”

His impatience was returning as he wanted to know just what his father’s “devoted” servants were about.

“I dunno, sir. I was working in the fields and they come ‘round to tell me that they were going to town. Ain’t seen them since,” she said.
Ross shook his head because while he was dismayed that his staff would depart without a clear reason leaving a stranger in the house, he was not surprised. Over the years Jud and Prudie Paynter were considered wastrels, who did as little as possible and took as much as they could get away with. His father kept them out of some sense of duty but Ross was not so keen on doing the same. Now it seemed he might not have the chance to sack them if they were gone already.

“And you’ve been here ever since. Doing what may I ask?”

His tone had changed, setting Demelza on edge. She watched as Ross walked around the room, surveying it as if looking for something.

“Nothing sir. ’Cept cleaning and working the farm. I don’t know much about minin’ so I didn’t venture down there.”

There was an air of confidence around her now that Ross was unprepared for. He stopped by his mother’s old piano when he saw it was open with new music laid out.

“And do you play as well, Demelza?”

“No. But the sound takes away from the quiet. I don’t like it when it’s too quiet.”

Ross came back to where she sat and looked down at her.

“How old are you Demelza?”

“Eighteen, sir.”

“Do you know how to read? Or write?”

She bowed her head again and Ross saw that he had brought up a sensitive topic.

“No, sir.”

“Well, you seem to be a clever girl. I’m sure you’ve looked at the books in the library. Perhaps I can help you learn. Would you like that?”

She jumped up in excitement and again found herself unsteady. Ross caught her before she fell and gathered her against his chest.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“I think so. Just haven’t eaten yet,” she answered.

Ross was not sure he believed her as when he held her he felt that her body was not as non-descript as he originally thought. There was a soft and curvaceous shape to her that was well hidden in the clothes she wore. Unexpectedly, he found himself feeling shades of desire for this strange girl with the strange name. He held her away from him to look into her eyes. He felt she was hiding something but knew that tonight was not the time to pry it out of her.

“Come with me. Let’s see if there is anything in that kitchen worth eating,” he said, stepping aside to let her move first.

Demelza looked up at him as she walked passed.

“I made some soup. Just didn’t get a chance to eat it,” she said with a shy smile.
She was not used to such kindness. Or kindness of any type for that matter. Not without someone expecting something in return. With a slow step, she made her way to the kitchen as Ross followed close behind.

“Did you, now? Well, Demelza Carne, let’s see what kind of skills you have,” Ross said.

He sat down at the table, watching her move around the room as if she owned it. With ease Demelza gathered bowls and spoons, setting them on the table. Next, she pulled the pot off the fire, gave the contents a stir before doling out a portion for each of them. Setting it on the table she found a round of bread and brought that as well. Once she was satisfied that all was in place she sat down and tucked into the food. Ross watched her as she ate with gusto. He realized that he was hungry himself and the smell of what she had prepared was enticing. Taking a small taste he was surprised at how good it was. He kept eating but eyed his companion surreptitiously between bites. He had no idea why Demelza Carne came into his life but already she was making it interesting. This girl was an enigma and he was glad for the distraction.

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The days morphed into weeks during which time Demelza had settled into life at Nampara as if she had always been there. Even when Jud and Prudie returned, Ross didn’t change Demelza’s status. In fact, he improved it. While putting Jud and Prudie to work on the farm and in the fields, Demelza remained in the house as his scullery maid and in a short time turned the shell of Nampara into a home. He also made good on his promise to teach her to read and write. It was during one of these quiet nights, where Demelza sat at the table practicing her letters with Ross working on mine figures that a conversation arose touching on each of their pasts.

“Why are you not going to your cousin’s wedding? Is it to do with Elizabeth?”

Demelza said it so innocently that it took Ross a minute to understand what she had said. He should be surprised at her insolence but having worked side by side with her he had come to see her as a bright, intuitive young woman. He was more taken aback by the fact that she knew about the wedding at all and concluded that she was given the information from Prudie. Gossiping was one skill the old woman was experienced at so he couldn’t be mad at Demelza for being curious. He just wasn’t sure how to answer.

“Where did you hear about the wedding? And who told you about Elizabeth?”

Feeling that she had done something wrong Demelza didn’t respond so Ross answered for her.

“Prudie? Of course”

Demelza could see that he was less than pleased with her question. She didn’t want him mad at her; not after all he’d done for her.

“I’m sorry sir. I didn’t mean no disrespect,” she said.

Ross could tell she was embarrassed, so moved to diffuse the tension.

“I know Demelza. Actually, I’d rather not discuss it. But since you asked, I am going to the wedding.”

She smiled at him which was returned.

“I’m glad sir. Family is important.”
“Is it?”

“Truly, for even if many bad things happen they can’t outweigh the good.”

Ross knew she was right.

“How is someone so young, so wise?”

“I dunno about wise, sir. Seems like common sense if you ask me,” she replied.

Demelza stood up and swayed setting Ross to reach out and catch her.

“Demelza! Are you alright?” Ross cried.

“Sorry, sir. I must be wearier than I realized,” she said.

He held on to her as she seemed close to fainting. Ross walked her over to the settle and placed her gingerly on the seat then went to get her a glass of port. Coming back to her, a thought crossed Ross’s mind. He wondered if Demelza’s ill health was related to something more than just fatigue. Yet he had no idea how to broach the subject. While they got to a respectable comfort level, they had not delved too far into more personal topics. Hadn’t he just stopped her queries regarding Elizabeth? How could he ask her about things relating to her life before coming to Nampara if he was not willing to do the same? He watched Demelza sip the alcohol as her mouth broke into a small grin. Laying her head back against the seat, she closed her eyes so she didn’t see Ross staring at her.

Seeing that Demelza seemed fine, Ross poured himself a brandy and sat opposite her. He studied her face and wondered what lay beneath the surface of this young woman for it was clear she was no longer a child. She demonstrated that although she might not be formally schooled she was as clever as any other young woman he’d encountered, perhaps more so. Sipping his drink, his eyes scanned her body which had begun to ripen over the month by being fed and nurtured. The dress she wore was one of his mother’s that was found in an old trunk. It did not fit exactly as it should; the hem falling just a tad short as Demelza was taller than his mother. But in all other respects, it hugged her in such a way as to accentuate the changes that her body was going through. Ross would not be human if he didn’t recognize that and, to some degree, want to know it better.

Feeling like one of the lecherous landowners of the county, Ross shook the thought out of his head and refocused on what might possibly be ailing Demelza. He had a notion and looked closer at her to see if there were any other signs indicating what he suspected. Other than the fact that she seemed to be sleeping more than usual, Ross saw nothing. Perhaps he was mistaken and his imagination was running wild for no reason. On the other hand, if it was true, then what would that mean for her? And him as well? He started to run different scenarios through his head when the glass Demelza was holding fell, shattering on the floor allowing the dark crimson liquid to puddle on the floor.

“Judas!” she cried, the sound startling her awake.

Ross jumped at the sound of both the crystal and Demelza’s voice.

“Are you alright?” he asked as he bent down to pick up the larger shards, careful not to cut himself or spread the wine further on the floor.

“Oh sir, I’m so sorry. I don’t know what…here let me do that,” she said.

Demelza stood up, swayed for a moment before gathering herself and untying her apron, knelt down to join Ross in cleaning up the mess. Neither of them said anything, each in their own thoughts.
Using her apron to swab up the port Ross continued to pick up the glass. He rose and went to the kitchen to get a bin to put them in, coming back with another rag and bucket of water to wipe the floor clean.

“Sir, let me do that,” Demelza said, taking the cloth from him.

“I think I can manage washing a floor Demelza,” he replied.

“But sir,” she started to say when a wave of dizziness hit and she fell onto the floor before Ross could catch her.

“Demelza!” Ross cried as he picked her up and brought her towards him until her head lay in his lap. He touched her forehead which felt cool and clammy. Starting to panic he called for Prudie.

“Prudie!”

The servant scurried into the room and gasped at the scene before her. Mister Ross was on the floor surrounded by dark liquid and Demelza. She didn’t know what had happened but to her simple eyes, it did not look proper.

“Send for Dr. Enys. Demelza is ill,” he ordered.

“Yessir,” she replied and went to find Jud to fetch the doctor.

Ross in the meanwhile moved, in hopes that Demelza would stir but he got no response so he patted her cheek and spoke softly in her ear.

“Demelza, wake up,” he said.

Ross brushed the hair out of her face and noticed for the first time how long her lashes were; they lay against her cheeks like an amber fringe. Her lips were the color of a pale pink rose, stirring the temptation to kiss her. Ross cupped her cheek and began to lean in towards her when she moaned and her eyes fluttered open with a wild look to them. She blinked a few times before recognizing Ross hovering above her.

“Sir? What happened?” she said as she struggled to sit up.

Standing himself, Ross reached down, and grasping her by the arms, lifted her to stand. She swayed a little so he brought her to his chest and held her. The fragrance of her hair wafted up into his nostrils filling his senses with hints of lavender, vanilla, and the sea. Ross closed his eyes and inhaled, committing the scent to memory. Something welled up in inside that was more than base desire; it was a need to feel close to another human being. He realized how much he missed the touch, the nearness of someone. And he never dreamed it would come in the form of an urchin, with eyes as bright and clear as the sea and a disposition that belied her roots.

“Sir?” she murmured into his chest.

Ross pulled her away from his embrace to look at her. She still seemed slightly disoriented and unsteady, so he kept his hands on her arms.

“Demelza, I think you should go to lie down until Dr. Enys arrives,” he suggested.

“Yes sir,” she replied and moved to walk away when he held her firmly.

“Good. Then come with me,” he said.
Then, taking hold of her elbow, he led her out of the room. Demelza instinctively turned towards the kitchen where her box bed was. Ross had other ideas and steered her towards the staircase that led to the upstairs bedrooms. Demelza tugged her arm out of his and froze in the hall.

“What are you doin’?” Demelza asked.

Her voice sounded shaky and Ross had to smile at her nervousness.

“I’m taking you to a bedroom Demelza,” he said.

“Sir?”

Demelza was genuinely confused and was going to fight his suggestion when another bout of dizziness hit, this time accompanied by nausea. She lunched forward in time for Ross to gather her in his arms and without a protest, carry her upstairs. Demelza relaxed and buried her head in the crook of his neck taking in the aroma of his skin. Unknowingly she sighed and settled into the cradle of his arms as he carried her down the hall. Reaching the room, Ross stopped as Demelza reached down to help turn the latch. With his shoulder, Ross pushed open the door and proceeded to lay Demelza on the bed. Their eyes met and both smiled, an unspoken understanding between them. Ross went to the window and opened it to let in the fresh air since the room was musty from lack of use. Demelza watched as he did this, wondering why he was being so kind.

Ross turned around to see Demelza’s eyes trained on him. As he looked at her lying on the expansive bed, he saw how small she appeared; more like the urchin, he had found rather than the woman who now seemed to run the house. Still, the thought that her current ill health was related to something more permanent would not leave his mind. He knew he should wait until Dwight arrived to do an official examination but Ross was impatient. He walked to the bed and took a seat next to Demelza. She smiled at him sweetly but started when Ross took her hand.

“Demelza, I must ask you something,” he started.

Having no idea what her master was going to say, Demelza immediately assumed it was to ask for her to leave.

“Please sir, I’m sorry about the glass and the rug. I’ll find a way to repay ‘ee,” she said, as she went to sit up.

“Demelza what are you talking about?”

Now Ross was the confused one. He gently guided her to lie back down but continued to hold her hand.

“Ain’t you gonna ask me to leave?” she said.

Ross laughed.

“No silly girl. I’m not going to ask you to leave,” he said.

Demelza let out a sigh of relief and smiled, her body relaxing slightly.

“Then what…” she asked.

Ross was self-conscious now and second-guessed asking the question he wanted but still, he needed to know.
“Demelza? Is it possible that your illness…that perhaps you are…”

Before he could finish the door opened and in burst Prudie with Dwight Enys behind him.

“Surgeon’s here!” she cried.

Ross jumped up and greeted his friend after giving his servant a warning look. He knew Prudie’s opinion of Demelza and so if this turned out to be more complicated than just fatigue, the last thing he would tolerate would be her judging of the situation. Feeling her master’s disapproval, Prudie snorted and then left.

“Dwight, thank you for coming. I don’t think you’ve met Demelza,” he said leading the doctor to the bed.

“No I haven’t, but I’ve heard nothing but good things,” Dwight said.

Demelza sat up and clasped her hands in her lap. She looked at the young physician who appeared to be close to her age and relaxed. He seemed kind and she thought if he was a trusted friend of the master, he would only want to help her.

“Doctor Enys?” she said shyly.

“Don’t be afraid. I’m merely going to examine you to see why you’ve had these fits.”

She nodded then looked past the doctor to Ross who gave her a smile of reassurance. Demelza felt a warmth run through her that made her blush. As Dwight unpacked his instruments, he caught the look between the two and felt that he had walked into something more than a master worried about a sick servant. Demelza turned her attention to the physician, watching him with curiosity as he prepared to examine her. Suddenly she felt shy and didn’t want Ross in the room anymore. She stared at Dwight hoping he would glance her way so she could convey the message. She cleared her throat and Dwight looked down at her. Saying nothing she looked towards Ross and Dwight understood. He patted her hand then walked to where Ross waited with Prudie.

“Ross,” he said in a hushed tone. “I think it best that I examine Demelza alone. If something delicate is the cause she might be more inclined to speak with me if there is no one else in the room.”

Ross was put off by this request. Naturally he thought he’d stay and see what was wrong with Demelza but clearly, she didn’t want him there. While he was hurt—although he had no reason to be—he abided by her wishes.

“I’ll be downstairs if you need anything,” he said then closed the door behind him.

Once he was gone, Dwight returned to his patient and began his examination. Demelza allowed him to check her superficially but knew that she had to tell him what she already suspected. She had hoped that what she feared was just her imagination or her body reacting to the strain of leaving home and beginning over again at Nampara. Now she was almost certain it was something else. Something that was the result of an event she had struggled to put behind her; an event that brought her to Truro and this new life.

“Dr. Enys,” Demelza said.

“Yes,” he responded, not quite paying attention.

Dwight had gone back to his bag, ready to mix a powder for her when Demelza spoke.
“I think I know what might be ailing me,” she said quietly.

He turned around and saw the young woman twisting the bedding with her hands, her head down, her hair falling around her face, hiding her expression. Dwight’s instincts kicked in and while he also suspected what might be the cause of Demelza’s spells, he waited for her to speak first.

“And what might that be?” he asked.

She looked up at the doctor making no effort to hide the tears that now fell softly down her cheeks.

“I am with child,” she answered.

Dwight said nothing. He returned the medicines to his bag and sat down next to Demelza. He looked into her eyes. They were clear despite the tears so he knew that she was not being dramatic and that she believed this to be the truth.

“Are you certain? Have you had this confirmed before you came to Nampara?”

His voice was gentle and nonaccusatory which put Demelza at ease.

“No. But I’ve heard tell from enough villagers about how one can tell if they are in that condition. Besides, something happened that….” she paused, not quite ready to reveal all.

Clearly, there was much more to this story than perhaps even Ross knew. Dwight felt that if he was to help Demelza which in turn would be helping his friend, he would need to know everything.

“Demelza, Ross asked me to come and treat you because he is concerned but also because he cares for you. I wish to fulfill that request but cannot do so without knowing all the facts. Believe me, I will not share anything you tell me if you do not wish it,” Dwight said.

The kindness of the young doctor was too much for Demelza. She started to cry uncontrollably as Dwight held her. Something traumatic seemed to put the maid in this predicament for her to have such a reaction. These were not tears of a penitent but more of a victim of something horrible.

“There, there my girl. It will be alright. Please just tell me what happened so I can help you.”

Lifting her head off his shoulder, Demelza used the back of her and to wipe her face then nodded.

“Alright,” she said.

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Ross was in the parlor, sipping brandy and pacing when Dwight entered. Without a word, the doctor poured himself a glass as well and walked to where Ross stood. He took a good gulp of the liquid before sitting down on the settle, waiting for Ross to do the same. The two men sat silently for a few minutes before Ross spoke.

“Dwight, for goodness sake, tell me what is going on with Demelza!” he blurted out.

The doctor looked up at his friend and saw the concern on his face. Dwight was still trying to make sense of what Demelza related himself. He had found her story abominable so he knew that Ross would feel the same if not worse because of the feelings between his friend and the young maid. However, Demelza did not object to Ross being told what happened and preferred Dwight relay it. She believed Ross would be less likely to be angry if he heard it from Dwight.

“First I must tell you she will be fine. Rest will do wonders for her,” Dwight said
Of course. I’ll see to it that her chores are handled by Prudie and Jud,” Ross said.

Taking another sip of his drink, he saw that Dwight seemed to be struggling with something else.

“Dwight? Is there something else? Something you’re not telling me?” he asked.

Dwight took a deep breath and spoke, “Yes, there is. But before I tell you what she said, you must promise me to let me finish and do not, I repeat, do not jump to conclusions.”

More than a little confused, Ross tilted his head and agreed.

“It seems that Demelza is with child,” Dwight said flatly.

Ross took a moment to let that set in his mind then quickly spoke.

“You don’t think that I am the father?” he said.

“Of course not. Demelza never implied that either.”

Ross said nothing but let Dwight went on.

“She is too far along for that to be possible anyway. However, the circumstances of her condition are not simple.”

“What do you mean Dwight?”

“I mean she did not have a suitor nor did she give herself willingly to a man,” Dwight said.

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying she was assaulted. Before she came here.”


“Some friend of her father’s was all she said. The man was drunk, Demelza was alone in the house and…”

There was no need for him to continue with details; Ross heard enough to put the pieces together. Dwight went on.

“She ran away and found her way here. I don’t know what she planned to do if you hadn’t taken her in but that seems to be a moot point now.”

“Yes,” Ross said thoughtfully. “Dwight, how far along…I mean, when is the child due?”

“In approximately six months’ time.”

“I see,” Ross said.

He rose and poured another drink.

“You know what people will say, don’t you?” he said to Dwight.

“I can imagine. But as long as you and Demelza know the truth…”

“Dwight, do you really think that villagers will believe anything but what they want about a kitchen maid and her less than stellar master?” Ross asked.
Dwight knew he was right. This situation lent itself to all sorts of rumors and innuendos that would be bad enough for Ross but even worse for Demelza. Not only was she a servant, now in the family way, she was from another village and therefore an outsider.

“What are you thinking, Ross?”

Ross finished his drink and crossed the room to go see Demelza.

“The only thing that I think will help. I just hope Demelza sees it that way as well.”

With a determined step, Ross bounded up the stairs, two at a time, reaching the bedroom in seconds. He took a breath and waited outside to gather his thoughts before knocking. The proposal, such as it was, might be considered madness by some but to Ross, it was the only logical thing to do. Besides he had to admit that this was as much for his benefit as it was for Demelza. In her time at Nampara, her presence had eased his loneliness. Not only that, there was no denying his attraction to her. Of course, he had no idea if she felt the same but she would have to see the reasoning behind this kind of arrangement. And that would be how he presented it.

Ross knocked and waited for Demelza to invite him in but when nothing came, he pushed open the door to see her standing by the open window. It seemed she didn’t hear him enter and Ross didn’t want to startle her so he gently called her name.

“Demelza?”

She jumped anyway and turned quickly to see him standing just inside the door.

“Sir! I’m sorry about all the trouble. I’ll repay you for the glass and the rug if I can’t get it cleaned,” she rambled.

Ross moved closer to her and saw the distressed look on her face. She no longer had the pallid color she did when she collapsed; now she looked flushed to the point of embarrassed.

“Demelza, what are you talking about? I know of no trouble,” he said.

Demelza blinked a few times, then nervously brushed the hair out of her face. She walked back towards the bed when Ross reached out and took hold of her arm.

“Sir? Didn’t Dr. Enys tell you about…”

She paused to look down at where he held her as if just realizing what he had done.

“Your condition? Yes, he did.”

Nodding shyly, Demelza spoke, fighting the tears that threatened to appear.

“I’ll pack my things as soon as I’m able. Thank you for your kindness,” she said and pulled away from him.

“Demelza? Have I said anything about your leaving?”

She turned to stare at him, thoroughly confused as to what he was saying.

“I just thought with things now, that you’d want to find another maid who could do the work. Soon I won’t be much use,” she said.

This was not going as Ross hoped, so he knew he had to get to the reason for his visit now, without
any flowery preparation.

“Demelza, you’re probably right that I will need to find another servant but not for the reasons you imagine,” he started to say.

“I see,” she replied.

“No I don’t think you do,” he said with a smile.

Ross took Demelza’s hand and led her to the bed. Sitting down, he motioned for her to do the same.

“Demelza, Dwight has told me about your condition and how it happened…”

Demelza shrunk away from him, embarrassed that her master knew what she was.

“Please sir, I can’t…”

“Demelza, there is no need to repeat anything. That is not important to me. What is important is your well-being and that of your child. This is why I have a proposition for you.”

His tone was business-like and matter-of-fact, contradicting his nervousness. Ross had never proposed to anyone before, not even Elizabeth. To say the unique circumstances added to his trepidation was putting it mildly. However the more he looked at Demelza, the more he wanted this. Not just for her but for himself as well. Something told him this would change both their lives in more ways than expected.

“I’m sorry sir, I don’t understand,” Demelza said, wiping her cheeks.

Ross took both her hands in his, rubbing his thumb gently over her skin, then spoke.

“I’m really mucking this up, aren’t I? Demelza, what I’m trying to say is that I think, that is, I want… Bloody hell! Demelza, will you marry me?”

The young woman gasped and snatched her hands out of his grasp and pulled away.

“What?”

“Marry me. Become my wife and let me raise your child with you.”

“Sir, perhaps you should have Dr. Enys examine you because I believe you have lost your wits. I can’t marry you!” she cried.

Ross fought the urge to laugh at her because he saw that she was truly distressed at the thought.

“Demelza, why can’t you marry me? Do you already have a husband?”

He asked the question in jest but wondered if it was possibly true.

“NO!” she screamed as she rose from the bed and began to pace the room.

Seeing that he upset her, Ross wiped the smile from his face and went to her. Catching her as she passed by him, he held her by the shoulders, giving her a moment to calm down. Then tilting her chin up so he could look at her, he spoke softly.

“Demelza, it was not my intention to upset you. I only thought that my proposal of marriage could help us both. You, in the care of your child and me…”
She looked up, searching his face for some kind of explanation.

“Yes?” she asked.

“I could use something to focus my life on. Besides, it will be assumed that I am the father anyway,” he said.

“Who will assume that? Surely you don’t think that I would ever...Sir, I’ve never once said anything to anyone that you and I...that we...” she said.

Ross smiled down at her, attempting to calm her fears.

“I know Demelza. But villagers love nothing more than to gossip,” he said.

“You’re right, sir. Still, marriage? To me?”

“Am I that displeasing that the thought of being my wife is that outrageous?”

Demelza’s eyes widened at the thought that she had insulted her master, then she saw the glint in his eye and realized he was teasing her. She took a breath and thought about what he was asking her. If she accepted it would mean that she would still have employment and a place to stay and that her child, despite how it came to be, would have a home but more importantly a name. That all seemed like a logical reason to accept. What she was still unclear about was what Ross’s expectations would be with regards to married life. Would he expect her to share his bed as well as his name? And truth be told would she object to that? Demelza would be lying to herself if she didn’t acknowledge that she was fond of her master and that at times, thoughts of him invaded her mind in ways that most would deem inappropriate. Yet she didn’t care. Ross Poldark, for all his dark moods and secret thoughts, was kinder to her than anyone she had ever met. And she trusted him. She knew that if he thought this was the best plan to deal with her situation, he was probably right.

“Yes...I mean no. I mean, yes, I’ll marry you,” Demelza stammered.

Ross broke into a grin and hugged her. She fit in his arms as though she was meant to be there. Ross closed his eyes and enjoyed the moment before separating from her.

“Demelza, you’ve made me very happy. I hope I can do the same,” he said.

“I’m sure sir,” she said. Then she asked, “Sir? What do you expect...what I mean is, am I to...”

She paused, unable to say the words or ask, for fear of the answer. Ross stared at her trying to determine what she was trying to say when he realized she was anxious about the extent of their marital life.

“Oh Demelza, know that I would never ask you to do anything you were uncomfortable with. Especially under the circumstances and in light of your condition. For now, this will be a marriage in name only. You are not expected to share my bed but I do think that sleeping in the kitchen is no longer possible. Stay in this room from now on,” Ross said.

For some unknown reason, Demelza was relieved but also a bit disappointed that he didn’t insist on more from her. She assumed it was as he said, out of consideration for her condition. Without realizing it, her hand slid to her stomach and lay there. She bowed her head to look at her body when another hand joined hers. Demelza slowly raised her eyes to gaze at Ross. She was met with a warm smile and the whisper of a kiss. His lips on hers were soft, yet firm and filled with hope. They pulled away but stayed close with the promise that this arrangement might be the beginning of something more.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Wedding preparations begin as Demelza meets some of the extended Poldark family. And a certain blue dress makes its first appearance.

Chapter Notes

I own nothing but the idea. Winston Graham and Debbie Horsfield are responsible for the characters in all their original forms. Errors and Omissions are strictly of my doing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The last weekend of November seemed as good a time as any for Ross Poldark to marry his kitchen maid, Demelza Carne. He saw no reason to wait and considering the situation thought the sooner the better to make Demelza a Poldark. He advised Reverend Odgers of the decision and requested that the normal three weeks of banns were forgone due to the extenuating circumstances. The Reverend was tempted to ask why but because he owed his position to the Poldark family he kept his thoughts and opinions to himself. As predicted Ross knew there were grumblings amongst the villagers, gentry, and miners about his sudden decision to marry. That news, coupled with his choice of wife was sure to keep tongues wagging. Demelza’s presence at Nampara was fodder for scandal from the onset so while Ross turned a blind eye and deaf ear to the gossips he knew that Demelza could not. On the other hand, in Ross’s mind, she shouldn’t have to. Marriage was the logical choice for their situation and after the first few days of her hesitancy to his proposal, she relaxed as they both got used to the idea.

For her part, Demelza changed nothing in the way she performed her chores or behaved around Ross: he was still her master. He tried more than once to get her to call him ‘Ross’ but she couldn’t bring herself to do it. At least not until after they were married or so she told herself. So they danced around each other, putting on a façade that nothing was different between them when bubbling below the surface there was an air of excitement neither wanted to admit. There was also no further discussion of any expectations once they exchanged vows. It was a topic that neither the bride nor groom would speak of. The only thing in their minds was to marry and ensure that Demelza’s child had a legitimate start.

Around Nampara, Prudie and Jud were convinced that their master had lost his wits with this decision. No Poldark, not even Joshua in his wastrel days, had taken such a wench to his bed, let alone consider marrying one after being widowed. There had to be only one other reason that Master Ross would be embarking on such a venture and the thought riled both servants even more. They were sure that this urchin had seduced their master forcing him to fulfill an obligation. Considering they were the people who brought Demelza to Nampara, they were perhaps feeling some remorse or blame. Then again, they justified that thought with the reality that Ross didn’t do anything he didn’t want to. So they reluctantly put up with the changes that were coming but refused to help with any preparations. As it turned out the only indication there was going to be a wedding was the new dress that Ross insisted Demelza have for the occasion. Even that small gesture had the
older servants exchanging looks and wondering how they were going to treat this girl once she became Mistress Poldark.

They were mumbling about this to themselves as they worked in the yard when Ross happened upon them.

“Chit of girl. Who do she think she is?” Jud said as he fed the chickens.

“Too common to curtsey? Mistress Grace be turning over in her grave if she knew her son had taken up with a common…”

“Enough!”

Prudie didn’t get a chance to finish that thought as she was interrupted by Ross’s bellowing call.

He approached them on Darkie looking down from his perch on the steed. The servants looked up at him and saw from his expression he was not pleased as they brushed themselves off without making direct eye contact with him. Ross dismounted and handed the reins to Jud but before letting the old man put the horse in his stable he spoke.

“From this day forward I will no longer have any such talk about Demelza or questions about my decision to marry her. Is that clear? If I find out that either of you has been spewing any kind of rumor or gossip in the village or even between yourselves I’ll sack you.”

Jud said nothing, but Prudie was not going to keep quiet.

“Master Ross it’s just that this girl is no proper wife for ‘ee. ‘Tis true you may be still be stinging from Miss Elizabeth marrying your cousin but that don’t mean that you need to take such a one as she to wife,” Prudie said.

Once the words were out she regretted them as she saw her master’s eyes turn black, rage simmering in him. She waited for his reprimand, her hands on her hips and her chin jutted out. What she got was the back of him as he walked away and into the house. Jud turned to her and shook his head as he walked past with the horse.

“Hush your creening,” he whispered.

“I’ll say what I want,” she retorted.

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Demelza heard nothing of the commotion outside because she was too busy trying to calm her stomach down. For the past week, she had suffered from nausea that came in waves throughout the day. At times she wasn’t sure if it was due to her condition or her upcoming marriage. Both had put her nerves on edge. For the time being, she blamed her condition because if she admitted the truth to herself, her wedding was not an unwelcome change of circumstance. Demelza found that over the weeks, warmth grew for her master, now soon to be husband. While nothing reflecting impropriety had passed between them, there was no denying a growing fondness, at least on Demelza’s side. She was grateful that Ross had not picked up on her feelings but also that he had not insisted on enforcing his new position as her betrothed. Demelza was reminded of the reason for his offer each time she lost the contents of her stomach or felt dizzy doing a chore. Now as she took a cool cloth and wiped her head, she sat down at the table and tried to resume kneading the dough for their bread. As she pounded the loaves, memories of another kind came to mind. The night that put her in this situation came flooding back with each punch. A chill came over her at the memory. To shake it from her she began to sing softly. The tune was one she’d heard her mother hum to her
brothers and slowly she calmed down.

Soon she was feeling well enough to stand and started to shape the loaves. She quickly put one pair in the oven and returned to make the next batch. As she mixed the batter, the reality that soon she would be mistress of this house and all that came with it took hold and made her smile. Even if their marriage never moved past the cordial stage, she knew that she’d be happy. Her heart was opening to Ross in ways she never expected. The one encounter she had with a man was more than unpleasant; it was violent. Most women would avoid any kind of relationship with another man after experiencing something like that. On the contrary, Demelza was curious as to what it would be like to have Ross truly kiss and hold her. She watched him as he worked the farm or sat going over figures in his library and the yearnings began.

Now as the wedding approached she wondered if she wanted this marriage to be more than just one in name only. Did she want to truly be a wife to Ross Poldark? Or perhaps the question was, did he want a true wife? Time would tell. Until then Demelza went back to her chores, shaping the next loaves and placing them on the tray. She took out those already done and was about to remove them to the table when she heard him call her name.

“Demelza!”

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Ross didn’t waste any more time on his servants. What he did do was go to find Demelza. He found that since the proposal, he looked forward to seeing her after long days at the mine. It seemed as though no matter what trials or stress happened during the day, her smile could make him forget it all. She was a balm to his soul and his life. Now as he strode into the kitchen he was met with the sound of her soft voice singing a tune, already easing the tension in his body. He reached the door and saw his soon to be wife shaping loaves of bread, her face dusted with flour yet it did nothing to diminish her beauty. It was a welcome sight. As she moved the trays to and from the oven, he wondered why she was doing chores that should fall to Prudie. Ross watched her command the kitchen with comfort and wondered how much of the conversation he had with the servants she’d heard.

“Demelza,” he called from the door.

“Sir!” she said as she spun around, nearly dropping the tray she held. Ross flew to her side, catching it just in time to save the fresh loaves.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you,” he said.

Ross placed the tray on the table then took hold of her waist to steady her. He hesitated before leaning in and kissing her softly. Demelza kept her eyes open, watching him as he kissed her. This dynamic was still new to her but a welcome one so she responded in kind, letting her lips receive his as her arms grasped his coat. The moment passed and the couple separated, smiles crossing both their faces. Demelza pulled away to catch her breath with Ross’ gaze never leaving her face. She felt a flush come over her and turned back to the task at hand. Taking the baked loaves off the tray she placed them on a dish and covered them with a cloth. Silently she worked at finishing the rest of the bread, hoping that Ross would leave her alone so that she could gather herself together.


He had walked around the table and poured himself rum before sitting down to look at her. He could see something was different in her face and that her hands shook a little. Ross became concerned that something other than his surprise display of affection was bothering her.
“No, sir. Just a bit tired. Thinkin’ about the wedding and such, I haven’t had much sleep.”

Demelza kept her head down as she spoke, knowing that if she looked at him, she’d lose any kind of control over her emotions. Her words were unsettling to Ross as he wondered if she was having second thoughts.

“Demelza, are you unsure about our marriage? Has something happened to change your mind?”

She stopped what she was doing to slowly raise her head to look at him. Smiling as she absent-mindedly touched her belly Demelza moved to where he sat and spoke softly.

“No…Ross, I haven’t changed my mind,” she said.

Ross grinned at her use of his name, pleased that they were breaking the wall between master and servant to husband and wife. Still, he was worried that she’d heard some gossip or talk that denigrated their relationship.

“Have Jud and Prudie said or done anything?”

“No sir, why would you ask that?”

“Then why are you doing these chores that should be done by Prudie?” he asked.

He took a sip of his rum while he waited for her to answer.

“If you must know I don’t trust Prudie to make these to your liking. Besides, I enjoy the quiet of the kitchen. Especially since lately I’ve been feeling…”

She paused from continuing, not wanting him to know that her condition was causing her discomfort.

“Feeling what Demelza? You are unwell, aren’t you?” he said.

Demelza was not a good liar and so decided to tell Ross what she was going through. She knew it was better than having him believe Jud and Prudie were causing her troubles.

“I’m fine, sir…I mean Ross. It’s just that I’ve been feeling sickly for a few days, probably from the babe. Nothing more,” she explained.

Ross felt relief at her confession then took her hand to pull her down to sit beside him. It wasn’t that he wanted her to suffer through this pregnancy; instead, he was glad that she was still willing and it seemed, ready to marry him. Although he was still concerned about her health and needed to put an end to her doing the scullery work she was hired for.

“Demelza, I would prefer it if you did not continue doing all the chores. I’ll speak to Prudie about it later,” he said.

“No! Don’t do that!”

She practically shouted her objection to him, causing her to shrink away from him in embarrassment and fear. The last thing Demelza wanted Ross to think was that she was some sort of shrew. Her eyes widened as she looked at him and saw that his expression was calm rather than upset.

“For goodness sake, why?”

On the verge of tears, Demelza shook her head and gazed at him in disbelief. Did he not remember
what they were dealing with?

“I don’t want her knowing…” she stammered.

Then he realized what she was worried about. The news of her condition would cause enough gossip after they were married, but if it was known before the banns had been read, the whispering they were trying to avoid would only get louder.

“You’re right. Still, she needs to take on some of the tasks. I’ll find a way to relay that without letting too much being revealed. Agreed?”

“Yes, Ross,” she said with soft confidence.

Seeing a smile come to her face made Ross want to kiss her again but he restrained himself, instead just pulling her into his arms. Demelza laid her head on his shoulder and relaxed into him, letting the tension of the day go.

“I’m sorry to be such a bother,” she murmured.

Ross pulled away to look at her. He brushed the hair off her face and held it gently, his thumbs caressing her cheeks.

“You’re far from a bother Demelza. I only wish I could help more but with the starting the mine, I must focus on that,” he explained.

He moved his hands down her arms.

“You’re doing enough as it is. Taking me in, giving me and my child a home. And a name. I couldn’t ask for anything else.”

Without thinking, Demelza leaned forward and touched her lips to his. It was barely a whisper but it was enough to ignite something between them. Ross’s arms slipped around her, his hands almost reaching completely around her slight torso as he pulled her flush against his own body. The kiss deepened, eliciting moans from each of them and sending a chill up Demelza’s spine. It was the first time she had this sort of contact with a man that was full of emotion. As Ross’s mouth moved down her neck, a memory flashed of the last time someone had done that and suddenly she was scared. She pushed against him and wrested herself out of his embrace. Her breath was ragged and tears formed. Ross saw her reaction but had no idea what he had done.

“Demelza? What’s wrong?” he asked.

“I’m sorry. Please don’t be angry with me,” she pled.

“Oh my dear, I could never be angry with you,” he said.

She forced a smile and replied, “You don’t know me that well, Ross. I quite possibly will anger you.”

He returned her reaction with a grin and held her chin.

“I doubt that.”

Demelza smiled shyly then felt guilty for pushing him away but could not explain what she was going through. Taking in her demeanor, Ross became aware of what might have triggered her reverse reaction. He had to remember that she came to him wounded and in need of care, despite her
strong exterior. Although they were about to be married, Ross could not assume that spousal privilege would be automatic once the vows were said. Time and patience would be needed if this arrangement was to grow into something more. Unexpectedly, Ross was hoping that it would do just that.

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As the wedding day approached, Ross moved forward with his plans for a new dress for Demelza. She agreed and offered to make one if he provided the material. He did as she suggested and she began working on a simple frock of deep red. The color reminded Demelza of the port she had recently taken a liking to. She decided to make something practical that would function as a day dress once the ceremony was over. There was no reason to let a dress hang uselessly in the closet because it was made for a special occasion. Each day she would work on it after her regular chores were done, making progress so that soon it actually looked like a gown worthy of Ross’s wife. As she bent over the material, diligently stitching the fabric together, Demelza was aware of the perusing eyes of Prudie and Jud watching her as she worked. She made a point of ignoring them hoping that they wouldn’t start questioning her as to why Ross proposed this sudden change in their circumstance. For the most part, the pair of servants left her alone, mainly because they were convinced their master had lost any sense and that this marriage most likely would never come to pass.

One day as Demelza was cleaning the library she became curious as to what was held in an old chest hidden in the corner of the room. She had known it belonged to Ross’s father as the elder Poldark’s initials were etched into the latch. Putting her rag down on the desk, Demelza knelt in front of the formidable box and traced the “JP” with her fingers. The lock was long gone so she tentatively pulled the latch and lifted the lid. She stood and assessed the contents, seeing nothing very interesting. Bending over she moved aside a large white sheet to reveal something bright blue. She reached in and extracted a gown. Demelza held it up to the light, making it shine. The color was similar to a robin’s egg that had been kissed by the sea and sky. The material was soft between her fingers, unlike the coarse cotton of her other garments. Demelza was tempted to try it on but thought better of it. Instead, she held it up to her body just to see if she could imagine how it would look. She moved closer to the window allowing the fabric to catch the light to where it almost shimmered and rustled when she moved. Demelza pictured wearing such a dress as she stood at the altar ready to become Ross’ wife when she heard a sound behind her.

“What is that? What you be doin’?”

Demelza spun around at the sound of Prudie’s voice, dropping the dress.

“Nothin’. Just lookin.’”

Prudie wrinkled her nose at the young maid.

“Master Ross won’t be likin’ you nosin’ around his things. You got no business in here. Best put that frock away. That be Mistress Grace’s dress. Don’t belong on the like of you,” the servant snorted.

Demelza silently began to weep because she knew that Prudie was right. What was she thinking? Did she seriously believe she could marry someone like Ross Poldark and become the mistress of Nampara? She picked up the dress, folded it and placed it back in the box when Prudie came up behind her.

“I don’t know what you did to get Mister Ross to offer to marry you but don’t fool yourself into thinking he’ll be sticking around. He be just like his father; out to bed any hen in the coop.”
The tears came freely now as Demelza moved to escape from the room and the older woman’s comments when she found herself being caught by Ross.

“What the devil is going on?”

Demelza looked up at his face saw concern coupled with the onset of anger. Not wanting to incite further anger she was about to confess when Prudie spoke up.

“Master Ross, sir. The maid was going through Master Joshua’s trunk and touching Mistress Grace’s things. I told her you wouldn’t be liking that…”

“Prudie!”

Ross bellowed at the woman, stopping her prattle in mid-sentence.

“As a reminder, Demelza will soon be my wife and mistress of Nampara. Anything belonging to me or this house will be hers as well as mine. If she chooses to look at Poldark family items, so be it.”

Prudie stood with her mouth open, not quite believing what she heard. Yet she said nothing more as the look on her master’s face told her the subject was closed. With a fleeting glance at Demelza, she left the room. Ross waited until she was gone then closed the door to give Demelza and himself some privacy. He took her hand and walked her back to the trunk.

“I’m sorry Ross. I didn’t mean to do anything. I just saw the dress and…”

He smiled at her and her innocence. More importantly, he was pleased that she was beginning to think of herself as her partner and not his servant.

“Demelza, you have nothing to apologize for. I don’t give a fig about you looking around this room or any of the items in this house. They will soon be yours as well.”

She did not expect this kind of warmth from him over a matter like this.

“You’re too kind. But I’m not truly going to be a Poldark, am I? Surely ‘tis in name only.”

Demelza waited, secretly hoping he would deny this. Stepping closer to her, Ross held her arms lightly.

“You will be a Poldark in the most important way: as my wife. Now, how you choose to portray that is your decision, Demelza.”

Demelza contemplated what he was saying. Was he really leaving the choice to her as to what kind of marriage they would have? It was the first time in her life that any man gave her the power to decide how she would live so she was not quite sure how to reply. What she did know was that she was beginning to feel something for this man that went beyond gratitude. Stirrings of desire began to take root and she wondered if he might possibly be feeling the same.

“What would you prefer, Ross?” she asked softly and lowered her eyes.

Ross tilted her chin up to look at him.

“To see you happy, Demelza.”

She was not prepared for that answer nor was she ready for his next move as she watched his face move towards hers. Without any hesitation she lifted her head up to meet him, their lips touching fleetingly at first but that soon intensified. Unlike the other night when Ross became more
aggressive than he intended, this time it was Demelza who made her feelings known. Grasping his head so that she could thread her fingers through his hair, she cautiously opened her mouth, snaked her tongue out and begged his for entrance. He acquiesced, welcoming her into his mouth with a small moan. His hands moved of their own volition, sliding up her back as she clung to him. This time when his lips sought out the pulse point on her neck, she easily moved her head to give him better access. Any trepidation was gone. Demelza pulled back to gaze at Ross, a smile crossing her face. She took his hand and began to place it on her breast when he stopped her.

“No Demelza,” he said.

“It’s fine Ross. I’m fine. And we will be wed soon so there is no reason we shouldn’t…”

“Yes there is,” he said, interrupting her. “I’m not going to take you like some doxy, throwing you down on the floor for a quick moment of satisfaction.”

“Ross I never thought that,” Demelza said.

She was confused at this change and so made it clear what she wanted.

“But I want to be your wife in every way,” she said.

Ross appreciated the sincerity of her statement and his heart warmed.

“I’m glad you feel that way. And you will be my wife when we are wed.”

His tone was insistent and her look was disappointed. Ross saw her face fall and quickly moved to explain. He rubbed her arms and stared into her eyes.

“Demelza, believe me when I say there is nothing I would like more than to have you share my bed from now on. But for your own reputation, and in consideration of your condition, I think it best that we remain separate for now.”

Demelza was touched by Ross’ concern for her both because she was expecting and in avoiding more gossip. She was also surprised at her own intense reaction to him and the desire he brought out. There was no question that something more than lust was driving her emotions. Reluctantly she agreed with him.

“If you say so, Ross.”

“I do.”

She smiled broadly then touched his cheek, making him smile too. Satisfied that she understood his intent he turned the conversation back to what he walked in on.

“Now what was this about a dress?”

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The next day Ross sent for his cousin Verity to help Demelza with wedding preparations now that it was clear Prudie was useless. He also believed it would do both women some good. Verity seemed tied to Trenwith without a marriage prospect of her own and so was relied upon by her family as caretaker. Ross hoped that bringing her out of that environment to Nampara would put some light in her eyes but also give Demelza a friend. Up until now his soon to be wife only felt comfortable around the miners and villagers; he knew she would fit in with his circle once she had the chance to show who she really was. When Demelza heard the news she was not pleased but said nothing to
Ross. The idea of even one member of his family coming to Nampara to scrutinize her was enough to bring back her morning sickness. Despite her ailing, she spent the next day or so working hard to make the house presentable in a way she thought the Trenwith Poldarks would expect it to be. Prudie did her minimalist best at helping out only because she didn’t want to incur the wrath of Ross. Jud kept away from the house, keeping himself scarce either by working in the fields when Ross insisted or inhabiting the kiddley. Both were preferable to having him around the house to spar with Prudie which in turn would upset Demelza. For Ross, the most important thing leading up to their wedding was making sure Demelza was kept calm and unruffled which his betrothed appreciated.

She was working in the garden, picking through some errant weeds when she heard the sound of approaching hoof beats. Thinking it was Ross she didn’t bother to stop what she was doing and so she kept her head down, her focus on thinning out the bramble. It wasn’t until she looked up to greet him that she saw it wasn’t Ross but two women. She didn’t know who they were at first but she could guess that at least one of them was a Poldark relative.

“Demelza?” said the more petite woman.

Demelza stood, trying to brush the dirt from her hands and face and walked towards her visitors.

“Yes? Are you Verity?” she asked.

“Yes, my dear. Ross told me you might need some assistance with the wedding,” she said, swinging her leg out of the saddle and sliding to the ground.

The other woman stayed perched on her steed, coldly looking down at the redhead, the slightest squint showing in her eyes. It was clear this visitor was not here to help but more likely to scrutinize. Verity stepped closer to Demelza and gave her a gentle hug. Letting out a breath, Demelza relaxed just a bit but still was wary of both women. Stepping back, Verity looked up and down the younger woman, taking in her features and stance. There was something about her countenance that the Poldark cousin found endearing which made her feel empathy for Demelza adding to her desire to make her feel welcome into the family.

“‘Tis kind of you to come, Miss Verity. I told Master…I mean Ross…that I could manage but he thought it best I have some help,” Demelza said.

“And he was quite right. It wouldn’t do for you to try and manage a household while preparing for your wedding. Now, why don’t we go to the house and get to know each other over tea?” Verity suggested.

Demelza took to this woman and felt that she might end up being someone she could trust. Perhaps if circumstances permitted, she could let Ross’s cousin know about the special conditions of their marriage.

“Yes, I’d like that. I’ll ask Prudie to put a kettle on,” Demelza said as she turned to lead the way into the house.

Verity paused and looked back at her companion who still had not alit from her horse.

“Elizabeth? Aren’t you coming?” she asked.

At the sound of that name, Demelza knew now who this person was: Ross’s first love and the woman he was supposed to marry. A chill ran down her spine as a wave of nausea hit unexpectedly. She swayed a little and reached out to the nearest thing she could find to steady herself. It happened
to be Verity.

“My dear, are you alright?”

Demelza nodded while keeping a grip on the other woman’s arm.

“Yes. It must be the sun. I shouldn’t have been gardenin’ for so long,” Demelza replied.

“Are you sure? You’re pale as a sheet. Here, let’s get you inside.”

Taking hold of Demelza’s arm, Verity led the way, ignoring Elizabeth who still waited for some kind of acknowledgment from either of the women.

“Perhaps you should call for that miner’s physician. Dr. Enys isn’t it? I’m sure he is most familiar with ailments pertaining to the likes of your sort.”

The bitterness in Elizabeth’s voice was clear, making Demelza feel as insecure as she did when she first arrived. Verity was not going to let her sister in law taunt Ross’s fiancée and so turned to speak to her.

“Elizabeth that was uncalled for. I wonder if it wouldn’t be better if you didn’t return to Trenwith. There is nothing for you to do here. I’m sure Demelza and I can manage just fine,” Verity said, essentially dismissing Elizabeth.

Elizabeth smirked at Verity and gave a sideways glance to Demelza, who said nothing. Demelza was fighting the urge to empty her stomach so she kept her lips tight and briefly closed her eyes. Verity saw how Elizabeth’s comments and mere presence were affecting Demelza so she redirected her attention from the brunette to the redhead.

“Come Demelza. I’m sure Elizabeth can find her way home without any more assistance from us,” Verity said.

Demelza said nothing but began walking towards the house. She didn’t want to look back at Elizabeth even though she knew it was rude not to bid her goodbye but at the moment all she wanted was to sit down and see Ross.

“Thank you,” she whispered to Verity as she approached the door.

Prudie then appeared, unbidden, and appraised the scene. Casting her eyes from Elizabeth to Verity to Demelza, she could only assume what had transpired. While she was tempted to ask what was going on, she restrained herself, instead looked to Verity for instruction.

“Prudie, take Demelza inside and give her a glass of port to settle her. Then perhaps you can make us some tea? I will see to Mistress Poldark.”

Verity took control of the situation to which Demelza was grateful. She was not up to facing both Elizabeth and Prudie in her current state.

“Yes Miss Verity,” Prudie said.

She put her arm around Demelza’s waist and walked her into the house. Demelza, for her part, was stunned at the kindness from the servant, given the run-ins they’ve had lately, but accepted the help. If she didn’t lean on the older woman, Demelza was sure she’d faint. Verity watched as they left then turned back to Elizabeth.
“Why are you being so cruel, Elizabeth? Ross is moving on with his life just as you did. Let him be,” Verity stated.

Elizabeth snorted at the other woman’s comment.

“You don’t seriously believe that Ross wants to marry this person, do you? No, he must be so distraught at our separation that he had no idea what he was agreeing to. I’m sure once he realizes what foolishness this is, he will retract his proposal,” Elizabeth said confidently.

Verity was about to respond when Ross appeared from behind the house.

“I’m sure I won’t,” he said.

The sudden sound had Elizabeth’s horse spooked and he jostled, forcing her to tighten her hold on the reins. Briefly shaken, she gathered herself with a pat to her hair and smoothing of her riding coat.

“Ross, I had no idea you were home,” she said innocently.

“Obviously not or I’m sure you wouldn’t have shared your feelings as you did,” Ross said.

He ignored his former attachment as he went to Verity.

“Thank you for coming, cousin. Demelza and I appreciate the help and support,” he said, kissing her hand.

“I’m glad to do so, Ross. Now I think you should go and check on Demelza. I believe all this excitement has had an effect on her and she seemed a bit off.”

Worried now that something had happened to Demelza, Ross let go of his cousin to go find her.

“Is she alright?” he asked Verity.

“I’m sure she is. It’s most likely the stress of the wedding, nothing more,” Verity explained.

Ross looked beyond her to Elizabeth who sat with a crooked smile on her face, trying to engage Ross, but he was having none of it. His sole concern was for Demelza.

“I hope you’re right. Forgive me for leaving you so hastily but I must see to Demelza.”

“Yes of course. Go, Ross. I’ll see Elizabeth off,” she said, looking at the other woman.

“Thank you,” he said.

He turned and went into the house calling for Demelza as he did. When he was gone Verity went up to Elizabeth and spoke.

“Go home, Elizabeth and leave Ross and Demelza alone. I think it would serve you better to concentrate on your own marriage and not worry about Ross.”

Elizabeth opened her mouth to respond but a cautioning look from Verity gave her pause.

“Fine. But mark my words, this marriage will be the laughing stock of the county. And Ross will rue the day he let this girl into his home.”

She pulled on the reins and led the horse away, both disappointed and stunned at the behavior of Ross. She decided to bide her time and wait for him to come round, for she was sure he would. As
she rode off Verity felt a sense of self-satisfaction having taken up the cause of her cousin and the young woman who was to become his wife. Never had she felt that kind of power and it was a heady feeling. With a breath, she spun around to join the rest in the house. As she neared the parlor she heard Ross’s voice soothing Demelza.

“My dear, pay no mind to what anyone says. You and I know the truth of our marriage and that is the only thing that matters. Agreed?”

Verity peered into the room to see her cousin sitting with his arm around Demelza, her hands wrapped around a small glass of port. The young woman looked at Ross with such love as to make Verity envious. It was her greatest wish to find love and seeing her cousin and his fiancée, she hoped that it was not too late for her. If Ross could open his heart again after the pain he returned to, then surely she could. She was initially wary of this marriage, just as Elizabeth was, however, looking at the young couple now, she was sure that Ross had found someone to match his passion and who could mend his heart and soul. Verity thought how lucky they were as she entered the parlor. She moved stealthily so that she wasn’t heard and so Ross and Demelza didn’t realize she was there when they both caressed her abdomen. The gasp she let out was heard by the couple who quickly moved apart.

“Verity,” Ross said. “Has Elizabeth gone?”

The woman moved to the settle and sat opposite the pair.

“Yes. But Ross, is there something you’re not telling me?”

He looked at his cousin then turned to Demelza whose pale skin was now flushed pink.

“We don’t want anyone to know so please say nothing,” he said.

“So am I correct to assume that Demelza is with child?” she said quietly.

“Yes. But that is not the reason we are to be married,” he added.

“Ross it’s not my place to question your reasons for marriage. From what I can see, you and Demelza have something special. I’ll leave it at that,” she said with a smile.

The couple smiled gratefully just as Prudie entered with a tray of tea and biscuits. Looks passed among the group with Demelza now wondering how much the servant had heard. It seemed if she did hear anything, Prudie didn’t let on but went about her business of serving before exiting the room.

“Now then, shall we talk about the wedding?” Verity said brightly.

Ross rose from where he sat to give his cousin a kiss on the cheek.

“Thank you again. Demelza and I appreciate this more than you know.”

It was Verity’s turn to blush as she poured cream in the tea and handed him a cup. He took it with a smile towards Demelza.

“I told you. We have at least one friend in the family,” he said.

Demelza returned the smile and sat back, sipping her port, hoping that Ross was right.
I apologize for the delay in getting the next chapter up for this one but the direction of the story changed multiple times. I think I've got the route I want this one to take so I hope everyone keeps an open mind and remembers that this story is an alternate universe, including the timeline. So Ross and Demelza are closer in age than the books but their meeting comes together nearer to Ross's return from America. Things will not be as they are in the books or either TV show.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Ross and Demelza wed in this "marriage of convenience"

Chapter Notes

As always I own nothing except the idea. And because I'm a little rusty, all errors and omissions are solely of my own doing. Please forgive me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The wedding was to be a quiet affair. While the Trenwith Poldarks were invited, they sent regrets saying they would have to miss the festivities due to Elizabeth being ill. Years ago that would cause Ross to jump on his horse and ride to her side. Now he was indifferent as he and Verity shared a common thought that the absence of Elizabeth and Francis would be a blessing. There was enough tension surrounding this wedding that stemmed from ordinary jitters; the addition of a pair of critical relatives would only make things worse. Most especially for Demelza who was doing her best to hide her insecurity because of her knowledge that Ross’s family would not be attending because of their disapproval of this marriage; or more to the point, disapproval of her.

As the wedding day approached, Demelza and Verity became closer. Ross’s cousin schooled the young woman in the basics of running a household. There were lessons in table setting, manners and social graces such as polite conversation and deportment not to mention trying to finish the wedding dress. While Demelza was handy with a needle, she was grateful for Verity’s talent in the finer details of sewing that gave the dress a slightly special feel. Knowing that Demelza wanted the dress to be practical for later use, Verity was careful to keep the trimmings to a minimum. The pair also made sure to keep the dress out of Ross’ sight as Demelza wanted to surprise him with it. Luckily her figure had not changed too much so that the dress fit her perfectly, leaving her condition a well-guarded secret between the couple and Verity. She was glad that Ross had entrusted her with this but more importantly that Demelza was warming up enough to take her into her confidence. As they put the dress on for a final fitting, the soon to be cousins-in-law chatted idly about the changes taking place.

“I’ve never seen Ross so happy my dear,” Verity said.

She was crouched down putting the last stitches in the hem as she spoke. The petite brunette smiled up at the tall, young red-head, giving her a knowing look. Demelza relaxed a little but she wondered, despite Verity’s kindness, if the cousin still didn’t frown upon this union.

“Do you think so, Verity? I know this marriage ‘tisn’t what most would expect but…”

Verity stood up when she saw Demelza begin to get upset. She took the girl’s hand and led her to one of the settles in the parlor. She sat her down, continuing to hold her hand as she sought words that would offer reassurance and support.
“Demelza, after Ross returned from the war and found out about—well, my brother and Elizabeth, I was sure he’d follow the same path his father took after Grace died: debauchery, drinking, not caring about anything or anyone, least of all himself. Since meeting you, whatever the circumstances, he’s found something and someone to focus on besides himself. He’s found hope and I believe, perhaps even love. Though he may not know it yet.”

Demelza was warmed by Verity’s statement, easing some of her uncertainty that this marriage was a huge mistake for Ross. Where Verity was mistaken was in thinking that Ross felt anything but an obligation towards her in his offer of marriage despite the apparent mutual attraction that flowed between them.

“I doubt Ross feels anything akin to love for me, Verity,” she said. “He’s kind and generous for taking me in especially under these conditions but he’s never mentioned love. And I don’t expect he ever will.”

She got quiet, twisting the material of her dress between her fingers. Verity was surprised at her confession for she was sure what she witnessed between her cousin and Demelza was most assuredly love. It was certainly more than what she had seen between Francis and Elizabeth.

“Demelza, do you not love him?” she asked.

A sad smile came to Demelza’s face as she turned to look at Verity.

“Beyond anything. Oh Verity, I never thought, after what brought me here, I’d feel for someone what I feel for Ross,” she said softly.

Verity was confused as to what Demelza was referring to. She assumed that Ross had just hired her as a maid and that his loneliness led to something more. She knew her cousin well enough that neither obligation, pity, nor even practicality, would be enough of a reason for him to take a wife. He’d have to feel something more for a person he was bringing into and sharing his life with. Verity knew, even if Demelza or Ross didn’t, that the love was not one-sided. It would just take time for the pair to figure it out. Still, Demelza’s comment about how she came to Nampara vexed Verity but she decided now was not the time to press her for answers.

“My dear, this marriage, however it has come about, seems to be what you and Ross need. I’ve not had much experience in these matters but I do know that to love and be loved is a great gift. So while Ross may not see it yet, I believe what he feels for you is love.”

Demelza was crying now, tears falling down her cheeks and landing on her new dress. She did nothing to stop them.

“Thank you, Verity,” she said.

“No, my dear. Thank you. For bringing back the Ross I knew before the war. And for showing me that love, in any form, exists. It gives me hope.”

“Oh Verity,” Demelza cried as she threw her arms around her.

The older woman fought back her own tears and clutched Demelza.

“It’s alright. Now is not about me. It’s about you and Ross. And what a wonderful wedding day you will have.”

They separated just as Ross entered the room and stood watching these two women in his life connect. Each one giving the other something they were lacking.
“What’s this? Tears before the ceremony? That doesn’t bode well for me,” he said.

The women stood as Demelza realized she was still in her wedding dress.

“Ross! Get out! I didn’t want you to see this yet,” she yelled in all sincerity as she turned her back on him.

“What?” he uttered, totally confused.

Verity saw the panic in Demelza’s eyes and rushed to correct the issue. She jumped in front of the taller woman, trying in vain to hide as much of the dress as possible.

“Ross, please. Demelza wanted it to be a surprise. Go,” she said motioning for him to leave the room. “Leave so I can get her changed.”

“Verity you’re mad. What does my seeing her dress have to do with anything?”

“Ross!” Verity cried. “This is Demelza’s wish. Don’t question her. Please.”

He looked from his cousin to his future wife and saw they were entirely serious. Trying not to laugh at the idiocy of their request and still not quite understanding the issue, he turned and went towards the kitchen. Verity followed him then peered around the edge of the door to make sure he was gone before rushing Demelza out of the parlor and up to her room to get changed. Once up in her bedroom, she carefully helped Demelza out of the dress and hung it in the wardrobe.

“There. All safe and sound and ready for the big day,” Verity said. “I better go down and see to my impatient cousin before he comes trooping up here looking for you. Come down when you’re ready and we will have tea. Alright?”

Verity gave her a warm smile and touched her arm in affection. Demelza was glad for the friendship.

“Thank you, Verity. I don’t know how I would have managed without you,” she said.

“Don’t mention it. I’ll see you shortly,” Verity said as she took leave of the room.

Demelza walked to the wardrobe and looked at her dress as well as the new corset and stockings that Ross had ordered specially for the wedding. Again, Demelza was taken by his gestures. It made her heart wonder if perhaps Verity was right and that some kind of love was growing between them. Now back in her everyday dress, Demelza checked herself in the mirror. A quick look at her face showed that she was paler than normal. She pinched her cheeks to bring some color to them, then smoothed her hair. Content that it was the best she could do, she left the room to join Ross and Verity. Walking down stairs she heard the cousins chatting in light tones. Again, her stomach lurched; whether it was the babe or the thought of not being able to fit into this family, she couldn’t tell. She took a deep breath and entered the room.

“Demelza,” Ross said as he stood to greet her.

He approached and placed a light kiss on her cheek. Stepping back he examined her face and saw a shadow in her eyes. They were not as bright as usual.

“Are you unwell?” he asked.

Demelza was surprised that he noticed or that he voiced concern.
“I’m quite well Ross. Perhaps just a little tired,” she replied.

He doubted her answer but didn’t want to argue. The last thing he wanted was to add unnecessary stress to her, especially in her condition. Lately, Ross was more mindful of the fact that Demelza had not only the wedding to contend with but also the child. He had thought to consult Dwight about it, in case there was some special care he needed to provide her but again, held back. Even though his friend knew the details of his relationship with Demelza, there was still the fear that gossip would flourish amongst the village. Ross smiled, not wanting his worry to feed over to Demelza. He put an arm around her shoulders and guided her to the table. He leaned close and whispered in her ear.

“You’d tell me if anything was troubling you, wouldn’t you?”

Demelza pulled back to look into his eyes.

“Yes Ross,” she said.

“Good. There are to be no secrets between us Demelza. No matter how worrisome you believe they might be. Understood?”

There was a no-nonsense tone to his voice that Demelza could not ignore. Yet she didn’t want to sully the upcoming day with her irrational thoughts or even her deep seeded wish that Verity’s comment earlier was true. Could Ross actually feel love for her? No, that would need to wait for a later time…much later. She strode across the room to Verity and sat down. The cousin gave her a queer look before pouring her a cup of steaming liquid which Demelza happily took.

“You’d tell me if anything was troubling you, wouldn’t you?”

Demelza and Ross’s wedding day began overcast with a mist of rain coating the land. The bride hoped this wasn’t a sign that the marriage would be clouded in grey. Pushing open the windows in her room, she held her hand out and tilted her head up to feel the cool, damp breeze. She awoke with another bout of nausea and so the freshness of the air was welcome. It cleared her head as the scent of the ocean invaded her senses.

“Today is the start of a new life. Please Lord, let this be the right thing for all of us. Most of all, for this child I carry. He did not begin out of desire but I pray his life will be built on love.”

She closed her eyes as she recited this prayer, hoping that whatever God existed, heard her. Little did she know that the man she was about to marry, had heard her. Ross had quietly opened the door to check on her but did not wish to wake her. He stayed hidden and as Demelza spoke, a lump came to his throat. The girl he came upon only a few months ago had somehow and without warning, grown into a young woman with more heart and soul than anyone else he knew. And though she was not formally educated, she was wiser than many. Including him. He retreated silently, then knocked to gain formal entrance.

Demelza wiped at her face then turned to see the door open slowly, revealing Ross.

“Did I wake you my dear?” he asked.

She moved towards him, his use of a term of endearment still a surprise to her.

“No Ross. I’ve been up for a little while. I couldn’t sleep,” she replied.

They now stood face to face but still unsure of how to behave. Demelza was torn because she
wanted him to kiss her. As if reading her mind, Ross did just that. He placed a warm and gentle kiss to her lips as his hands held her waist. His thumbs absently rubbed her belly; a subconscious acknowledgment of what brought them to this point and what they were about to embark on. They pulled apart and gazed at each other.

“Nervous?” Ross said.

Smiling shyly, Demelza told him the truth.

“Yes. Aren’t you?” she asked.

“I know I should be but I’m not. Maybe it’s because I’ve faced worse circumstances. Taking on a wife should be easy.”

His voice was teasing and the grin that came to his face helped her relax.

“Perhaps. But did you think that when you took a wife she’d come with a family already started?”

Ross’s eyes widened at her blunt statement which amused Demelza.

“You said no secrets, Ross. Then let’s speak the truth now. Is this what you imagined when you thought you’d marry?”

He was taken aback at her question and a bit surprised. But then it seemed that Demelza was full of surprises. The biggest one being the effect she had on him.

“No, it wasn’t. Then again, I didn’t imagine coming home to a life that was turned upside down. Or finding someone like you either.”

Demelza worried that maybe this turn at the truth was not the best way to start one’s wedding day. She pulled away to walk back to the window when Ross grabbed her arm.

“And I am most grateful at the turn my life has taken. For finding you at Nampara was one of the luckiest days of my life.”

His face broke into a broad grin and without hesitation, Ross pulled Demelza into an embrace, his arms wrapping completely around her torso, holding her tight.

“Ross,” she murmured into the crook of his neck. “You don’t have to say such things just to appease me. I know that if things were different, you’d most likely be wed to another.”

Taking her face in his hands, he kissed her with the sole purpose of driving those thoughts from her mind. For her part, Demelza allowed this show of force even if the first touch conjured up less than pleasant memories. Those were quickly replaced by the feel of Ross’s hair under her fingers and his chest against hers. She knew that the man who held her would never harm her as others had. After several moments, Ross pulled back to search her face.

“Truth be told Demelza, I don’t know that anymore. Of late, I wonder if the life I thought I wanted was just an ideal I created to get me through the war. For it appears that the life I have now is the one I was destined to live.”

Tears filled her eyes once again, this time from the happiness that Ross expressed his feelings in such a way. His hands moved to wipe the moisture as he kissed each cheek in turn.

“Do not cry my sweet,” he said.
The words brought forth more sobs.

“What is it?” he asked, now concerned that something more was bothering her.

“Your words. They touched my heart, Ross. And what you just called me…”

“You mean, ‘my sweet’?” he asked.

“Yes. My mother used to call me that. For she told me that Demelza means ‘my sweetness’.”

Ross kissed her again.

“Then I take that as a sign that she is here and blessing this union.”

“I hope so.”

The couple was so wrapped up in each other that they didn’t immediately hear Verity enter with a tray.

“Enough of this,” she said brightly.

Verity walked past the couple to place the tray on the vanity. She poured a cup of tea then turned to hand it to Demelza.

“Ross, shouldn’t you be getting ready yourself? Or at least seeing to Jud and Prudie so that preparations for the wedding lunch are underway? I don’t think Demelza should have to worry about such things today. Do you?”

His cousin’s take-charge attitude had him moving away from Demelza yet he didn’t leave the room just yet. He stared at Verity as she gave him orders. The bride coyly sipped her tea, peering over the cup at the groom.

“Fine. I’ll go see to the preparations while you ladies have your tea party. Do tell me when I’m allowed back into my rooms again, won’t you?”

His indignation amused both women but neither said anything. They continued to sip their tea and nibble on scones, ignoring Ross. Seeing that he wasn’t getting anymore conversation from either of them he huffed out of the room to do as Verity suggested. As he bounded down the stairs he heard giggling coming from the room he just left and grumbling emanating from the kitchen. He wondered if this was going to be the tone of the day: laughter from one end and creening from the other. Ross was glad that Verity had such a positive effect on Demelza which is why he didn’t want to deal with his servant’s negativity. Knowing he couldn’t avoid the inevitable, Ross entered the kitchen. He expected to see the pair sitting around, taking the liberty of his rum but instead when he pushed open the door the sight he came upon was quite the opposite. Jud was just entering from outside with a pile of freshly cut wood for the fire as Prudie put the final touches on a pie she was forming. She looked up from her task to see her master enter the room.

“Sir. Jud and me were wonderin’ who all might be coming to the house after the church?” Prudie asked.

As she moved to put the pie in the oven, Ross noticed it lacked the finesse of Demelza’s cooking. He hadn’t realized how spoiled he had become to the way she did things until now. The older woman wiped her hands on her apron then faced Ross.

“It will just be Demelza, myself, and Miss Verity. Dr. Enys will likely join us later,” he explained.
“So there be no family from Trenwith comin’?”

Ross couldn’t ignore the slight tone of surprise mixed with gloating in her voice. He knew what Prudie and Jud thought; that his marrying so beneath him would have an adverse effect on his relations not just with family but with most of his class. Lucky for Ross that he didn’t care about most of this. Most especially, he didn’t care what his servants thought. They had been around since his father’s days and as such, saw his behavior over the years. As much as they might have disliked Demelza, even they would have to admit that his marrying the girl was a sight better than just parading women through the house whenever the mood struck.

“No, there will be no one from Trenwith attending. Now, tell me what’s left to be done so Demelza needn’t worry about anything.”

He walked around the table to inspect all that had been done so far and couldn’t find any fault with what he saw. Prudie stood with her hands on her hips waiting for some criticism from Ross and so was pleasantly surprised when he said, “Everything looks fine, Prudie. Demelza will be pleased with all you and Jud have done. And I am extremely grateful.”

Prudie exchanged a surprised look with Jud as she could think of nothing to offer in response except a weak, “Thank ‘ee Mister Ross. Will ‘ee be going to the church soon?”

Ross poured himself a mug of rum and answered.

“Yes. As soon as Demelza is ready. I expect you and Jud to join us,” he said.

Prudie stopped laying the table to stare at Ross; Jud dropped the last log in the crate next to the fire before turning towards his master.

“We? You be wantin’ Prudie and me to come to your wedding?” he asked.

“Of course. If not for you, Demelza would not have come to Nampara. I know you don’t understand my decision but that’s not your concern.”

The pair were speechless and found she needed to sit down. Prudie was still surprised that she and Jud were still employed by Ross let alone invited to his wedding. She didn’t hide the fact that she didn’t like Demelza and thought the marriage was nothing more than a trick to get her master’s inheritance. But if it meant keeping their positions, then she would attend this wedding with a smile.

“Thank you, sir. Best I go find something to wear.”

Leaving the dishes she scurried around the kitchen and out the door, nearly knocking Verity down in the process. Ross’s cousin had appeared suddenly in the kitchen, already dressed for church. She wore a simple frock of striped cotton and matching hat. The gloves she carried dropped to the floor as Prudie said, “Pardon me, Miss Verity.”

She paid no mind to the fallen objects but Ross cleared his throat to get Jud’s attention. The older man seemed confused at his master’s call but quickly caught on when he saw Ross tilt his head towards Verity. Realizing that he was being told to pick up the wayward gloves, Jud moved to retrieve them and handed them to the cousin. Bowing awkwardly, Jud moved to find Prudie and get ready for this rare visit to church. Verity watched him leave then turned to Ross.

“What was that all about?”

Ross took another drink of rum and offered one to Verity, who declined.
“Nothing except I believe Prudie’s surprised that I haven’t sacked her and Jud. And instead invited them to the wedding.”

“Ross! You didn’t? I’m shocked. I thought for sure you’d send them packing after the wedding.”

“I should but with so little money where else would I get servants to work for next to nothing. Besides, Demelza is going to need help. I don’t want her to keep doing the same chores she’s used to. She will be mistress of Nampara and deserves to be treated as such.”

Verity was proud of her cousin and the stand he took, not only in defending the woman who was to be his wife but in learning to handle his household. She had to admit he might have less of an inheritance than her brother but he surely had more sense.

“I’m glad. In her condition, Demelza really shouldn’t be overexerting herself.”

“I know. I’m worried that all this has caused her undue stress, Verity.”

“She’s a strong woman Ross.”

“I know. It’s just that…”

He stopped in midsentence, his attention drawn to the doorway. Verity followed his gaze to see Demelza standing there. The deep crimson-colored dress form-fitted to her body. Her hair was pulled up loosely with sprigs of wildflowers scattered throughout and her cheeks were rosy with a blush.

“Demelza,” Ross said. His voice was low and hoarse, the emotion of the moment taking over.

“Do I look alright?” she asked.

Verity went to her side and pulled her into the room.

“You look lovely my dear. Doesn’t she Ross?”

He continued to stare at her, words failing him.

“Ross?” Verity asked again.

He turned to his cousin, the spell broken.

“Yes,” he whispered.

Ross walked to Demelza and took her hands in his then bent to whisper in her ear.

“Very lovely,” he said.

The young woman pulled back to look at him with shimmering eyes; tears on the verge of falling again.

“Thank you, Ross.”

“We will miss the hour if we don’t leave now,” he said smiling at the woman who was about to become his wife.

Verity pulled her gloves on then found the bouquet she had made for Demelza earlier. The small bunch of wildflowers tied with a blue ribbon was sitting in a pitcher on the window sill. She
checked that the blooms were still fresh before shaking the water from the stems and presenting them to Demelza.

“Oh Verity,” she cried. “I didn’t expect this.”

Ross’s cousin smiled and touched her arm.

“No bride should go without flowers. Especially one who loves them so much and has brightened this house with them.”

The tears fell freely now and Demelza didn’t do anything to stop them. She held the flowers up to her face, closed her eyes and inhaled deeply, the scent immediately acting as a calming agent.

“Thank you so much, Verity,” she said again.

“Don’t mention it,” Verity replied. “Now, should we go? I think the sooner we get you two married the sooner everyone can relax.”

Demelza smiled shyly at her and then Ross.

“Yes,” he said.

He offered his arm to Demelza and led her out of the kitchen into the sunlight. They made their way slowly through the yard towards the path that led to the church. Verity followed along with Jud and Prudie who had put on their finest Sunday’s clothes. Walking slowly, the wedding party said nothing; the nerves seeming to build amongst the participants. As they neared Sawle Church the steeple came into view along with Rev. Odgers. The thin, pale minister stood in the entryway, ready to greet Ross and his child bride.

“Greetings, Captain Poldark. Everything is in readiness if you are sure you want to go through with this,” he said.

The minister gave Demelza a sour perusal then turned back to Ross.

“Without question. Shall we?” Ross said.

The Reverend snorted his displeasure but led everyone into the house of worship. Verity, Jud, and Prudie took their place a few pews away from the altar as Ross stood with Demelza. He felt her trembling and moved closer so that his shoulder touched hers, hoping to impart a sign of comfort. She turned to glance at him and he smiled gently. Demelza returned the gesture. Rev. Odgers opened the missile and began.

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered today to join this man and this…woman, in holy matrimony. Do you, Ross Vennor Poldark, take this woman to be your lawful, wedded wife?”

A deathly silence fell over the small room as the few in the church waited to see if something would bring this wedding to a halt. When nothing was said, the ceremony continued. In a matter of minutes, after softly voiced vows, Ross was slipping the thin gold band on Demelza’s left hand symbolizing their union. She kept her gaze lowered, staring at the shining piece of metal as Ross continued to hold her hand.

“By the power vested in me, I now pronounce you man and wife.”

Ross didn’t wait for the reverend to proclaim he could kiss the bride. Instead, he took it upon himself to seal their marriage with a kiss. Demelza breath caught in her throat as she stood still to receive it.
Ross held on to her shoulders, keeping her steady when Verity came to congratulate them. Jud and Prudie said nothing but stood, jaws slack with shock that their master had actually married this wench. Grabbing Demelza’s hand, Ross led her back up the aisle, past his servants without a second look. At that moment, the only person he was aware of was his new wife.

“Come. Let’s go home,” Ross said.

*~~~~~~~~~~*

Back at Nampara, the celebration was a low key one. Dwight arrived shortly after the rest and joined the party. Prudie’s wedding lunch of stargazey pie, mince tarts, and custard was simple and not quite up to Demelza’s talents but still, the newlyweds and their guests enjoyed it. Ross even allowed Jud and Prudie to share in the celebration giving them a bottle of rum to share. So that Demelza didn’t have to lift a finger, Verity helped Prudie serve the meal while Ross opened up one of the last bottles of port left from his father. When all were fed and sated, and the dishes cleared away, Jud and Prudie left before anything else was asked of them. Ross assumed they were going to the village kiddley to continue their own type of celebration and he was fine with that. Better they were out of the house before another slip of Prudie’s tongue did set him off to sack them.

Unbeknownst to the couple, Verity also had plans. She excused herself from the conversation leaving Ross and Demelza to entertain Dwight who appeared to be studying Demelza over his glass.

“How are you feeling?” he asked her.

“Quite well, thank you.”

Skeptical, the young doctor looked to Ross.

“She seems to always be tired,” Ross said.

“Well, that’s to be expected with a woman in her condition. It’s important she gets plenty of rest and not overexert herself.”

He smiled as he made the last statement knowing full well how Ross and his wife would interpret that suggestion. Despite the pair stating this was a marriage of practicality, Dwight knew his friend was taken with Demelza and she with him. And he knew that as hard as they tried to hide their anticipation of the wedding night, the desire to consummate this relationship and take it to the next level was overwhelming.

“Of course, Dwight,” Ross said.

The disappointment was clear in his voice as was the look on Demelza’s face. Dwight was amused and was about to put them out of their misery when Verity reappeared.

“I’m ready,” she said brightly.

Demelza stood when she saw her new cousin dressed in her travel outfit, ready to leave.

“Where are you going?” Ross said.

“Home. To Trenwith. I’ve stayed long enough. Plus, you don’t need me anymore.”

“But Verity why now?” Demelza asked. “Stay until morning.”

“No. It’s still early and I believe my dear cousin would prefer a quiet house tonight.”
Demelza exchanged a look with Ross and proceeded to blush.

“That’s silly,” she said.

“Hardly. Besides, I’ve left Francis for too long. I’m sure he could some help managing things.”

She realized it was useless to fight her, so Demelza moved to give her a hug.

“If you must,” she said.

Verity returned the hug, suddenly feeling emotional.

“Yes. I’ll be back to visit soon.”

She moved to Ross who drew her into his embrace and held her tight.

“Treat her well, cousin. The girl loves you,” she whispered.

Ross stepped back, eyes wide as Verity gave him a warm smile.

“Dr. Enys are you ready?” she said.

Ross was confused.

“Where is Dwight taking you?”

“I’ve asked him to accompany me home. He kindly said yes.”

“I couldn’t have her traveling alone at dusk,” he explained.

“You’re a true gentleman Dwight,” Demelza said.

Dwight finished his drink and reached for his hat.

“Shall we Miss Verity?” he asked, offering her an arm.

“By all means,” she answered, taking it.

A final hug to Demelza while Dwight patted his friend’s back.

“Call on me if you need anything,” he said.

“I think I can manage,” Ross said.

The doctor escorted the Poldark cousin out picking up her case as he walked past. Demelza followed them out and watched as they departed. Quietly, Ross came up behind her and put his arm around her. Demelza shivered at the touch.

“Are you cold?” he asked.

“No. You startled me, is all,” she murmured.

“Oh.”

An awkward silence fell and Ross placed a kiss on his wife’s neck, sending another shiver down her spine and eliciting a moan.
“Ross…” she said.

“Yes.”

“I think we should go inside and finish the washing up. I don’t want to leave it for Prudie when she comes back.”

Ross moved to stand in front of her and saw a shadow of something cross her face. Fear? Shyness? Nerves? He couldn’t quite name it but knew the ease from earlier had changed.

“That’s if Prudie comes back. I don’t expect to see her or Jud before tomorrow.”

Demelza took a breath and smiled, her hands clasped around her waist as if to hold herself steady. The color faded from her cheeks and her eyes grew wide. The importance of what was expected to occur finally hitting. Tonight would truly change everything.

“Demelza, are you sure nothing is wrong? Are you feeling ill?”

“I think I’m just a little tired. Perhaps I should go upstairs, get out of this dress and into my work clothes if we are to do chores.”

This unnerved Ross because the last thing he wanted was to spend the evening cleaning the house with his new wife. Then again he didn’t want to push Demelza to do anything she wasn’t ready for. He had to remember the circumstances which brought her to him and her current condition. Not the usual way one would start a marriage. As much he wanted to take this marriage to the next stage and felt Demelza wanted it as well, he was not going to force the issue. He would have to go by her signals as to what and how far things progressed.

“Yes, my dear. Why don’t you get out of this dress and have a lie-down,” he said.

She nodded and touched his cheek; her hand grazing the scar that was finally starting to fade. A moment passed between them that led Demelza to reach up and kiss him. It was gentle and offered the promise of what was to come.

“Thank you, Ross,” she said.

He took her face in his hands and returned the kiss.

“For what?”

“Everything.”

Ross smiled and drew her into his arms. Demelza laid her head on his shoulder and closed her eyes. She let his scent waft up into her nostrils as if making a memory. Her breathing slowed and she stilled, making Ross think that she might have fallen asleep.

“Demelza?” he said gently.

Slowly she raised her head and with her eyes half closed, smiled softly. Ross let out a small laugh and tilted her chin up so she could look at him.

“My dear, it’s been a long day and clearly you need to rest.”

Shaking her head, Demelza weakly fought him as he started to guide her out of the room.

“No Ross. I’m fine,” she mumbled.
“Perhaps, but in your condition…”

Now she was wide awake. Demelza did not want her ‘condition’ to be used as some excuse for being treated like an invalid.

“My condition is fine, Ross. I feel fine,” she protested.

She stood her ground and refused to move until Ross agreed. He saw that she was digging her heels in on the matter. Even after living with her for such a short time, Ross knew when to give in. Demelza was often more stubborn than himself and that said a lot. It was their similar temperaments that led Ross to believe that they were well suited to have a successful marriage. Even if it wasn’t based on romantic love. Or was it?

He was so lost in his thoughts as he stared at his wife that he didn’t hear her speaking to him.

“Ross?”

Shaken from his daze he looked down to see her staring back him, her mouth tight and looking more desirable than ever.

“Yes?” he asked.

“Perhaps you’re the one that should rest. I said I’m fine.”

“Yes, you are. More than fine,” he stated, kissing her lightly. “So why don’t you do as I suggested and go upstairs? I’ll follow shortly.”

Relaxing slightly, Demelza pulled away.

She turned and walked away without another word, but as she started up the stairs, looked back over her shoulder and gave her husband a coy smile.

“Well, then I’ll be upstairs. Waiting.”

*~~~~~~~~~~*

As Ross opened the door, he felt a wave of nerves and hesitated. With his hand on the door handle, he took a breath, curious about what would greet him on the other side. As much dancing around that had been going on between him and Demelza, it was still no preparation for the pair finally acting on those flirtations. For Ross, this night would be the first time he was with a woman other than the working girls he visited when the urge struck. Those encounters were different as they were strictly business transactions for the sole purpose to relieve natural, male tensions. Although if he were honest with himself, on several occasions, his trips to town were often after thoughts of Demelza filled his mind and, guilty that he was even contemplating crossing that line, drove him to find solace elsewhere.

So while this night was important to him, he assumed it was even more so for Demelza. Ross knew that, if she were willing, this night would be her first with a man since the incident that created this situation. He had seen her reaction to him when his passions flared beyond the polite; how she pulled away and trembled with memories of the violence done to her. He was mindful of that fact as he entered the room. Ross was determined to make this night one of tenderness and mutual respect that would set their marriage off on the right foot. If that meant not consummating their relationship yet, so be it. Ross’s concern was not for his satisfaction but rather for Demelza’s comfort.

The room was dark except for the bedside candles and the light from the fire so Ross didn’t
immediately see her. He scanned the room and saw her dress along with her corset, shoes and stockings draped on his mother’s old hope chest. Moving closer to the bed he saw the covers rumpled and the outline of his wife’s shapely legs beneath. He walked around to the side she lay on and saw that she was sound asleep. His heart sank before disappointment was overtaken by guilt. For as much as he wanted to make love to Demelza, he knew that her health and that of the child were more important. Leaning over, he brushed a stray tendril off her face, then placed a kiss on her forehead. He moved back and poured himself a brandy. Taking a long gulp, he went to stand by the fire to warm his hands. Putting the glass on the mantel, Ross began to undress. As he took off his wedding garb, piece by piece, laying each on the large wingback chair. Sitting down he removed his boots and stockings, then sat back and closed his eyes. He left his shirt open and loose, falling over his breeches into his lap which hid the growing desire for his sleeping wife. Ross stood to retrieve his glass and finish his brandy when he heard movement from the bed.

“You looked so handsome in church,” a groggy voice said.

Ross started at the sound of Demelza’s voice. He turned to find her lying on her side, her head propped up on her arm.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you,” he said.

“You didn’t,” she replied. “I think I just felt you were here.”

He couldn’t argue with her when she looked so enticing. Her hair fell in wild waves around her face as she sat up, letting the covers fall away to reveal the sheer linen nightgown which left little to the imagination. A groan escaped Ross as he drained the glass, clutching it so tight he was afraid it would shatter in his hand. He moved closer to the bed so that he could reach out and touch her cheek.

“Demelza, I want you so. But I will not pressure you if you do not return my feelings,” he said with sincerity.

Demelza’s heart swelled at his gesture and concern which in turn made her want him as much as he apparently wanted her. Her breath caught as her gaze traveled down his body to his breeches which clearly defined his ardor as they tightened across his groin.

“Come to bed, Ross.”

Pulling back the covers as an invitation to join her, she held out her hand. He came towards her, kneeling on the bed as she tugged his arm, meeting him halfway. She rose up on her knees and tilted her head up to offer herself for a kiss which Ross readily took advantage of. His hands slid down her sides; his thumbs brushing her breasts as they settled on her middle. For the first time, he felt the change in her body as the normally tiny waist had just the hint of thickening—the first outward sign of her condition. A momentary flash of worry crossed his mind as he wondered if what they were about to engage in would be of any harm to the child. However, Demelza’s enthusiastic attempts to relieve Ross from the rest of his clothing easily made him forget anything other than her. Her hands reached down and pulled his shirt up and over his head before she threaded them through his hair. Ross’s lips slid down to the crook between her neck and shoulder.

He was beginning to loosen the ribbon that held her nightgown closed when his stomach flinched as he felt her fingers make their way down from his chest to the fasteners of his breeches. Ross stopped what he was doing to watch his new wife. Their eyes locked as she seamlessly freed him from his clothing. The garment fell off his hips, opening him up to the curious eyes of his new wife. Demelza unconsciously licked her lips as he stood and let the garment fall in a pool around his feet. Stepping out of them, he returned to the bed and pulled her towards him until his naked body was
flush against her linen clad one. Ross lay down, taking Demelza with him.

“Ross,” she murmured as he kissed her with a purpose.

Any delicacy and propriety were gone as the passion bubbled to the surface. The weeks of fleeting kisses and covert touches morphed into passion as their tongues dueled with hands grabbing anywhere they could. Demelza’s fingers skimmed over his skin, now slick with a fine layer of perspiration which facilitated the exploration of the planes and dips of her husband’s body. She went to lift her leg over his hip but the nightgown she wore hindered her movements. Feeling her struggle against him, Ross reached down and pulled the material up, past her knee, holding it at her thigh. He let go of the fabric so he could caress her skin, his hand sliding around to her buttocks, squeezing her flesh and pressing her against him.

This fueled his ardor and he needed to feel more of her. With little effort, the nightgown was dragged up her body, Ross’s eyes staring in awe as every inch of her was revealed to him. When Demelza rose slightly so that it could be pulled over her head avoiding tearing the material, she took the opportunity to kiss him again. Ross dropped the gown to floor, not caring where it landed because he was lost in his wife. She pulled him down so that they became a tangle of limbs.

“Demelza, you are so beautiful,” he whispered as his mouth made love to her.

“I’m not,” she replied.

He bent down to her breast and took one nipple between his lips, making Demelza arch her back so Ross suckled harder. Her hands held his head steady as he worked her flesh until it was pink and swollen before he moved to the other one which was already plump with excitement. His hands slid down to her torso once again passing the growing child she carried. His journey stopped there for a moment; his palm cupping the slight swelling of her belly. Demelza lifted her head to look at him, a tear forming and falling silently down her cheek. She tried to discreetly move her own hand to brush it away when he caught it and turned to look at her. He saw the moisture on her face, setting him into a panic.

“Demelza?” he said as he moved up the bed to face her. “Did I hurt you?

She smiled; her heart swelling with love for this man who saved her and who now cared about her more than his needs.

“No Ross,” she said.

“Then what is it?” he asked.

His arms wrapped around her so that her head lay on his shoulder. The tears fell again but this time she held nothing back.

“I don’t deserve this,” she said.

“What?”

“This. This home. This life. You.”

Ross was perplexed at what could have changed her mood from passionate to pensive. Demelza saw his confusion and sought the words to explain.

“I think perhaps Jud and Prudie are right and that you are mad to take me as your wife.”
He moved to hover over her before kissing her again, more gently this time, no thought of anything other than showing her he cared.

“Demelza, I am in quite a sound state of mind and know exactly what I’ve done. This decision was mine alone and frankly at this moment, as you lay naked in my arms, I do not want to debate the issue.”

She giggled as he tickled her ribs by fluttering his fingers against her. The heavy mood quickly evaporated as the couple realized that this moment is the only thing that mattered. Ross saw that she was about to protest and silenced her with another kiss, this time rolling her underneath him so that he found a home in the apex of her thighs. He paused to make sure that she was alright, making sure to keep his weight off her body. Demelza helped him relax by flexing her pelvis bringing her directly in contact with his hardened manhood. She wriggled a little to get comfortable which Ross took as a sign to surge forward. Slowly and deliberately, he entered his wife, settling in her sheath, allowing her to become accustomed to the feeling of him. It didn’t take more than a moment for Demelza to react to his invasion as she moaned when he pulled away before re-entering again, this time pressing his groin to hers. Her swollen nub was further stimulated by the coarse hair that covered him and Ross pressed against her once more so that there was no space between their lower bodies.

“Judas,” she cried as the heat rose and without warning, she felt her inner walls begin to twitch.

Ross must have felt it as well since his movements quickened and he stifled his own groans by kissing her anywhere he could. Their lips were sealed together as he felt his imminent release course through his body. He detached himself from her mouth as he searched her face for any sign that she was in discomfort. He saw it flushed and her eyes bright with passion. It was then, as she looked into his face and saw the desire in them that she realized this act was truly not one created out of physicality or force, but of emotion. At that moment, all the feelings that had been building in her over the weeks culminated in this act of love; for while Ross may not be of the same mind, Demelza was hard pressed to hide her feelings.

“Don’t stop,” she urged, moving her hands down to his buttocks to hold him tight against her as the first wave of her climax began. She ground against him, trying to make the sensation last as she felt Ross shudder, calling out her name as he flooded her body. As the last of her tremors subsided he held on to her, reluctant to leave the shelter of her womanhood. Seeing that he had no intention of moving, Demelza wrapped her arms around him, cradling his head against her breast, soothing him back to her.

“How are you…my dear?” he asked.

For some reason, the word ‘love’ could not or would not, escape his lips even though he felt more satisfaction and serenity than ever before.

“Content Ross,” she said as she drifted off to sleep, not paying attention to what he said.

He laid feather-light kisses on her breast, full of caring but no less passionate. They knew that a bond was forged with this simple act and while neither of them was brave enough to utter the words, both Ross and Demelza knew that what they just shared was more than their bodies. The seeds of love had been planted and despite how they were sowed, both knew that the roots were running deep; too deep for any storm to uproot it.

Chapter End Notes
I apologize for the delay in updating. To all those still interested in this story, thank you for sticking around. This one had me stuck at a crossroad trying to decide which path to take. Still not sure so we might all be finding out what happens together...because I'm not sure.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

A surprise visitor upsets the calm at Nampara...and Ross needs to face his feelings for his new wife.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In the days following the wedding and wedding night, Ross and Demelza fell into a simple routine of husband and wife. While Ross was at the mine trying to find the elusive vein of copper that could ease their financial woes, Demelza slowly grew into becoming the mistress of Nampara. After Ross laid down the new rules of what his wife would and would not do, he informed Jud and Prudie that they were to obey Demelza as they would have his parents back in the day. Whatever she needed, they were to assist with. At Demelza’s insistence, which Ross agreed with, her condition was kept secret for the time being. Luckily, she was not showing any real physical signs of being with child. The nausea from a few weeks prior had ceased which was a relief because it allowed Demelza to get on with day to day life. It also was a relief because she and Ross, having discovered each other and the joys of marital bliss, made sure to take every opportunity to explore this new part of their relationship to the fullest. To the casual observer, nothing had truly changed between them except for their legal status. But to the newlyweds, everything had changed and not just their new sleeping arrangements. There was a sense of calm over Nampara that had been lacking since Ross’s departure and subsequent return. That same feeling washed over Ross as well.

For her part, Demelza carried on, as usual, only altering her actions when her condition forced it. On those occasions, she was mindful to amend her tasks to fit how she was feeling at the time but without alerting the servants to anything. If there was anything she was most fearful of in her new position as Mistress Poldark it was that someone would learn of the forthcoming child. Realistically she knew that when the babe was born, people would calculate the date to compare to her and Ross’s marriage. At that point, they might have to deal with gossip and judgmental looks but they had months to decide how to handle that. Right now, Demelza’s focus was making Nampara a home Ross would be proud of, becoming the wife he deserved and preparing for her confinement.

That all changed with the arrival of an unexpected and uninvited guest to Nampara. It was while she was sitting in the parlor mending some baby garments given to her by Zacky Martin’s wife, that she heard the livestock causing a fuss in the yard. She didn’t think anything of it, assuming that Garrick was chasing the hens again until Prudie came running in with her arms flying. Demelza lifted her head to see the frantic look on the servant’s face.

“Maid, there be a stranger, all in black, coming across the yard. He be looking like he’s comin’ for a funeral.”

The description of the visitor gave Demelza a sinking feeling. Without asking Prudie anything, she put down the tiny garment she was working on and walked slowly to see who had come to Nampara. Standing in the doorway, a wave of nausea overcame her, forcing her to grasp the closest thing she could find, which was Prudie.

“Judas!” she cried. “What’s he doing here?”
“Who?” Prudie asked confused.

Demelza didn’t have a chance to answer because the man was now standing directly in front of her. Swallowing down the bile that had risen, she pressed her lips together, praying her body wouldn’t betray her. Taking a deep breath she released Prudie’s arm and took a step forward towards the man.

“Hello, Father. What brings you here?”

Her voice was sure but small as she clenched her hands at her sides. Demelza had not seen her father since she left all those weeks ago in fear and shame. Since then she had found a home, security and, at as far as she was concerned, love. Now it seemed all that was fading away as she stared into the steely blue eyes of the man who was one of the reasons she fled.

“There be talk that you wed the master of this house because you are with child. Be that true, Demelza?”

There was a gasp from behind which Demelza chose to ignore; she kept her focus on the man who sired her. She couldn’t think of him as the man who raised her for in truth he barely noticed her after the death of her mother except as a skivvy to take care of him and her brothers. Or, on those nights when he came home drunk from the kiddley, a convenient whipping post.

“I care not what people are saying. ‘Tis naught but gossip. But yes, it’s true. I am wed to Captain Poldark.”

Tom Carne took a step forward making Demelza want to move backward, but she stood her ground.

“What are you thinking girl? To give yourself to a man without my permission?”

His voice bellowed scaring Prudie so much so that she turned and ran into the house in search of Jud.

“Your permission? Why would I need that? I didn’t see you wanting my permission when you beat me. Or when your friend took it upon himself to…”

Her voice faded, unable to finish that sentence as the vision of that night appeared in her mind. She shivered and pulled her shawl tighter around her shoulders.

"I don't know what you're on about, girl. Taking the strap to you was the only way to teach you to respect your elders. You have always been defiant and wild. This wedding proves it,” he said.

“I’m sorry I’m such a disappointment father but at least I’m no longer a burden to you. And your new wife.”

Demelza hoped he’d seen the reason and practicality in the current situation and just return to Illogan.

“’Tis my wife which urged me to come to fetch you home," he replied.

Demelza flinched at his statement. Fetch her home? He couldn’t mean it. Could he? She took a moment to gather herself. She thought of Ross and all they’d become to each other as well as her child, which gave her the strength to stand up to her father.

“This is my home,” she said.

“This is not your home. It’s a place where you fell into a life of sin becoming this Poldark’s whore.”

Tom Carne raised the small Bible he held and shook it at her.
“Hear me, Demelza. Leave this place! Turn to the Lord and find salvation!”

He was shouting now, sending fear through Demelza. She started to tremble at her father’s actions and words, sure that he would use the book to strike her as he took another step towards her. She cowered and took a step back when she bumped into something. She turned around and saw Jud standing there wielding a shovel while Prudie held a rolling pin at the ready. Demelza appreciated their attempt to protect her but did not want or need Ross to come home and see his wife and servants fighting with her father.

“Jud! Prudie! Enough! This is my father. There is no need to…”

Without warning, Demelza felt a hand on her arm pulling her away from the servants. Her father had taken a hold of her and pulled until she wobbled, almost falling to the ground. When he spun her to face him, she had barely a moment to recover herself when she realized that he was about to strike her.

“You’ve been taken by the devil and he must be driven from thee!”

His hand moved swiftly, connecting with her cheek, this time knocking her off balance. Demelza tripped and fell, her head hitting a small stone on the ground.

“Mistress!”

Prudie screamed and ran towards them, dropping the rolling pin as Jud began to chase Tom Carne with the end of the shovel.

“Get gone with ‘ee!” Jud cried, running out of the yard in pursuit of Demelza’s father.

“A curse upon you daughter! You will rue the day you turned your back on the almighty! Mark my words!”

His figure walked over the hill and out of sight leaving Jud breathless and clutching the shovel.

“There you go, running away like a coward. Good thing I didn’t use this,” he called out.

Jud kept his eyes trained on Carne to make sure he wasn’t returning when Prudie called to him.

“Jud! Run! Go fetch Mister Ross! The maid is hurt,” she yelled.

Demelza lay still on the ground leaving the pair to think she’d passed when her eyes fluttered open.

“Prudie, get me inside. Then run for Dr. Enys,” she managed to say.

“Jud be running to get the Cap’n,” the servant answered.

“No! Dr. Enys first. Please. Something is wrong,” she said, tears forming and falling.

“I can bind your head maid. There ain’t too much blood. I can manage.”

The young woman tried to shake her head but was met with intense pain. Then she put her hand on her abdomen, signaling to Prudie where the true problem may lie.

“You be carrying a tyke?”

“Yes,” Demelza whispered. “Please…I need to go inside. And I need Dr. Enys. Please!”
Demelza was sobbing now, fear and pain overtaking her. Prudie wanted to ask more questions but did as she was told. She slipped her arms under Demelza’s and helped her to her feet. Holding her around her waist she led the young woman to the parlor and got her situated on the settle.

“Please go for the doctor now,” Demelza begged.

"Yes, maid."

“And don’t tell Ross. Not yet,” she asked.

“I think ol’ Jud already went to the mine,” Prudie said before leaving to get Dwight.

Demelza was surprised to hear the woman sound so apologetic but secretly she was glad Ross was sent for. She was scared. She cared less for the bruise on her head and more for the cramp she felt in her stomach. She lay down on the small seat and wrapped her arms around herself in a gesture of self-comfort; she was convinced she was losing her child. She wept as she prayed softly before the room went dark.

“Please Lord, don't anything happen to my child. They shouldn't pay for my sins.”

*~~~~~~~~~~*

She awoke to the feeling of someone holding her wrist and something damp on her forehead. Demelza’s eyes fluttered open to see Dwight hovering over her, a look of concern on his face.

“What happened?” she asked weakly.

She moved to sit up but was held in place by the good doctor.

“Lie still. I’m told you fainted,” Dwight said calmly, his eyes trained on his watch as he took her pulse.

Demelza didn’t correct him as the dizziness and the aches she felt earlier, returned. She lay back against the cushions and closed her eyes again, a single tear escaping which was seen by the good doctor.

“There now Demelza, there is no need to become alarmed just yet. But I would like to examine you more fully. Do you think you can manage climbing the stairs?”

His voice was gentle and soothing, putting the young woman at ease.

“I can try,” she responded as she sat up slowly, her hand removing the cloth that had been laying on her brow.

However, once on her feet the room seemed to move and she swayed. Dwight caught her and lifted her into his arms. As he did, he noticed the tinge of dark red in her hair.

“Demelza? What is this bruise on your head? How did you come by that? Exactly how hard did you fall?”

She closed her eyes trying to ignore her pain, and so didn’t answer Dwight’s questions. She was embarrassed that she brought shame to Ross’s house. Dwight saw that she was hiding something but was more concerned about getting her settled so he could examine her. He began to walk out of the parlor to take Demelza to a bedroom when he turned to Prudie and said, “Has Ross been summoned?”
Without warning, Ross flew into the house just as Dwight had started up the stairs.

“Demelza!” he cried, running to her.

When he reached her side he gazed down at her face hoping to see her bright blue eyes but instead encountered his seemingly unconscious wife.

“Demelza?” he said more gently.

She stirred at this as her eyes fluttered open. Recognizing her husband’s face, she smiled.

“Ross. I’m so sorry. Please forgive me.”

Her eyes closed again as she laid her head against Dwight’s shoulder.

"Ross, I need to get her lying down so I can examine her."

Ross nodded dumbly, not quite sure what was going on. He followed his friend upstairs and moved in front of him to open the bedroom door. He stood still as Dwight put Demelza on the bed and sat down next to her to begin his assessment of her condition. With light palpitations, the doctor determined that Demelza was still with child but that the fall and bump on her head would require her to rest.

“Dwight, is she going to be alright?” Ross asked.

He had come to stand next to the bed but did not move to sit. Instead, he stood and stared at his wife’s face willing her to open her eyes and look at him. He needed to know she was alright.

“Ross?” she said.

“My sweet,” he replied as he took her hand.

“The baby?”

Ross didn’t have an answer for her so he looked to Dwight for some insight.

"It appears that the child is fine, however, you did sustain a nasty bump to your head and the fact that you were unconscious for several minutes can be concerning."

Demelza let out a breath as tears gathered again.

“But the pain I felt…”

“What pain Demelza?” Dwight asked. “Describe it to me.”

The worry returned to her face which was also reflected in Ross’s expression as well. He grasped her hand tighter as she explained what she was feeling.

“It was a twinge, here.

She pointed to her lower abdomen before laying her hand on the small swell that was her child, gently caressing it. Unfortunately, Dwight moved her hand to press gently against her body. Demelza cringed at the touch.

“Does that hurt?” he asked.
“A little,” she cried. “Dwight, am I going to lose my baby?”

Ross looked from his wife to his friend trying not to appear panicked.

“I don’t think so. Demelza, can you tell me, do you feel any cramping, more in keeping with your courses?”

Dwight was trying to be as diplomatic as possible not only to avoid laying extra worry on the couple but mainly for decorum. These types of issues were rarely discussed with a woman’s husband in the room.

“No, nothing like that. More like a stitch. Like when I stretch up to reach something.”

The doctor said nothing as he continued to feel Demelza’s body but he knew to be certain that she was not in the beginning stages of a miscarriage he had to perform a more extensive exam.

“Dwight?”

It was Ross who spoke now; the silence in the room grating on his nerves.

“Ross, I can’t tell you anything definitive until I do a complete exam. I think you should leave so I can do what I need to. I will call you when we are finished.”

Dwight moved to get his bag and prepare his instruments.

Ross didn’t want to leave and Demelza agreed.

“Please can’t he stay?” she asked.

Dwight sympathized but he wasn’t sure what the propriety was for this kind of exam.

“Demelza, I would rather he not. I’m going to have to check to see if you are bleeding at all. It would be best if Ross leaves us. I promise to be quick.”

She looked to her husband who knew she wanted him to stay but delaying Dwight’s duties could be more harmful to her and the baby so Ross made the decision for them.

"My dear, let Dwight do what he needs to. The most important thing is to make sure you and the child are unharmed. I will be right outside.”

He kissed her hand and when he pulled back and saw the despair on her face, he bent down and placed a soft kiss to her lips. Demelza held tight to his hand, squeezing it as if to reassure herself.

“Alright,” she conceded.

With that, he touched her cheek, smiled at her and left. Closing the door behind him Ross leaned against it, needing something to support him. When Jud came to the mine with news of Demelza's accident, his mind raced in a million directions. The worst is that she would not recover from whatever had taken hold of her. Then coming into the house and seeing her being carried by Dwight, her small body looking more childlike than he imagined, his heart sank. In the short time, he’d known this feisty redhead, he'd never seen her incapacitated like this. She was so strong and had begun to handle the duties of mistress of Nampara with ease. As if she was born to be there. Now he worried that all this could be taken from them. Jud had relayed how Demelza’s father had appeared out of nowhere, and that some sort of disagreement had ensued. That must have been what caused this illness but what could have been said to cause her to collapse?
Ross gave up trying to answer that question—he would find out more when Demelza was well or from Prudie if need be. The issue at hand was her current ailment and the well-being of their child. He startled himself with that thought; when did ‘her’ child become ‘their’ child? In truth, Ross began to think of Demelza’s child as his own from the moment she agreed to marry him. The idea took root and he did nothing to change that. Perhaps it was his need to create a family. Or better still, perhaps it was the simple fact that he had begun to have feelings for this woman that went beyond pity. He couldn’t yet call it love, but it wouldn’t matter if either of them were in danger. Needing some fortification, Ross went downstairs to the parlor and poured a large glass of brandy. He gulped it down in one swallow and poured another. He mused over his life in the time since the wedding and smiled. He hadn’t known this kind of happiness in a long while. If he was honest with himself he would have to admit he has never known this kind of happiness. Even when he was in the war and thought of what life with Elizabeth might have been like, it never resembled this.

What he had with Demelza was beyond imagination; it was real, pure and honest. Neither of them was perfect but it was those scars, whether physical or emotional, that bonded them. Even without knowing each other very long, they were, on almost every level, soul mates. Often no words were needed to convey a thought. Their mindsets were often the same. And since their wedding night that crossed over to their physical relationship. It was more than just the natural release bodies go through during lovemaking; there was a spiritual connection that made the act so much more. Ross mused on this then had a disturbing thought. Could their new and frequent joining have contributed to Demelza’s current state? Finishing his second drink, he put down the glass and ran back up the stairs to his bedroom, encountering Dwight as he emerged from the room.

“Dwight? Demelza? How is she? Is the child...?”

Ross rambled on breathlessly as Dwight stood waiting for him to finish his thoughts.

“Relax. She’s fine for now. The bruise on her head is superficial and she will have quite the bump,” the doctor said as he directed Ross away from the bedroom door.

Letting out a sigh, Ross leaned against the nearest piece of furniture and closed his eyes in silent prayer. He took a moment to gather himself before looking at his friend for more assurance.

“And the baby?”

“Is fine. The twinge was just as Demelza described it; a stitch from a pulled muscle. It must have happened when she went to brace herself as she fell,” he explained.

Ross nodded in understanding and gave his friend a grateful nod in relief but he still had questions.

“Dwight, you’re sure that there is no harm to our child. I was concerned that perhaps our--marital relations—had caused some sort of trauma.”

He blushed at the admission to which Dwight returned.

“I can assure you that those activities had nothing to do with what happened today.”

Relieved that he hadn’t been the cause of his wife’s trauma, Ross patted Dwight on the arm as he walked to rejoin Demelza. Stopping just short of opening the door, he recalled what his friend had just said about the nature of her fainting spell.

“Dwight, what do you mean Demelza injured herself trying to stop her fall? Didn’t she just have a case of the vapors?”

The doctor realized that Ross hadn’t been told of exactly what caused Demelza’s condition. He
hesitated in relating to Ross what he had learned about the incident but knew his friend well enough that he wouldn't stop asking until he knew the specifics. Better he hears it from him than Demelza.

“No. From what I was told, someone—struck-- Demelza causing her to lose her footing. That’s when she hit her head and fainted.”

It didn’t take Ross but a moment to realize what actually happened and even less time for his temper to rise.

“I’ll kill him,” he gritted out. “I’ll find that child beater and kill him.”

It wasn’t said as a threat but a vow. Dwight knew that Ross would and could do it if he set his mind to it so he moved to calm him down.

“Ross, what good would that do? Think of Demelza. She has already had one trauma today. There is no need for you to add to it. My advice is to not dwell on the how but focus on keeping your wife calm and your child safe.”

As much as he hated to admit it, Ross knew Dwight was right. It didn’t matter how Demelza’s accident happened even if her father was the cause of it. What mattered was that both she and the child were unharmed.

“You’re right. For the time being, Tom Carne and his motives are not my concern. Only my family.”

Dwight was glad common sense took hold of his friend instead of the impulsive nature that often led to rash actions.

“Good. Now, go see your wife. She needs you,” Dwight said.

As Ross opened the door, he turned to his friend.

“Thank you,” he said.

“Think nothing of it.”

*~~~~~~~~~~*

As he entered the room, he saw Demelza lying in the middle of their bed, looking frail and he found that disconcerting; the realization that this could have had more serious consequences hit as he approached the bed. She looked so young to be his wife, carrying a child. Her hair was splayed out on the pillows and her eyes were closed but they fluttered as he sat down and took her hand. He brought it to his lips and kissed the ring on her hand, unaware that she was watching him.

“Ross,” she said weakly.

“My…sweet,” he said.

He was still hesitant to use the word ‘love’ even though his heart seemed to swell each time he was with her. But saying the words would be an admission of something he didn’t think he should be feeling. If he could fall in love with Demelza so easily, he questioned what he felt for Elizabeth for so many years. He thought that was love. Perhaps he was mistaken. Perhaps his feelings for Elizabeth were just the ideal of love and not the true emotion that sustain a couple throughout the span of a marriage. He was focused on trying to comprehend this clash in his mind when he felt his wife squeeze his hand.
“Ross? Is something wrong? What did Dwight say?”

Demelza tried to push herself up so she could lie against the back of the bed but a shooting pain returned and her hand flew to the back of her head. A bump had risen and a small wound began to form under the mass of curls which she now rubbed lightly. She lay back down, putting her head gently on the pillow, letting her eyes slip closed again. A tear escaped and ran down her cheek which Ross wiped away. He reached down and kissed the dampness on her face before lifting her to bring her against his chest. He cradled her head, caressing where the swelling lay. Ross heard Demelza let out a sigh and relax against him.

“I’m so sorry Ross. It seems all I do is bring trouble to you,” she murmured.

Her lips were pressed against him so that the vibration as she spoke sent waves of electricity through him. Ross suddenly felt guilty that he was becoming aroused from this innocent act when he should be concerned about Demelza’s well-being.

“Believe me Demelza, I’ve encountered far worse trouble in my life. I didn’t get this scar from playing it safe.”

His attempt at lightening the mood worked as she pulled away to look at him, her hand going to his face, tracing the image in question.

“No, but you didn’t bring it upon yourself. I, however, seem to court trouble wherever I go. First in Illogan with….and now it follows me here.”

Tears threatened to form again as her lip quivered. Ross wanted to make her realize that nothing she did was going to make him turn his back on her, their marriage or this child.

“Stop talking nonsense. If anything, what you brought, to me at least, is hope.”

He took her face in his hands so that she couldn’t turn away from him as he spoke.

“Demelza, when I returned from the war, I was still recovering from the wounds I received in America, only to be faced with another sort of injury. Not to my body, but to my heart and soul. Then I happened upon you. Seeking refuge in my home, also suffering from a hurt which was far worse than mine, but still, you didn’t give up. You taught me that with determination and work, we could overcome anything.”

Demelza smiled at him while she cried silently. Ross leaned forward and kissed her, his lips lingering against hers as she opened her mouth slightly to touch him with her tongue. He grinned against her and ended the kiss with a playful smack of their lips before he continued.

“What happened today was not your fault. And I promise you that this will never happen again. Neither your father nor anyone else will invade our lives. All that matters is you, me and this child.”

"Ross? Truly though, perhaps this arrangement wasn't the best for you. If today was any sign, I don't think my father will stay away. His newfound faith seems even more menacing than any strap he used on me. What will your friends and workers think when they hear what happened? For surely they will. Perhaps it best that I leave now before we become too involved. Or at the least, return to being just your servant.”

Ross fought the urge to laugh at her because the idea was ludicrous after all they’d experience. But from the look on Demelza’s face, he knew she was serious. Had his reluctance to voice his feelings for her led to this suggestion? Somehow he had to convey to his wife what his heart said to him, but the words would not come yet. Instead, his hand went to the swell on her abdomen as a sign of his
devotion, not only towards this relationship but to the child as well. And as if the babe knew the adults were in distress, there was a flutter against his hand. Demelza started as she felt the reaction as well. She moved her hand to cover his and held it there until the movement stilled.

“See, even our daughter thinks your suggestion is nonsense,” he said.

Demelza’s eyes widened at his statement, pulling away to stare at him.

“What did you say?”

“You heard me. I’m no doctor but I would bet that you’re carrying a girl. Simply because she seems as feisty as you.”

Demelza grinned broadly and hugged him.

"Then I pity you, Ross because that is surely courting trouble."

“I’ll take my chances,” he replied.

They stayed locked in an embrace until Ross moved to lie down taking Demelza with him. As she curled into his side, Ross thought about what she had said only moments ago. Was she serious in thinking that they could rewind the clock and take themselves back to just being master and servant? He hoped it was just the aftermath of her injuries coupled with the emotional stress of the day because Ross knew that there was no turning back for them. If anything, this relationship, this marriage, this life, was moving full steam ahead and no matter what lay on the horizon they’d face together.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the delay in updating this story and if it’s just a little lackluster. Life, a little loss of mojo and the start of S5 are to blame. Hope you’ll stick with me as things get back on track.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Demelza has a visitor while recuperating from her scare and comes to a surprise decision.

Chapter Notes

So sorry for the delay. Caught up in the end of Poldark and a thing called real life knocked some mojo out of me for writing. But new inspirations are hitting so I hope to update WIP and possibly start a new one. As always I own nothing and all errors and omissions are my own.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Demelza spent a week in bed per Dwight’s instructions but she was certain Ross instigated it. While the immediate danger to herself and the baby seemed to have passed, it was agreed that avoidance of any stress, either physical or emotional was key to her recovery. To that end, Prudie was entrusted with most of the household chores while Jud tended to the farm. At first, Demelza felt the ire of both Paynters but a stern look from Ross quickly ended that. In no time the Poldark servants did what they could to keep their master and new mistress happy even if they disapproved of the situation as a whole.

As she was confined to her room, Demelza soon found herself bored and in need of some diversion. Knowing she wasn’t used to be idle, Ross had some books brought up from the library along with a tablet and quill so she could practice her writing. It was as she was trying desperately to focus on a book of verses that the door opened and Zacky Martin’s wife entered with a basket full of clothes.

“Mrs. Zacky? What are you doing here?” Demelza closed the book and sat up to greet her visitor.

“Ross thought you could use some company. And I brought ‘ee some clothes for the babe.”

Demelza assumed that Ross asked Mrs. Zacky to stop by and look in on her while he was at the mine because he was afraid she’d ignore Dwight’s instructions and find some chore to do. Although, she had mentioned in passing that how lonely she was feeling since she didn’t have many friends and at a time like this, support of another woman could be helpful; especially one who had children and had gone through this experience. It never occurred to her that Ross actually took note of her comment. Apparently he had and while Demelza assumed Ross would have called Verity to come, she was glad he recruited one of her own kind instead. As much as she liked Verity, bringing her into this situation most likely would have widened the with Francis and Elizabeth so Demelza was glad he thought better of it by finding new alliances with people who didn’t judge him or his decision. Zacky Martin had been like a father to him since before he left for the American war. It was only natural that Mrs. Zacky be brought into their circle as a maternal figure not just for Demelza but for Ross as well since he lost his mother at such a young age as well.

The rotund woman walked to the bed and placed the basket next to Demelza then brought a chair
over and sat down, her eyes giving Demelza a quick perusal.

“How are you feeling, love? The little one giving you trouble is she?”

Mrs. Zacky’s voice was gentle and kind, putting Demelza at ease immediately. Lowering her gaze, Demelza instinctively touched her abdomen, rubbing the swell of her child.

“How do you know it’s a girl?” Demelza asked.

Of course, she felt that she was carrying a daughter as well but thought that was simply wishful thinking as opposed to some kind of mother’s intuition. She never expected anyone else to pick up on that as well.

“I’ve had many children of my own and helped bring just as many into the world. There be times when a mother has a look that comes with either a son or daughter.”

Demelza smiled.

“You have that look of a mother carrying a daughter,” Mrs. Zacky explained.

The older woman broke into a wide grin which put Demelza at ease. A tear slipped down her cheek which she quickly brushed away before picking up one of the small garments in the basket.

“These are lovely Mrs. Zacky. Thank you,” Demelza said laying the small nightgown across her lap. She lightly touched the stitching as she realized her child would soon be here to wear these.

“’Tis nothing child. They do need some mending, so I’ve brought needle and thread. I thought mayhap I could show you how to do that?”

The kindness this woman showed was not something Demelza was used to but which she greatly appreciated. She’d have to thank Ross for thinking of her in this way. She hadn’t realized how much she missed having a mother until she found herself in this situation.

“Thank you. I’ve never been taught how to sew properly. I’m lucky Ross’s cousin came to help with my dress but my stitching is not delicate enough for baby clothes.”

Mrs. Zacky touched her hand and reassured her.

“No worries, love. We will do these a little at a time. They don’t need much and you still have a way to go before you deliver.”

Demelza’s eyes widened because this woman believed that the baby wasn’t due for some time which wasn’t quite the truth. Not wanting to correct her, she smiled her thanks and began to thread a needle. The women were chatting amiably when Prudie suddenly entered. Demelza looked up and saw a queer look on the servant’s face.

“Prudie? What’s amiss?”

“There be someone here to see ‘ee maid,” she said.

“Another visitor? Who else could want to…?”

Demelza’s voice halted when she saw the dark-haired woman standing in the doorway of her bedroom. She was dressed in the finest riding outfit Demelza had ever seen; her hair was impeccably styled with not a tendril out of place. Suddenly self-conscious as to how she looked, Demelza made a
half-hearted attempt to brush the wayward curls off her brow. She put down her mending as she struggled to sit up, trying to straighten her nightgown and was grateful when Mrs. Zacky offered her assistance as she repositioned herself against the pillows. Taking a deep breath, the younger woman silently thanked her companion then turned her gaze to Prudie.

“Prudie, stand aside so that our guest can enter,” Demelza said with feigned authority.

In truth, she felt more insecure than she cared to admit.

“Elizabeth,” Demelza said.

She forced a smile to her face and held out her hand to Ross’s cousin in law and first love. Elizabeth scanned Demelza’s body as she lay in the bed before a look of disapproval crossed her face. With her gaze aimed at Demelza’s fragile frame, she said, “So it’s true then? You’re with child?”

The atmosphere in the room immediately filled with as much tension as in Elizabeth’s voice.

“Yes,” Demelza said softly.

Elizabeth continued to move towards Demelza as her eyes scanned the room, taking in the surroundings. It was the first time she was in this part of Nampara and the thought that this might have been hers was not lost on anyone. Demelza could feel her body react to the situation as did her child because suddenly she felt the little one kick. It was stronger than she’d ever felt before which made her wince; a gasp escaped her lips. She suddenly wished Ross were there. Mrs. Zacky looked down at Demelza and took her hand as Prudie pushed past Elizabeth to go to her mistress’s side.

“Are you alright maid?” Prudie asked. “Shall I send for Mister Ross?”

The servant made sure to look at their visitor as she asked the questions but Elizabeth seemed oblivious to what was happening. Demelza clenched her eyes shut and held Mrs. Zacky’s hand tightly as she felt another twinge.

“No Prudie. ’Tis just the babe kicking up a dance; nothing to be worried about. Dwight said this was to be expected and ‘twould be a sign that everything was fine.”

“Still, I think Mister Ross should come. I’ll send Jud right around to the mine.”

Prudie exchanged a look with Mrs. Zacky who nodded in agreement. Demelza was too preoccupied trying to keep her discomfort from the others to notice but it didn’t escape Elizabeth.

“I think it wise that Ross should be called. I’m sure he’d want to know if something was wrong with the child….or you.”

Demelza looked up at her rival because the bitterness in Elizabeth’s voice was clear. She tried to discern exactly why she had come. So far she offered no assistance or even words of comfort but seemed put out by Demelza’s condition. It appeared to Demelza that she came simply out of curiosity. Prudie hesitated for just a moment before flying out of the room calling for Jud. Mrs. Zacky resumed her position in the chair next to Demelza, resolutely determined to stay put until Ross arrived or this woman left. Having been around Nampara since Ross was a lad, she knew the history of him and Mistress Poldark of Trenwith and had also formed her own opinion on this situation. She wasn’t normally one to judge but in this case, she believed her instincts were right and that this woman was not to be trusted. She had promised Ross to have a care for Demelza and that she would do.

However, Demelza was not going to shrink from Elizabeth’s presence. While she was not expecting
a confrontation with Elizabeth, Demelza would listen even if she was not quite in the mood to continue this social call. She thought perhaps if she allowed Elizabeth to state her purpose she would do so and leave. As much as she hated to admit it, now she wanted Ross to return. The sudden need to see him and get some reassurance was powerful but first she wanted to get to the bottom of this visit.

She was tired but quickly resolved to handle the situation instead of letting her insecurity overtake her.

Elizabeth moved closer to the bed, pulling off her gloves and ignoring Mrs. Zacky, her focus aimed at Demelza. She brushed the quilt at the foot of the bed before sitting down to face Demelza.

“How did you hear about…?” Demelza asked.

“Surely you didn’t think your condition would be a secret for long? The village was already talking about Ross’ hasty marriage to an outsider. It was only a matter of time before the reason for it became known. And seeing as how we are cousins, if only by marriage, I felt it my duty to come here and show my concern. You know Ross and I have a special bond that will never be broken. So isn’t it proper that I call and inquire about his…wife? And his unborn child?”

Demelza settled back against the pillows, letting out a breath she was holding as Elizabeth spoke. Try as she might, she wanted to like this woman who was so important to Ross but her Illogan senses just wouldn’t let her. Still, she couldn’t voice these feelings so she smiled politely and replied.

“Thank you. I hope that Ross’s family will not turn their back on him during this time. He cares for all of you so much and truly wants you to be part of his life.”

Mrs. Zacky watched as this young girl, who came from the most humble of roots, took on this well-bred woman. It was true that Elizabeth Poldark was born to society and propriety but that didn’t make her more of a lady. Right now Demelza Poldark was as much as lady as Mrs. Zacky had ever encountered. If there were any doubt about her fitting into Ross’s life or as mistress of Nampara, this encounter settled that argument.

“Well Demelza, it wouldn’t be any fault of ours if Ross felt out of place amongst his family or friends. That could be blamed on his choices. The Poldark family name is well respected throughout the county; if he feels he is being snubbed by his class, perhaps you should look closer to home.”

Whatever easiness Demelza felt moments ago left as the meaning of Elizabeth’s words cut to her core. Based on what she just heard, it was clear Ross’s family blamed her for any ostracizing he received from the gentry. This was not how she hoped this visit would go and was about to ask Elizabeth to leave when Ross appeared.

“Elizabeth? What brings you to Nampara? And my bedroom?”

He was breathless as he crossed the room to Demelza’s side. Leaning down he gave her a gentle kiss which she returned. As he pulled away he whispered in her ear,” Are you alright?”

She nodded wordlessly before forcing a smile for him.

Standing up, Ross looked to Mrs. Zacky for confirmation.

“The maid is of strong stock Ross. She’ll be more than capable of delivering this child without issue when the time comes,” she said.

“Thank you Mrs. Zacky for everything,” Demelza said holding her hand out.
The woman took it but then leaned down to hug her.

“’Twas nothing. Now, you rest and I’ll come by in a day or so and we can resume our sewing. Will that work?”

“’Twould be much appreciated,” Demelza responded.

“Good.”

Mrs. Zacky gathered her things and began to depart when she spoke to Ross.

“Take care of this one, Ross. You’ve met your match.”

He smiled back at her and said, “I agree.”

Exiting the room, Mrs. Zacky left the door open as Ross addressed Elizabeth.

“Now why are you here Elizabeth? Because if your visit is over, I think it best you leave. Demelza really should rest and any stress is not good for her or the child.”

His voice was firm as he walked to Elizabeth’s side in an attempt to steer her out of the room.

“Perhaps you’re right, Ross. Besides, I came to speak to you as well.”

Turning back to the bed, Elizabeth bid Demelza farewell.

“Take care, my dear. And if you should ever have a need, please know that I am close at hand. Ross only needs to send word.”

Demelza smiled politely as Elizabeth stepped up and out of the room. Ross returned to the bed and gave her a gentle kiss.

“I’ll see her out and return presently,” he said, caressing her cheek.

She nodded in response because she didn’t want Ross to see that Elizabeth’s visit had jarred her. Glancing past her husband’s shoulder, Demelza could see the other woman standing just outside the doorway, casually putting her gloves back on but listening to the couple’s conversation. The woman’s presence in what was now her home brought up the insecurities about her place in Ross’s life. What right did she, a common miner’s daughter, have to take up residence in this estate? Demelza lay back in bed and watched Ross retreat, coming upon Elizabeth hallway. He pulled the door but it remained ajar allowing Demelza to hear the conversation going on outside her room. She picked up the sewing again and try as she might to focus on her task, she was drawn to listening to what was transpiring between her husband and his first love.

“Ross, my dear I am so sorry you have to deal with a situation like this. How awful that the kind gesture you exhibited towards that the poor girl has become such a burden.”

Elizabeth’s voice was sugary sweet to the point of being cloying yet she didn’t notice Ross’s impatience and so continued.

“I know how much in despair you were at the news of my marriage to Francis. But that was no reason for you to fall prey to some urchin, who more likely than not, was some sort of associate of that common trull Margaret, and who probably saw you as a way out of that business. Surely you can’t believe that she has any feelings for you. Or anyone for that matter except herself.”

She made a move to touch his arm in consolation, however, unable to hide his annoyance at
Elizabeth’s comment, Ross stepped back out of her reach. He was over this false attempt at concern and friendship and wanted her gone. Never in his life did Ross think Elizabeth would become the type of person he wanted out of his life. Up until a few months ago, she was his be-all and end-all; now she was merely his cousin’s wife and that position was just fine with him.

“I’d be careful of saying anything more Elizabeth. You know nothing of my feelings then or now,” he explained.

Elizabeth was surprised but that didn’t stop her from persisting. She moved closer to him, giving him no chance to evade her.

“I think I do. Perhaps it would be better if something did happen to that child. Perhaps it still might. Then you and I could….”

He could not believe what she was saying. Was this woman so cruel as to wish someone that kind of ill will? Was she the same woman he fought his way back from the war for? Looking at her face now, Ross wondered if he was misguided for so many years.

“Be careful of continuing that thought Elizabeth. What do you suppose could happen? You are married to my cousin. That is not going to change nor should it. For you to suggest that is preposterous.”

She laughed lightly at him.

“Is it? I said before you were married that I believe this whole thing to be a farce. This girl is no wife for the likes of a Poldark.”

She moved towards him and this time, she was able to grab his hand as she said, “She’ll never be to you what I was.”

Ross stood still, his eyes never leaving hers in an attempt to show her he was no longer a foolish youth under the spell of her beauty.

“No she’s more. Once I had built up a world where you and I would be married and living the lives of a mine owner and his beautiful wife.”

She smiled, “Who’s to say that can’t still happen?”

“Because I see now, as the months have passed since my return that what I had done was idealized what we had because it was an escape: an escape from the war; from my father and his expectations; from myself. I don’t deny that at some point I loved you but I realize now that I was never “in love” with you nor was it a love that would sustain a marriage. In hindsight that is probably for the best for I could never give you what you need.”

Elizabeth was surprised at his confession and was not accepting it.

“Ross, I need you,” she said in her best seductive voice. Ross wasn’t impressed.

“No Elizabeth, you need to be admired. You need a life of comfort. You don’t need me; you want something you can’t have.”

She was taken aback at the truth Ross threw at her. Yet it didn’t deter her from pressing the matter to leave him with something to think about.

“Are you sure Ross? As you say I may be married to Francis but you will always have a piece of my
heart. And try as you might to deny it, perhaps from some misplaced sense of obligation to this girl, a part of your heart with always belong to me.”

Elizabeth gave him a coy smile before making her way down the stairs and out of Nampara. Ross was left shaking his head at her assumption of his feelings but also at his own misconstrued vision of what love was. He knew now that what was waiting for him on the other side of the bedroom door was what he believed love to be despite the unconventional beginnings. As he moved to return to Demelza, he heard shuffling coming from the room. Surely she wasn’t meandering around when Dwight gave her strict orders for bed rest. As he pushed open the door he saw his wife repositioning herself under the covers confirming his suspicion that she had alit from the bed to perform some task.

“You cannot hide from me Demelza. Were you not told to stay abed? What were you doing up on your feet?”

He asked in jest but there was an undertone of concern in his voice. For her part, Demelza lowered her gaze, unable to look him in the eye as she responded. A blush came to her cheeks while her fingers toyed with the needle that protruded from the garment she was mending. Her reluctance to answer surprised Ross. Usually, she was quick with a retort to defend her actions; this time she seemed embarrassed at being caught.

“Demelza? Is everything alright?” he asked as he sat next to her on the bed.

“Yes Ross,” she said quietly.

She kept her head bowed, pretending to take a knot out of the thread she was working with. Ross stilled her hands with his own before giving them a squeeze.

“What is it? Are you feeling any discomfort? Shall I send for Dwight?”

She shook her head slowly before lifting it to face him with eyes that shone. He could see the moisture gathered in them that now worried him anew.

“There is no need to send for Dwight. I believe I know the best remedy for the situation.”

“Remedy? Situation? My dear, you’re speaking in riddles.”

Demelza smiled weakly then spoke.

“I don’t mean to. It’s just that so much has happened in such a short time that I think we need to take some more time to adjust.”

Ross sat back to look at her fully. He saw a shadow cross her face alerting him that there was more to her statement than merely anxiety for her condition. Something was weighing on her but she was not revealing enough for him to decipher what that might be so he waited until she was ready to explain.

“I thought we’ve adjusted quite well,” he said as he moved to nuzzle her cheek.

The touch sent a chill through her that made her visibly shuddered which Ross felt. She moved slightly to break the connection then spoke again.

“We have. Somewhat. But now, with this new concern about the child, perhaps we should distance ourselves from each other. I think it best that I go back to my room for the time being.”

Her explanation was weak and Ross knew it. Something must have happened to make her want to
revert to their relationship before their marriage. Dwight had assured him that Demelza’s physical condition would be fine if they were careful when loving, so what could have prompted this change of heart that came so suddenly? He thought about it and reasoned that this new attitude must have to do with Elizabeth.

“Demelza, did Elizabeth upset you in some way? What did she say to you? Please tell me,” he insisted.

Looking at him, Demelza couldn’t lie to him because she saw the caring and yes, love, in his face. Besides, they had shared more than just a home since their marriage so to try an erase that would be foolish. However, she was having second thoughts about the future of their marriage especially if Ross had any lingering feelings for Elizabeth. She had only heard the last part of their conversation when he sent her away but clearly, the questions Elizabeth raised about the child she carried now took hold in Demelza’s mind. Could Ross be regretting his gesture, preferring instead to return to a single life where he could be available for Elizabeth should the opportunity arise?

“Ross, you know that I am forever grateful for what you have done for me and my child,” she started to say.

Right there Ross knew that it was Elizabeth’s visit that altered things. Up until that moment, Demelza had referred to the child she carried as “theirs”.

“Yes. And I’m grateful to you for bringing some purpose to my life,” he countered.

“I know your gesture of a home and marriage was offered out of pity which is why I think it best, for the time being, that we do not…live as husband and wife. I couldn’t bear it if, at some point, you began to resent your decision. Or me.”

Ross did not believe what he was hearing. This made no sense to him and yet, he could tell from the look on her face that Demelza was resolved to have it be so.

“Demelza, my love…”

“Don’t Ross. Please don’t say such things if they are not truly in your heart.”

“But they are.”

“I think you believe it to be so, but how could you, we, know love after such a short time? That is why I think it best that I go back to my duties as your housemaid for as long as I am able.”

There was no hesitation in her statement as she continued.

“And if, after my confinement ends, you find you can’t remain in this marriage, I will take my child and leave. I’m sure I can make my way in Illogan or somewhere else if necessary. I believe you care for me and for this child that I carry but it doesn’t compare to your first love.”

She glanced briefly at him before diverting her focus to the window. She said nothing but it was then that Ross was certain where her doubts had come from. The mention of his first love, clearly meaning Elizabeth, said to him that she must have indicated something to Demelza to set her on this reverse course.

“No, it doesn’t. Nothing could compare to that but something could surpass it. That, Demelza, is you.”

The tears that filled her eyes now fell softly but Ross did not attempt to wipe them away. He could
tell that the stubborn urchin he’d found months ago hiding in his kitchen had returned. The wall she built around herself after being hurt so monstrously by others was reconstructed and that no matter how much persuading or cajoling he did, it wouldn’t change her mind just yet. The emotions of her condition coupled with worrying if the pregnancy would continue without incidence took hold. Ross didn’t know much about women, but he knew that when their minds were set, to try and force a change would be useless. So for now, he would appease her whim to be married in name only.

“As you wish Demelza. We will, for now, be married in name only, sleeping in separate rooms for as long as you feel the need. However, you will not scullery for me. There I will put my foot down. You are still my wife and the mistress of this house. And to avoid any gossip as to the change in our living arrangements, it will be explained that your condition requires it. But you will stay here and I will sleep in one of the other bedrooms. I want you as comfortable as possible, is that understood?”

She nodded silently and Ross could not keep from touching her any longer. He pulled her into his arms and held her tightly against his chest; his hands caressing her back and head. His fingers massaged her, the gesture soothing them both.

“Thank you,” she whispered into his neck.

The urge to kiss him was strong and so letting instinct take over, Demelza did just that; she placed her lips at his pulse point, kissing him with just the touch of her tongue. Ross could not suppress the moan that bubbled up from deep within him so it escaped into the quiet of the room, echoing off the walls.

“Demelza.”

He turned his head and sealed his lips to hers, reaffirming the connection and passion that had grown between them. She quickly responded then pushed against his chest, both of them gasping.

They said nothing for a moment until Ross stated the obvious.

“We may be married in name only and sleeping apart but we both know that what has been forged between us goes beyond pity. We need each other Demelza, in more ways than in just the physical sense. So for now, we will live as you wish. But I have a feeling that it might be short-lived.”

Ross rose from the bed, but let his hand linger as it slid down her arm to hold her hand. He stood next to her not wanting to leave until he was sure she was alright with all that had happened. Moving to say something, Ross was stalled when Demelza took the hand that held hers and brought it to her cheek and then her mouth, where she grazed it with her lips.

“You’re an amazing man Ross Poldark,” she said softly.

He smiled at her before pulling his hand away to leave the room.

“Rest now and I’ll have Prudie bring you a tray.”

Walking away, Ross stopped at the door then turned to face her.

“If I’m amazing, it’s because you’ve made me so Demelza.”

He gave her a smile that had a touch of sadness to it and Demelza wondered, as the door shut behind him if she wasn’t making a mistake with this request. Lying back in the bed, she prayed she was doing the right thing.
Chapter End Notes

Thank you ALL for sticking with me especially now as the Poldark world is winding down. I intend to keep writing as long as there are people to read....

End Notes

This was originally written as a fan fic competition entry for the recent Poldark Nampara Assembly held in KY. It was submitted anonymously under the pseudonym Romelza 111. And it won! So now I am sharing with the world as this will be the start of a new multi chapter fic.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!