Three-month AU detour, Sept-Dec 1793. Set in the aftermath of Ross's betrayal. Demelza takes a different path. Novel-based with some takes from the TV production.
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**Sonnet 129**

The expense of spirit in a waste of shame  
Is lust in action; and till action, lust  
Is perjur’d, murderous, bloody, full of blame,  
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;  
Enjoy’d no sooner but despised straight;  
Past reason hunted; and no sooner had,  
Past reason hated, as a swallow’d bait,  
On purpose laid to make the taker mad:  
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;  
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;  
A bliss in proof, and prov’d, a very woe;  
Before, a joy propos’d; behind, a dream.  
All this the world well knows; yet none knows well  
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.  
- William Shakespeare

**May 1787**

Demelza . . . Stiff old silk of the dress . . . The hooks. What had got into her? He had been drunk, but was it with liquor? The expense of spirit in a waste of shame is lust in action . . . past reason hated – how did it go? He had not thought of that sonnet last night. The poets had played him false. A strange affair. At least there had been an expense of spirit . . .

**September 1793**

She mistook the cause of his silence, he said, but she knew now that she wasn’t so far off the mark. It was all there in the words he had just spoken.

But of course you’re right - I have been in a mood all this week, and for that I… My feeling about Elizabeth’s marriage need not be gone into now. That’s something I’ve had to think out - fight out in my own way.

He said something else after that - something about George living at Trenwith - and he told her the good news about Wheal Grace. She tried to smile, but what he had said first... those few short sentences…

Her chest ached and the restless anger that had kept her going since that awful night in May suddenly drained away, leaving her cold and empty. For surely wrapped inside those words was the message that he had finally found some way of moving on with his life, some way of reconciling himself to the loss of his one true love, even though it need not be gone into now. Judas! If he hadn’t meant that - if he had meant it - why not discuss his feelings now? Had she not waited long enough for some hint on their future together? On his feeling for her? No, it was clear to her that she, Demelza, would only ever be second best and she didn’t even warrant an
explanation. There was no way forward for her, she realised, at least, not in this house and not with him.

Later that night as she pinned up her hair, alone in her room except for Jeremy who slept, she looked more closely at herself in the mirror. The woman who stared back was a stranger, with her pinched mouth and her bitter-hard eyes - the look of the last four months, and, she feared, the rest of her life. She wanted her old attitude back - her old lightness, her old happiness - but the tide had washed the sand out from under her feet and now everything was gone.

There was no longer any place for her here at Nampara, she realised, not as wife and not as servant. There would be money aplenty and he could hire whatever help he needed. No more would she be even a necessary drudge for the man who had her heart but who couldn’t give her his in return. God’s life! He didn’t even want to touch her! Had made no effort to… Not that she would welcome him, not without love. And had he ever truly meant anything he said about love anyway? She could no longer believe it. He had fooled both himself and her, and now it was gone, all gone, and there was no living like this anymore.

“Not in this house, Ross, an’ not with you either,” she whispered. In that moment, she made up her mind; there was only one way to get back some little part of her old self, to regain a sense of worth…

References:

Quote in story is from 'Warleggan', Book 4, Chapter 1.
Chapter 2

Ross reined in his horse and drew his coat tight against the autumn chill. The waning moon had cast a ghostly light over the valley, turning it into an eldritch landscape of midnight-blue and shadow. To the south, on the edge of the cliffs, lay Wheal Grace. She was lit up by the flickering candles and lamps of the miners who worked on into the night. The rhythmic clunk of the headgear rose up over the noise of the pounding surf and the whole place hummed with purpose.

It had been a busy few days, meeting with Pascoe in Truro and attending to other business there. He was pleased to be back on his own land at last. Shifting in the saddle, he looked over towards Nampara. The house was in darkness. A small sting in his chest took him by surprise. It was unreasonable to feel disappointed, he told himself; it was late, after all. He could hardly expect Demelza to wait up for him as she used to. With a press of his knees, he urged his horse forward and as he rode down the valley, his words of a fortnight ago rattled around in his head.

*My feeling about Elizabeth's marriage need not be gone into now…*

Empty words. Weasel words. The pretentious words of a fool. Inexplicable in one who could make a pretty enough speech to save his own life but not, it seemed, his marriage. He owed her so much more but every time he went to say something, guilt tied his tongue even as his conscience conjured up excuse after facile excuse for what he had done. And in the end it all sounded wrong, even to his own mind, and was better left unsaid.

So why on earth had he uttered those words then? Some maggot in his brain, no doubt. He had hoped the promising news about Wheal Grace would be the thing to push past these months of estrangement, but then he'd gone and spiked his own guns. She had tried to smile when he told her but those other words hung over them like a storm about to break. He knew she wanted more - deserved more - but how to explain it all without doing further damage? And the hurt in her eyes… By God, but he wanted to run from that. A coward by any measure, and beyond belief in a man who had never held back from the fray. He hardly knew himself.

What had followed then were all the easy, expected words about their good fortune and nothing touching on what really mattered, nothing to set things right between them. And then the retreat: each to their own empty bed. Did she miss him as much as he missed her, he wondered. Reaching out in the night for the warm, slender weight of her and finding nothing. Waking up alone, hard and aching, needing the comfort of her in his arms and left wanting.

But it went deeper than that. He missed her vitality, the spark that animated her. Since that night in May, after the first rush of anger and pain, she had been but a polite, distant shadow of herself. His fault, he knew. He no longer had any idea what she was thinking and they no longer laughed together. He felt that loss more keenly than all the rest. She kept her sharp wit well-hidden and shared none of her amusing insights with him. He had no one to blame but himself.

The screech of an owl rang out in the Long Field and Ross looked up from his thoughts. He was at the bottom of the garden. Demelza's flowerbeds lay neglected in the moonlight. Another injury to his credit. She had lost all heart to tend to them, and freed from her watchful eye the weeds had run wild over summer. But the days were shorter now and the sandy soil was finally putting paid to all; the die-off had started.

He thought of the other small pleasures she had abandoned. Though the mundane chores of house and field were still attended to with the same capable efficiency, she no longer went about her work with a song on her lips, and the spinet in the parlour sat untouched. He had heard her husky
contralto tones once or twice with Jeremy but not the spontaneous upwelling of joy that came from a glad heart and high spirits.

Of course, her heart had been troubled long before May; he saw that now. How could he not? Self-knowledge had been bought dear. In the strife-torn years following Julia's death, he had slipped away from her, bit-by-bit, slowly gravitating back to Elizabeth. And then, after Francis's death and all those disasters, it had become a headlong rush. Blinkered by the past, he had lost all sight of what really mattered, who really mattered… Judas God! He had become more of a husband to his cousin's widow than to his own wife, putting her interests before those of Demelza and Jeremy, using more weasel words to justify himself. He had not needed to give Elizabeth the whole six hundred pounds he felt he owed her. Common sense should have told him as much. With careful management and economy, half that amount would have seen her and Geoffrey Charles right for a good long while. Demelza could have managed on half as much again - less, even. God knows she had managed on little enough these past few years.

And as for spending so many hours with Elizabeth, helping her with her business, taking pleasure in her company, in the renewed attraction between them… He had indulged in a deluded fantasy with a woman who could never be the one he needed - the one who filled his heart - and through all those deceitful months, Demelza had paid the lonely price of his generosity, his honour… his faithless stupidity. He was no longer able to fool himself on that score.

A sigh of wind whispered through the night and some small creature rustled in the weeds. Ross dismounted and led his horse the rest of the way to the stables. Insight had come only by degrees. Over the summer, he had worked the longest hours of any of the miners, losing himself in the daily rhythm of hard slog and the ebb and flow of easy talk. But each day, when the other men had gone home and he'd toiled on long into the evening, there had been no escaping his tangled thoughts, no escaping the confusion that swirled around in his mind: Elizabeth, Demelza, himself. And nor had there been any escape from the knowledge of his perfidy towards the one woman who had every claim on his love and his loyalty.

True, he had wronged Elizabeth in some measure too, but she had played her part in what had happened and her actions were for her own conscience to answer to, just as his were for him. He didn't hate her - could never hate her - but he saw her more clearly now: as a person in her own right, with her own share of human frailty, and not the perfect, faultless woman he had so blindly built her up to be. That he had made no effort to seek her out afterwards, had no desire to, told him a great deal in the end, and all through the long summer months he had chipped away at his thoughts until, finally, he had broken through to the lodestone: the unshakable certainty of who he wanted and what he wanted his life to be.

After he had finished seeing to the mare, Ross walked out into the yard and stopped. As he looked up at the gibbous moon and winking stars, his thoughts returned to Demelza. She was his real love, his true love, and he was drawn to her every time: to her warmth and her laughter; to her earthy passion and wit, her dear face and form. To her fierce love and loyalty…

They were fighters both, and in their six years together as husband and wife, they had shared the highs and lows of life, and everything in between. She had backed him - stood with him - in everything that mattered. Knew him better than anyone and accepted him - loved him - with all his flaws. She had opened his eyes to other perspectives, shown him new ways of looking at the world, and was so vital a part of his happiness that it was impossible to imagine anything other than a dull, flat life without her. He lifted his foot and brushed a speck of dirt off his boots then silently entered the house and bolted the door behind him.

Love and loyalty, and fierce with it. That was the core of her. Fighting for those she loved and
loving them with warmth and passion. And worthy of the same in return. In elevating Elizabeth above all, in acting as he had, he had shown Demelza the most appalling lack of respect and had given her every reason to doubt his own love for her. He would not wonder if she no longer considered him worth fighting for.

But she had stayed, and that had to mean something. Surely he still had some small claim on that fierce loyalty of hers even though his own had been so sorely lacking. He couldn't believe - didn't want to believe - that she wouldn't, in time, forgive him.

Pausing at the foot of the stairs, he looked up past the landing. She was up there, asleep in their old room, and he ached to go to her as he used to… To slip under the covers beside her, take her in his arms and kiss her awake. Show her all the ways in which he loved her. It was impossible, of course; he hadn't yet found the words to heal the breach and he was under no illusion that she would welcome him under such circumstances.

Going against every desire, against every wish of his heart, he turned away from the stairs and continued on to Joshua's old room off the library. He had made his bed there for the last four months and what an empty, loveless bed it had been. But no more. Tomorrow he would make a start on repairing all the damage he had done and weasel words be damned. He would reclaim the woman he loved above all others and share life fully with her once more. His last thought before he went to sleep was that he would fight for her.

References:

"My feeling about Elizabeth's marriage need not be gone into now." Winston Graham, 'Warleggan', Book 4, Chapter 1.
Chapter 3

“She’s gone t’ visit wi’ her folk in Illugan, sir.”

Ross stared at Jane Gimlett. That was not the reply he had expected when he asked where Demelza was. His housekeeper was surely mistaken. “I beg your pardon?”

“The mistress be gone to Illugan. T’ visit wi’ her people,” repeated Jane.

“I - I see.”

He laid down his knife and wiped his mouth with his napkin; his appetite for breakfast had suddenly vanished. In all the years he had known her, Demelza had never had the slightest wish to visit her family. Quite the opposite in fact. And after the debacle of Julia’s christening, he knew she would not care if she never laid eyes on them again. To think that she would seek them out now…

The meaning of her visit was clear: she had finally left him. She had talked about it in those early days, after his - betrayal with Elizabeth, but he had wanted her to stay and so she’d stayed and he would never have thought she’d leave, not after all this time. He forced himself to speak calmly.

“And Jeremy?”

“ Took the lad wi’ her. And the dog too.”

Ross was hardly surprised Demelza would take Garrick as well; she had refused to abandon the hopeless creature once before, on the day he had first met her all those years ago. Even then, with the memory of her father’s beatings fresh in her mind and the marks still fresh on her back, she would have chosen to return to that brute of a man for the sake of her only friend. That fierce, unshakable loyalty again…

Jane picked up the tea pot and went to pour him a cup but Ross waved her away.

“When did she go?”

“The day after ye left for Truro. Said she’d be gone about a week.”

It took a moment for the words to sink in and then the tension left his body in a rush. He rested his hands on the table and drew a deep breath. So, she’d be back; it was not a permanent thing.

“Thank you, Mrs Gimlett,” he said. “That will be all. I can manage the rest.”

“Aye, sir.” She put the teapot down and left the room.

As soon as she had shut the door behind her, Ross pushed back his chair and stood. Demelza would return. She had said so. In a week’s time. He did a quick calculation. He had left for Truro on Saturday and she for Illugan on Sunday. It was Wednesday now, so he would have to wait four days until he saw her again. Frowning, he walked over to the window and looked out past the cliffs. The sea was a vast, moving wave of crinkled blue glass. Four days was not really such a long time, he told himself. God’s life! Demelza had waited four months for him to sort through everything in his mind. He could at least give her a few days and it wasn’t as if there wouldn’t be enough to occupy him, what with the unexpected success of the mine and the need to prepare for the coming winter.
He turned and stared sightlessly at his breakfast going cold on the table... She must have been so
desperately unhappy here at Nampara if she was prepared to use Tom Carne’s house as a bolt-hole.

... ... ...

Ross had never known time to pass so slowly, not even the months in America when he had
counted the days until his return to Elizabeth. Though he was busy enough during the day, the
evenings ground on, empty and quiet and with far too many hours to brood. For all the coolness
between them, he realised there had been a comfort in Demelza’s presence, in the sound of her
going about her work, tending to Jeremy, and even in their brief, polite exchanges. And he missed
Jeremy too, wondered if he was missed in return.

On the first night, Wednesday, he had thought to sleep in their old room again - a way of being
somehow close to his wife and son - but as he was about to enter the room, he happened to glance
at the dressing table and stopped dead on the threshold. His chest constricted and he felt as if he’d
been punched in the gut. Demelza’s brush and comb were gone, as was to be expected, but there in
the centre of the table were the fancy garters he had given her the year before. He remembered
that night, the love and desire between them. How he had put the garters on her downstairs and
then taken them off again upstairs, on their bed. Pushing her back into the pillows, trailing kisses
along the soft inner flesh of her thighs, her hands in his hair...

The garters would never be put to such a use again; she had cut them up and used them to tie
together a polishing rag made out of an old pair of stockings. And they had meant so much to
her... An image rose up in his mind, of her expression as she faced him over the breakfast table
the morning he had returned from Trenwith - and Elizabeth’s arms. Of her anger and her pain, and
him so wrapped up in his own misery and confusion that hers meant nothing to him. It tore at him
now though.

He stared at the wreck of his gift for a moment longer and then retreated to the room off the
library. The next three nights were spent there too, and then came Sunday.

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