

Chapter Five
January 10th 1778

January 10th came round, and Hoglinda could scarcely sit still. When she heard a noise at the window, she jumped to her feet and pulled back the curtains - only to find that it was just a branch scraping against the glass. How foolish, she thought! It was only eight o'clock. The smugglers were not due back for another two hours. She sat down, but then got up again a moment later. Waiting up here at the house was impossible. She decided to go down to the bay and wait at the Hog's Head Inn, though she knew perfectly well that Quiller would not approve.

Hoglinda had sometimes wondered what the Hog's Head was like inside; but the public rooms of inns were rough places and generally considered to be no place for the female of the species. Mrs Tipps was different, of course, because she was the innkeeper; but for the daughter of an admiral to be seen in such a place was unthinkable. Hoglinda looked through her wardrobe, wondering whether her dark grey cloak, with the hood up, would be enough to conceal her identity. Then she remembered the old clothes she had discovered in Quiller's secret chest. Those would do very nicely. She crept into the study and, closing the door gently behind her, once again removed the panelling from beside the fireplace. Then, having swapped her elegant dress for a grubby pair of breeches, a thread-bare jacket and an old hat, she lit her lantern and stepped out into the night.

It was a cold night. A bitter wind penetrated through Hoglinda's tattered old clothing; she would undoubtedly have been a great deal warmer in her woollen cloak. A shiver ran down her spines. Was it the cold, she wondered, or nerves? With no moon to guide her, it was hardly the night to be venturing out alone for the very first time. Walking through the trees, she could see nothing beyond the small pool of light cast by her lantern. Who knew what might be lurking in the darkness? There were sounds everywhere - branches creaking in the wind, the screech of an owl... Twice she thought she heard a twig snap; but there was no one there - so far as she could tell.

As she neared the coast, the noise of the sea gradually overtook every other sound. Emerging from the woods behind Hog's Head Bay, she was pleased to find there was a stiff onshore breeze. The sea was a little rough, to be sure, but the smugglers would not mind that. Indeed, a little rough weather would give them the advantage, if they were

unlucky enough to meet a Customs ship: for the smugglers were generally the better sailors; and, knowing the local coastline like the backs of their paws, they could take their boats where the Customs Service dared not follow.

Hoglinda searched the horizon, but there was nothing to see. If there were any boats out there, they were not showing a light; and even the sea itself seemed to merge into the moonless sky above. Towards the west end of the bay, however, she could just make out the faint silhouette of the Hog's Head Inn, punctured by the light from its two downstairs windows. She paused for a moment or two, listening to the waves breaking and retreating across the pebbles. Then she picked up her courage, pulled her hat down over her eyes and walked over to the inn.



The public room was a large, simply furnished place, bristling with hedgehogs. But, with a good fire going in the hearth, it was surprisingly cosy; and the drink was flowing freely - indeed, it was clear that more than one hedgehog was three sheets to the wind. Some of the customers she recognized from the village - including Mr Tubby, who was standing warming his paws by the fire. Fortunately, neither he nor anyone else saw through her disguise or even gave her a

second glance. So, finding herself an unoccupied table away from the light of the fire, she settled down to wait.

"What can I get 'ee, sir?" asked Mrs Tipps, coming over to her.

"A brandy, please," said Hoglinda, in a half whisper.

"What was that 'ee said? ...Crimany!" exclaimed Mrs Tipps, suddenly recognizing her. Slipping into the chair opposite, Mrs Tipps leant forward and lowered her voice. "Why, Miss Hoglinda, what *was* you thinken', comen' y'ere? Has summat happened?"



"No, Mrs Tipps - I just couldn't bear waiting on my own up at the house any longer. I know I should not have come."

Mrs Tipps shook her head disapprovingly. "No, ma'am, that you should not - "

"Hey there!" interrupted a disreputable-looking hedgehog from another table. Hoglinda noticed he was swaying a little, as though the chair beneath him were a tightrope. "What bist gossipen' about, Tippy, wold dear? Casn't thee zee we be dyen' o' thirst over y'ere?"

"Drownen' in thee cups more like!" retorted Mrs Tipps, all the while leaping to her feet - for she was never one to say no to a customer. Scuttling off into a back room, she returned a minute later with the drinks. But neither she nor Hoglinda made any attempt to resume their conversation, for fear of attracting attention.

Time passed slowly once more for Hoglinda, sitting there on her own, surrounded by strangers and unable to talk to anyone. She dared not even check the watch in her pocket: only the wealthier sort of hedgehog could afford a timepiece and she was dressed as a pauper. She began to wish she had stayed at the house after all. If she carried through her plan and ventured out onto the beach when the *Hogspur* came in, she risked being challenged. Then she would have to reveal who she was, and Quiller would be angry again. He would probably send her home with her tail between her legs.

Here, however, Hoglinda's thoughts were interrupted, for the door was suddenly flung open. Silence descended upon the room. Two hedgehogs stood upon the threshold, one with a blood-stained cloth tied around his leg, who looked as though he was about to keel over. The other hedgehog Hoglinda recognized immediately: for, to her astonishment and horror, it was none other than Mr Gimlet, the Customs officer. She had met him several times when he had come to dine with her father. She tipped her hat a little further forward, hoping desperately that he would not recognize her.

"Some help here, if you please!" barked Gimlet, surveying Mrs Tipps's customers with barely concealed disgust. He was clearly having difficulty supporting his companion, but no one rose to help



him. Indeed, hostility was written on all their faces. As for Hoglinda, she was truly shocked. She wanted very much to help - especially as the wound must surely have been inflicted by one of Quiller's gang. Yet she dared not move a muscle. When Mr Gimlet looked in her direction, she wished she could just curl up into a ball.

"Help me, dammit!" bellowed Gimlet to the room. Mrs Tipps now came forward and shoed away one of her younger customers, who reluctantly gave up his chair. "No, that won't do!" said Gimlet crossly. "Can't you see that he has lost a great deal of blood? He must lie down. We'll take him upstairs."

"Oh no, sir!" protested Mrs Tipps. Hoglinda thought she sounded a little too alarmed for her own good. "I'm sorry, sir," continued Mrs Tipps, "but all the rooms be taken. We best lay en down on the rug in the parlour, next door. 'Tes comfortable enough in there."

Ignoring her suggestion, Gimlet made a move towards the staircase, supporting his companion as best he could. When his companion gasped with pain, however, Hoglinda stood up instinctively. She regretted it at once, but it was too late for her to change her mind. So, taking the wounded hedgehog's other arm, she helped Gimlet escort him upstairs.

There were four doors leading off the landing. Hoglinda tried to steer them towards one of the rooms at the back, facing away from the



sea. But Gimlet had already opened the door to a bedroom at the front. On the windowsill was an unlit candle. A few minutes more and it would have been alight, signalling to the *Hogspur* that the coast was clear.

Hoglinda immediately looked away, fearing that Gimlet might follow her gaze. Then, as they laid the wounded hedgehog carefully upon the bed, Mrs Tipps appeared in the doorway, anxious and out of breath.

"Not y'ere," she said. "There be a room at the back you can have, if you likes. But this room be taken."

Hoglinda edged towards the window and stood between it and Mr Gimlet, so the candle was hidden from his view.

"I thought you said they were *all* taken," said Gimlet sharply.

"'Es, sir," said Mrs Tipps, apparently unabashed. "Tes jest that some be more taken than others."

Mrs Tipps had only succeeded in rousing his suspicions. Without asking her permission, he started to search the room, fully expecting to find some contraband hidden there or other evidence of smuggling. First he looked inside the cupboard. Then he knelt down to check under the bed. Quick as a flash, Mrs Tipps reached behind Hoglinda and popped the candlestick in her pocket.

