The Smugglers of Hog's Head Bay

by Elizabeth Morley

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Prologue - *October 1776*

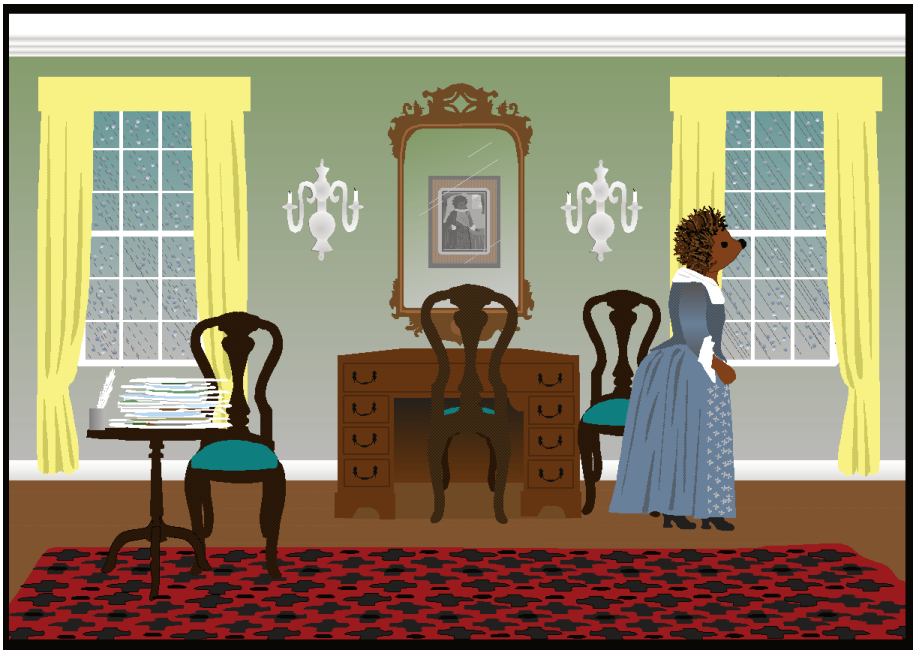
It was late October. A gale was blowing across the Isle of Needles, turning the grey sea white in a confusion of waves. Most hedgehogs who could took refuge indoors. As for Hoglinda, she barely noticed. The home she shared with her father lay in a sheltered spot, nestling at the foot of the downs and half surrounded by trees. Though the house overlooked Brambling Harbour, it lay some two miles from the open sea.

Hoglinda's father, Admiral Hoglander, had already set off on his morning walk. Being a creature of habit, he always followed the same route - up onto the downs and then along the high cliff tops. From there he would watch the ships through his spyglass and amuse himself by guessing what cargo they carried and where they were sailing to. But Hoglinda was tired of doing the same old walk day after day and had chosen to stay at home. Unfortunately, her cousin Quiller, who was staying with them, was out at the local shipyard on business. So she would have to entertain herself. First she played a few pieces of music on her harpsichord. Then she read a little. When she had had enough of reading, she pawed over her folder of drawings and paintings, wondering whether there were any views nearby that she



had not already attempted. Unable to think of any, she put down the folder and, stifling a yawn, began to pace up and down the room.

It was raining now. She paused to gaze through the rain-streaked window, reflecting on what a lucky escape she had had. It was then that she noticed the tree tops swaying in the wind. They hardly ever swayed like that, and it would be a great deal windier on the cliff tops. Her thoughts were cast back to a storm the previous winter: a hedgehog had fallen to his death from those cliffs. Suddenly afraid, she grabbed her cloak, scribbled a message for her cousin and set off in pursuit of her father.



As she climbed the steep slope behind the house, Hoglinda noticed that Brambling Harbour was much rougher than usual; at the top, hit by the full force of the wind, she struggled to keep upright. But she had spotted her father. She shouted. But he could not hear above the wind and it was no use waving, as he was turned the other way, so she pressed on and caught up with him as quickly as she could.

"Papa!" she said breathlessly, as she came up behind him.

Admiral Hoglander turned round and smiled with puzzled pleasure. "Hoglinda! What on earth brings you out in this weather?" His smile turned into a frown. "Is something wrong? Has something happened?"

"No, papa, nothing has happened - except that I was worried about you - that is all."

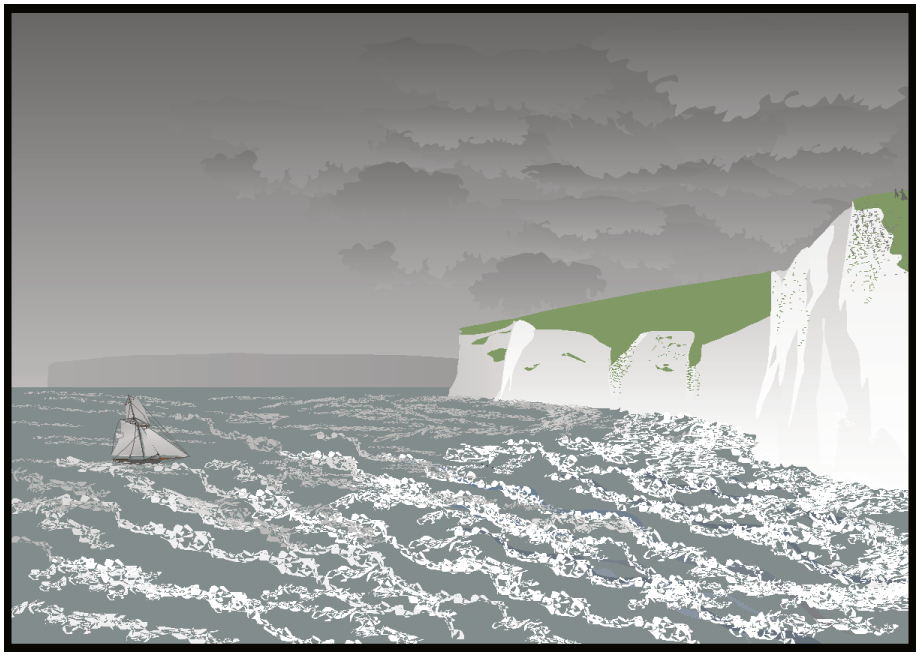
"Tush!" said the admiral. "I have weathered many a worse storm than this at sea."

"But you are not at sea now. Come, let us go home before the weather gets any worse."

The admiral glanced up at the sky. There were two layers of dark cloud moving in different directions. It suggested that worse weather was, indeed, on the way.

"Very well, my dear, I - "

The admiral broke off before he had finished his sentence, for he had just then noticed a ship. Her sails were close-hauled and she was trying to head away from the land; but wind and tide were sweeping her relentlessly on.



"Oh!" exclaimed Hoglinda, who had followed her father's gaze. "That ship is far too close to the shore, is she not?"

"Indeed she is," said the admiral grimly. He got out his spyglass to take a closer look. "Well I never! She is flying the colours of my old enemy!"

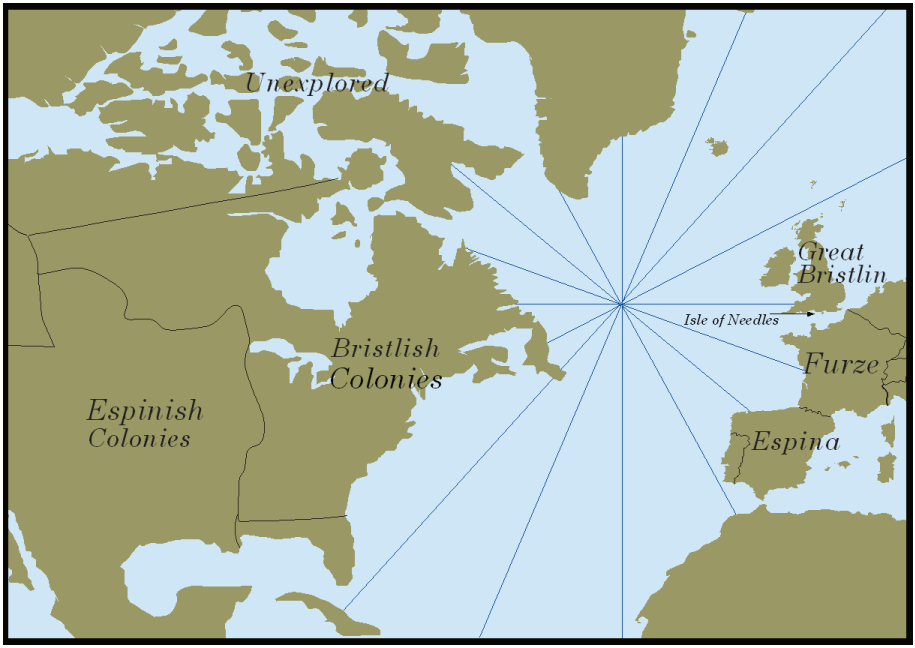
The admiral was referring to the Furzish Navy. Great Bristlin and Furze had, in fact, been at peace for some years now, but it was unclear how long this could last.

"How many hedgehogs can you see on board?" asked Hoglinda.

"I count seventeen on deck," said the admiral. "For a cutter of that size, that may well be the entire crew."

For a moment he wondered where the cutter was bound for and for what purpose. Great Bristlin was currently fighting to put down a rebellion in its western colonies, and the Furzish Navy was known to be sending guns to those very same rebels. In an attempt to stop this, the Bristlish Navy had taken to boarding and searching any foreign ships it came across, which was naturally greatly resented by the Furzish. The admiral wondered whether this cutter was also carrying guns to the rebels, but there was no way of telling. And, now that the cutter was in trouble, it no longer mattered. Through his spyglass, he could see that some of the crew had already started to untie the ship's boats and were getting ready to abandon ship. Very soon the cutter had all but disappeared beneath the towering chalk cliffs.

"We must fetch help," said the admiral, without hesitation. No sailor would leave another hedgehog to drown, whoever he might be.

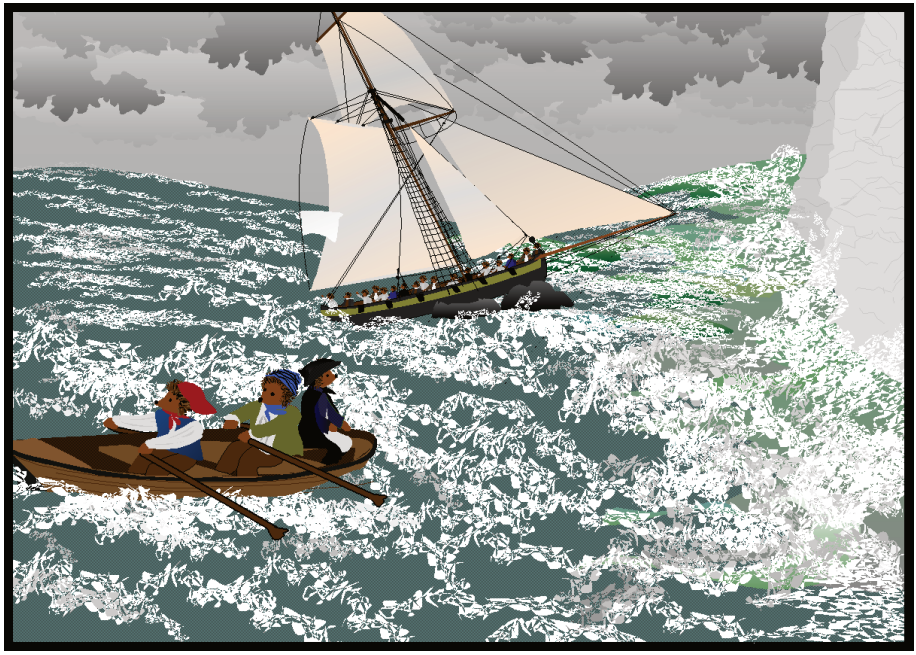


Hoglinda nodded and started to run down to the village, followed closely by her father. Within a half hour, the admiral had set off across the harbour with a little fleet of five fishing boats, rowed by hedgehogs from the village. Hoglinda waited anxiously on the shore, with the local physician and the rescuers' families.

The admiral's crew had to pull hard on their oars as they rowed against the wind. It blew even more strongly when they reached the open sea. Now rowing parallel to the shore among the breaking waves, they were in constant danger of being capsized. Several times they were forced to turn into the waves to save themselves.

Eventually they caught sight of the Furzish cutter. She had been swept onto the rocks. Her boats were adrift, and her crew stood clinging to the deck, with the waves crashing over them. As the admiral's boat came alongside, the swell carried her high above the cutter and the next minute flung her far below. Timing his moment carefully, the admiral threw a line across to the ship-wrecked sailors. They caught and secured it, and the first three climbed across, one by one. Then, with the admiral's little boat full, they turned for home, leaving the next boat to take their place.

Seventeen hedgehogs were saved that day, thanks to the bravery and skill of the islanders. No questions were asked until, some time later, the admiral enquired, as casually as he could, where the Furzish cutter



had been sailing to. He was assured that she had simply been patrolling the Furzish coast and been blown off course. The admiral accepted this story. Whether he believed it or not was beside the point - for the cutter and her cargo were now at the bottom of the sea.

The shipwrecked crew were given food and shelter. The admiral himself welcomed two of the survivors into his home: the ship's captain, Lieutenant Oursin, and his one passenger, Monsieur Espinon. They were to stay until such time as their return home could be arranged. The admiral's house, usually so quiet, was suddenly bristling with hedgehogs, since they also had Quiller staying with them - Hoglinda's cousin and nephew of the admiral's late wife.

The five hedgehogs got on well, despite the tension between their two countries, and the time passed pleasantly. Lieutenant Oursin very naturally shared Admiral Hoglander's love of the sea. And Hoglinda soon discovered that Monsieur Espinon shared her love of painting and drawing. Whenever they all went out for walks together, he would ask her to show him the best viewpoints, which of course she was delighted to do. She was also very pleased to be able to speak in Furzish with a native speaker, having only ever spoken the language with her governess until now. But the friendship between Quiller and Espinon was the most striking of all. At first Espinon had seemed to prefer Hoglinda's company. But one day, as they were all out walking

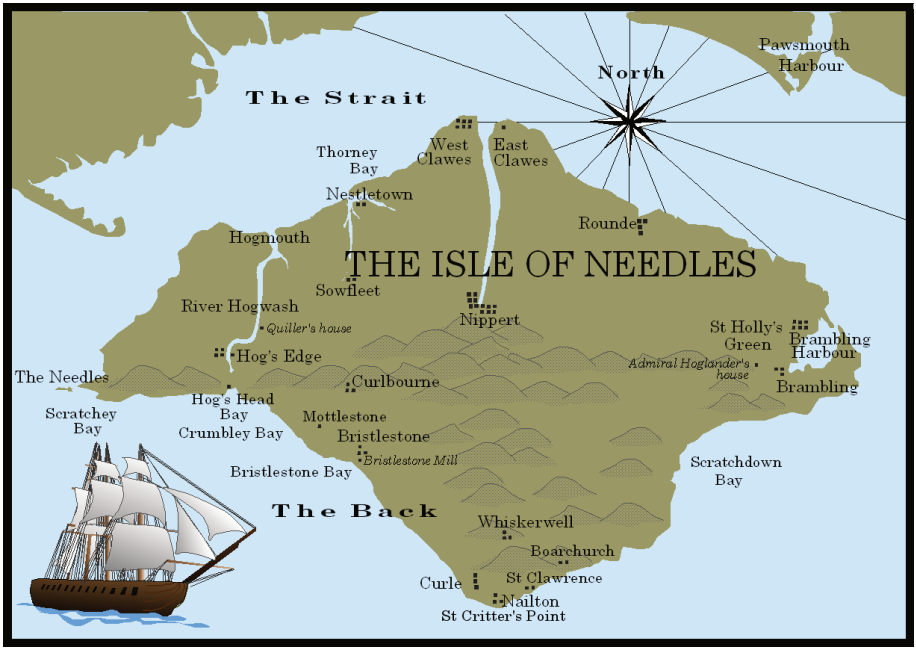


around the harbour, something changed. It seemed to Hoglinda almost as though Quiller and Espinon had reached some sort of understanding. From that time onwards, whenever they all went out, Quiller and Espinon would always stride on ahead of the others or drop behind; and, very often, the two of them went out all alone.

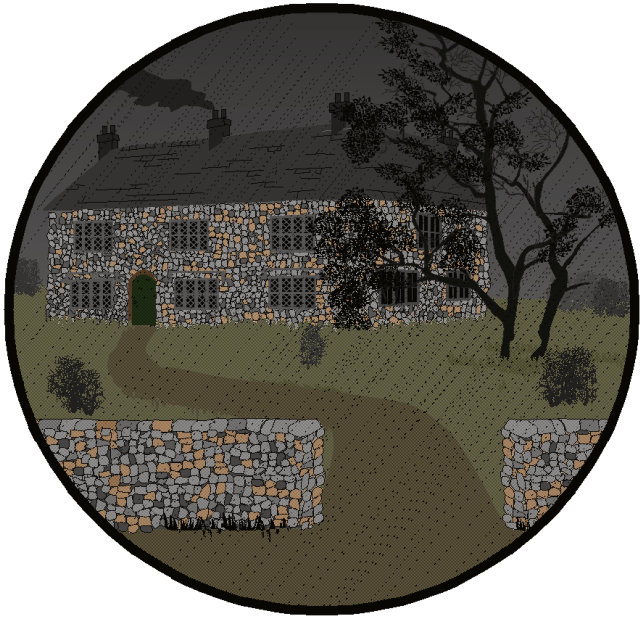
Within a few weeks, however, the party had broken up. Quiller returned to his home on the other side of the island; and Lieutenant Oursin found a ship to take his crew and Espinon back to Furze. Life in Brambling returned to normal. The winter passed uneventfully, except that it was colder and wetter than usual, so that Hoglinda longed for spring, when she could paint outside again and her father would take her out in his yacht. But with the arrival of spring came also the arrival of a letter summoning Admiral Hoglander away.

The navy needed the admiral's help with putting down the rebellion in the colonies. These colonies lay far away on the opposite side of the ocean and the voyage there alone would take several weeks. Knowing therefore that he must be away for many months, the admiral was reluctant to leave his young daughter all alone. So he decided to send her to stay with Quiller, as her nearest relative on the island. Quiller was a widower with two young hoglets to bring up, assisted only by his housekeeper and a maid. The admiral felt sure he would welcome the addition of his young cousin to the household.

For her own part, Hoglinda was extremely disappointed. She had hoped to be allowed to join her uncle on the mainland, for he had recently been elected a Member of Parliament and taken his entire family with him to the capital. Hoglinda could imagine few things more exciting than the capital city. But instead she was to be sent to Hog's Edge, a small village in the south-west corner of the Isle of Needles. The area - known locally as 'the Back' of the island - was so remote and wild that, though less than twenty miles from her own home, she had only been there a few times and had never stayed long. Of course, it would be pleasant to get to know little Quillemina and Quillip better; but they were not even near half her age, while Quiller was considerably older than she was. She feared there would be few hedgehogs in the neighbourhood with whom she could have much in common. She imagined the lives they led on the Back to be dull and uneventful. She prepared herself to be bored.


THE ISLE OF NEEDLES
North
The Strait
Pawsmouth Harbour
Thorney Bay
West Clawes
East Clawes
Nestletown
Rounde
Hognouth
Sowfleet
River Hogwash
Quiller's house
Nippert
St Holly's Green
Brambling Harbour
Admiral Hoglander's house
Brambling
Hog's Edge
The Needles
Curlbourne
Hog's Head Bay
Scratchey Bay
Crumbley Bay
Mottlestone
Bristlestone
Bristlestone Mill
Bristlestone Bay
Scratchdown Bay
The Back
Whiskerwell
Boarchurch
Curle
St Clawrence
Nailton
St Critter's Point

Part One
Chapter One
26th April 1777: half past four in the morning



Hoglinda lay in bed, listening to the wind and the rain. A draught ruffled the fur on her face, and the windows rattled in their frames. But it was another sound altogether that made her prick up her ears. There were voices beneath her window. Quiller had visitors - though it was the middle of the night. Getting up from her bed, she opened the curtains and peered out into the darkness. Three hedgehogs were coming up the path. They clutched lanterns in their paws, but their faces were hidden beneath their hats and a minute later they had disappeared inside. She frowned. Surely no respectable hedgehog would be out and about at this time of night - and on such a night as this!

Yet this had been the way of things ever since Hoglinda had come to live with Quiller, just over a month ago. There had been mysterious comings and goings, sometimes late in the evening but just as often in the middle of the night. Hoglinda had never met any of these nocturnal visitors, Quiller had never spoken to her about them and she had never presumed to ask. Yet she could not help being curious. Quiller lived upon the income from his land: surely there could be no need for him to conduct his business at night!



Unable to suppress her curiosity any longer, she pulled on her dressing gown, lit a candle and crept downstairs. There was light showing under the parlour door. She could hear the crackle of the fire in the hearth and the low murmur of voices. For a moment she considered knocking; but she could think of no reason for interrupting. So, blowing out her candle, she put her ear to the door and listened instead.

Quiller was speaking: "Did you meet anyone tonight, Mr Cutliss?"

"No, sir, that we did not. 'Twas no night for the fainthearted, with the sea so rough and the sky as black as ink."

" 'Twas the same ashore," said a third hedgehog. "We met no one neither. Not that we be done yet and nor is it like we shall be tonight. Problem is, around half the hedgehogs I employ most times, they be ill in bed with the fever - 'tes this accursed cold wind, no doubt. But no matter. The cave'll do well enough for now. We can go back and finish off in the mornen'."

"Hmm," said Cutliss doubtfully. "Let's hope you're right, Mr Tubby. Let's hope you're not caught out by the spring tide."

"Never you worry, Mr Cutliss," said Tubby. "We knows what we be about. The tide won't - " He did not finish his sentence. A floorboard had creaked beneath Hoglinda's feet. "What was that?" he asked. "I thought I heard summat."

Hoglinda stood rooted to the spot - afraid she might be heard if she moved. If only she could just curl up into a ball! For what would she say to Quiller, if he found her eavesdropping at his door? The sound of footsteps behind her startled her into action. She darted into the study just as the housemaid came up from the cellar.

"Oh, it's you, Pinafore!" exclaimed Quiller. He had opened the parlour door and found the maid outside, her paw poised to knock. "We thought we had an intruder."

"Oh, no, sir!" said Pinafore, "that couldn't be - not unless someone climbed in through a window. I locked and bolted the door as soon as my brother left… No, sir, I was just goen' to ask whether you be wanting any more wood for the fire."

"No, we have enough, thank you, Pinafore. You can go back to bed. We shall not want you again tonight."

"Very good, sir. Good night, sir."

Quiller wished her goodnight and shut the parlour door. Hoglinda waited for Pinafore to disappear upstairs, before relighting her candle from the embers of the study fire. She was then about to return upstairs to bed herself, when she noticed that a section of wooden panelling was missing from the wall. It had been removed from beside the fireplace, revealing a narrow windowless chamber beyond. Just visible in the semi-darkness of the chamber was a wooden chest.



Hoglinda stepped inside. The chamber was small from end to end but occupied the full height of the building. With Quiller and his guests next door, she dared not linger long, but it would surely only take a second to look inside the chest. She knelt down and lifted the lid, fully expecting to find something extraordinary inside; but all it contained was a bundle of old clothes, a rather strange glass-bottomed bucket and a leather-bound book.

She opened the book. It was a journal, and the writing was Quiller's - though it was not the journal she had seen him write in. Throughout were numerous references to the times of low and high tide. The letters O and C also appeared frequently – though sometimes the C was written backwards or the O was inked in. She flicked forwards to April the 26th, for it was now the early hours of that day. Here was an inked-in O, followed by the letters HHB; and underneath was written, "High water, four o'clock in the morning": that was barely half an hour ago.

Hoglinda put the journal back in the chest. Then she crept back upstairs, tiptoed past her young cousins' room and closed her own door behind her as quietly as possible. But back in bed she found sleep impossible. Her mind was full of Quiller's secret chamber, his conversation with his late-night visitors, and the journal hidden away in the chest. At first she could make neither head nor tail of it all. Then she remembered that one of the visitors had talked about the sea being rough and the other had mentioned a cave. Perhaps they had brought something ashore and hidden it in the cave. But what and why? Could they be smugglers, she wondered? But no, that was a ridiculous idea! Smugglers were criminals; they brought goods into the country secretly to escape paying the government tax. It was unthinkable that Quiller, her own cousin, would be mixed up with anything like that. He was a respectable hedgehog - the nephew of an admiral!

But then what could it be? Hoglinda was determined to find out. And, when it occurred to her that the HHB in Quiller's journal was very probably Hog's Head Bay, she began to feel she was getting somewhere at last. This was the closest beach to Quiller's house and at one end was a deep cave. Whenever she had been to the bay before, the tide had been far too high for her to get anywhere close to the cave. But one of the visitors - Mr Cutliss - had mentioned there being a spring tide at the moment. That meant greater extremes of both high and low water. So perhaps tomorrow the sea would go out far enough for her to be able to visit the cave on foot.

Hoglinda decided to give it a try. She would have to be careful, of course, as Mr Tubby's hedgehogs would be going back at some point. But she had her spyglass with her – it had been a parting gift from her father. So she would be able to look ahead and check there was no one there before proceeding.

As for the tide, she thought it was probably just a matter of timing; and she felt she had all the information she needed to get that right. According to Quiller's journal, high water had been at four o'clock that morning. As the average time between high and low water was about six and a quarter hours, she calculated that low water should be at about a quarter past ten. But it was always safer to arrive while the sea was still retreating. So she would aim to get there a little early. Ten o'clock would do, she decided. Then she immediately fell asleep.