



KINGSCASTLE

SOPHIA HOLLOWAY

CHAPTER ONE

MR TIDESWELL WAS ILL AT EASE. He found the bustle of a naval home port too much for one used to a quiet market town, and the sight of a small group of sailors, unsteady on their feet and lurching along Portsmouth High Street at two in the afternoon, filled him with horror as well as a degree of fear. He looked at the directions he had been given at the posting house, and made his way towards St Thomas's church. The High Street passed by it on the south side, and a row of decently proportioned houses formed an L shape on the west and north sides. He was impressed, having been prepared for some low, ill-kept boarding house, and when he rapped the polished brass knocker of the house bearing the correct number, a respectable-looking man came to the door and enquired his business.

‘I am come to see Captain Hawksmoor. My name is Tideswell, and I am his family lawyer.’

‘If you would be pleased to come into the hall, sir, I will find out if the captain is in. I believe he returned about noon.’

The man stood back, and Mr Tideswell entered the house. The doorkeeper, who appeared to be more of a housekeeper, went up to the first floor, and Mr Tideswell heard a brief, muffled conversation. The man returned and declared that Captain Hawksmoor would be pleased to see him, and would he please follow him up.

At the top of the stairs Mr Tideswell was shown into a neatly furnished room, at the end of which a gentleman in naval uniform sat at a desk. He rose, and it could be seen that he was a few inches above average height, his face a little tanned from exposure to sun and wind, and a trifle thin.

‘Captain William Hawksmoor?’ Mr Tideswell queried the rank, for the officer had but one epaulette. Surely captains wore two?

‘Yes indeed.’ The gentleman saw where the lawyer’s gaze had fallen. ‘Ah, you wonder at my shoulder? I received my promotion to post rank in ’14 and so have not yet the three years’ seniority that gives me the second epaulette. I really am Captain Hawksmoor, I assure you. Now, I am informed you are my family lawyer, yet I have never seen or heard of you before.’

He gestured Mr Tideswell to a chair, and took his seat again.

‘I have the honour to be the family lawyer to the Marquis of Athelney,’ volunteered Mr Tideswell.

‘But I am merely a scion of the cadet branch, Mr Tidesell.’

‘Tideswell, sir,’ corrected the little lawyer, with a cough.

‘Mr Tideswell. I am the younger son of a youngest son and . . .’

‘You are the surviving son of Lord Edward Hawksmoor, by his wife Celia, daughter of Sir Nathaniel Barton of Oswestry in Shropshire.’ Mr Tideswell rattled off the captain’s parentage as if the Hawksmoor family tree was imprinted upon his memory.

‘I am. My elder brother Thomas fell at Vittoria.’ Captain Hawksmoor frowned. This seemed ponderously formal.

‘I have to inform you that your uncle, Alexander Hawksmoor, fourth Marquis of Athelney, died these four weeks past and—’

‘I am sorry to hear it. Do not tell me he has left me some bequest in his will. I would not have thought he even remembered my existence.’

‘Not a bequest as such. You, sir, or rather, my lord, were the heir presumptive, and now, once the documentation is provided, fifth Marquis of Athelney.’

If Mr Tideswell expected an exclamation of surprised delight, he was to be disappointed. Captain Hawksmoor did indeed raise his brows, but then shook his head, smiling a little lopsidedly.

‘You have become muddled, Mr Tideswell, and have had a wasted journey. The heir presumptive to the title is my cousin, the son of the middle brother, Lord Willoughby Hawksmoor. He is also called William, which is why, no doubt, some clerk made the mistake. Though if you are the family solicitor, I would have thought that you would know it well enough.’ He looked slightly suspicious.

‘Mr William Hawksmoor regrettably met his death one week before his lordship, in an accident.’

‘From what I ever heard of my cousin William, are you sure some cuckolded husband did not shoot him in a duel?’

‘Er, no, my lord.’ Mr Tideswell blushed. ‘He died as the result of an accident with his curricle, in the course of some wager.’

‘That was another possibility, of course. You will not expect me to rend my clothes at the news, I take it. It would be both insincere and expensive, for a junior post captain on half pay receives but ten shillings and sixpence per day, and it is a long time till Quarter Day.’

‘It would be appropriate for you to show some sign of mourning when you return to Kingscastle, my lord, but no, I do not expect grief.’

‘Return to . . . If it is certain . . . Oh Lord, yes, I suppose I must do so.’ Captain Hawksmoor, for he could not as yet imagine himself as anything else, sighed. ‘Mind you, with the peace there are so many of us on half pay and so few ships, the chances of a command again are slim. Perhaps I should adjust to commanding estates instead.’

He spoke almost to himself.

‘That might not be as easy as you would think, my lord.’

‘I have commanded a fifth-rate, Mr Tideswell, one of His Majesty’s warships. I do not see a problem.’ The response was terse, and Captain Hawksmoor’s grey eyes narrowed.

‘There are certain provisions of his late lordship’s will, however, my lord. If I might show you?’

Mr Tideswell withdrew a sheet of vellum from the bag that he had been clutching, as if from habit, to his bosom, and laid it upon the desk. Captain Hawksmoor read the contents with a growing frown.

‘But this is ridiculous, outrageous . . . the estate to be held in Trust in perpetuity unless my nephew, William Hawksmoor, marries and produces a legitimate male heir within two years of my decease?’

‘His lordship was thinking, not of you, my lord, but of Mr William Hawksmoor. He believed that marriage might settle him.’

‘So if I am to have any control over the estate I have to marry. That is absurd enough, but the other part is simply madness. Even if I were to marry, there is no guarantee that my wife would bear a child within what was left of the two years, let alone that it would be of the male sex. Such things are in God’s hands, not a man’s.’

‘I admit, my lord, that the stipulation is problematic. I made the strongest of representations to his lordship that those phrases be removed, but it was shortly after

Mr Hawksmoor's affairs became rather more scandalous than normal, and his lordship was in no mood to see reason. I have consulted with other members of my profession, and it would seem likely that the clause could be contested and declared invalid, since, as you say, such things are outside human control. The requirement to wed, however, will stand.'

Captain Hawksmoor ran a hand through his dark hair, which rebelled against tidiness, however much he combed it. 'This is an awful lot to take in.'

'Understandably so, my lord. Perhaps it would be best if I returned tomorrow morning, when you have had some time to become adjusted, so to speak. I would hope you would see your way to accompanying me to Kingscastle, perhaps via the capital, since you will be requiring civilian attire of a quality befitting your position. We could also deal with any matters pertaining to your taking your seat in the Upper House, should you so wish.'

'Yes, though how would I pay for all . . .'

'The Trust would provide monies for such needs as you might have, my lord. And you must remember that in your case, the Trust will not be concerned that any money that is released will be misused. Mr Hawksmoor left debts, and his manner of living was . . . excessive. Your probity is not in doubt.'

'Thank you. I am not sure if I should be relieved or flattered,' murmured Captain Hawksmoor, wryly.

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It was some time after Mr Tideswell's departure that Captain Hawksmoor stood up and went to gaze into the street below. Here was Portsmouth, a place where he felt as much at home as anywhere upon land. He had gone to sea, under the patronage of his mother's cousin, at fifteen, which meant half his lifespan had been within the Royal Navy. He had been at sea for most of that time, and had only heard of the deaths of first his father and, last year, his mother, some months after the event. He had been ashore when his elder brother had been killed at Vittoria, but there were no obsequies to attend for a man buried anonymously upon a Spanish battlefield. If he was honest, the service had become his family, and he would miss it badly, now that Hawksmoor family duties were thrust upon him.

He did not see his unexpected elevation to the peerage as different from duty. He could not avoid it, so he would simply do the best he could. He feared idleness, and with so many men ashore, what chance had he of a command? Perhaps turning from the sea, from the ships that would not be there for him, would be a good thing; yet the 'family' of the navy had been his for so long that being parted from it was a difficult thing to assimilate. A naval officer was what he 'was' to his core; he was as comfortable with it as he was in his faded sea-going uniform. He was not even sure what a landed aristocrat actually 'did' in life. As a child he had not questioned what those without 'employment' did from day to day. Was a marquis expected to sit in aloof state while

minions did everything? If that was the case, well, he would simply be one marquis who did not conform to the norm.

He was lifted from this melancholic mood by the sight of a uniformed gentleman stepping out smartly along the street. The officer looked up, smiled broadly, and touched his hat. Captain Hawksmoor waved him up. A minute or so later, a cheerful voice and familiar tread were heard upon the stair.

‘Come on in, Mr Bitton.’

The door opened, and a fair-haired man, some five or six years the captain’s junior, came into the room.

‘Good afternoon, sir. I just heard Bradford got the *Phoebus*, lucky dog. I wonder if he might put in a word for me.’

‘He might. Take a seat, for I have news that may surprise you nearly as much as it surprised me.’

Captain Hawksmoor told Lieutenant Bitton, who had been his first lieutenant aboard his last command, of his change of circumstances. The cheerful lieutenant was suitably amazed.

‘I did not know you had such aristocratic connections, sir, my lord . . . er . . .’

‘I don’t feel like a lord.’ The captain sounded gloomy again.

‘That will come, my lord, given a few weeks.’

‘Perhaps.’ He sighed. ‘I have no desire for this elevation.’

‘Think of it as a promotion, as if . . .’ Lieutenant