

**IF THE
INVADER
COMES**

TOM PALMER



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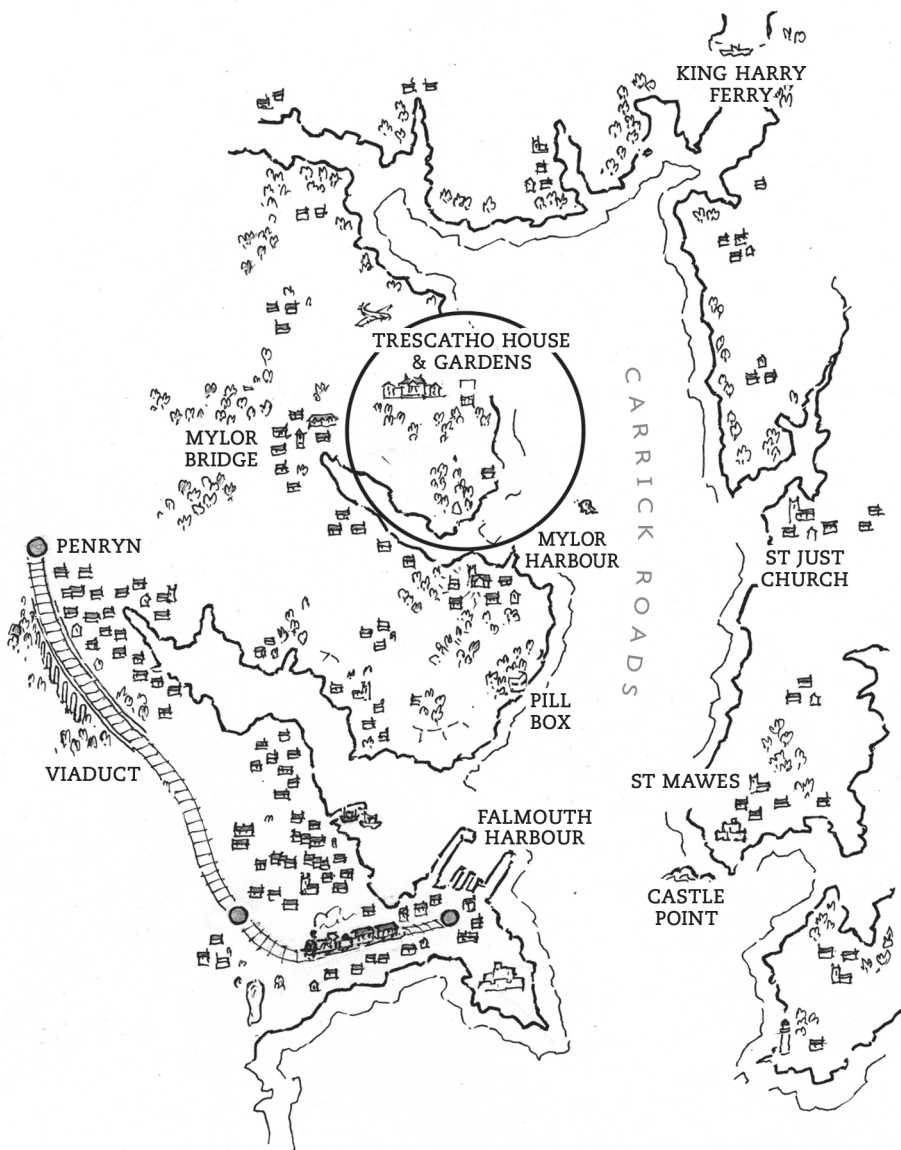
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FPO (fsc placeholder)

*This book is dedicated to the children and staff at Mylor
Bridge Community Primary School as a thank-you for
the help they gave me in telling the story of their part
of Cornwall during the Second World War*

CARRICK ROADS, CORNWALL

1940-1941



TRESCATHO HOUSE & GARDENS



EARLY JUNE 1940



Bobble knew something was wrong when she walked in to find her parents holding hands across the kitchen table at three o'clock on a Sunday afternoon.

“What is it?” she asked, feeling panicked.

As Bobble waited for an answer, she glanced around the room, searching for clues. It was a large kitchen for a cottage. Unplastered stone walls. Beams low across the ceiling.

There was a newspaper on the table in front of her parents. The headline read:

**DUNKIRK: TENS OF THOUSANDS
SAFELY HOME ALREADY**

“Nothing’s wrong,” Mum replied.

Bobble narrowed her eyes, not believing her. She studied her dad, who smiled at her. But his hands were trembling – so much so that she wanted to pull the newspaper away from him.

Dad didn’t need to read about British soldiers being rescued from a French coastal town that no one had heard of until this week. Weren’t they supposed to be shielding him from the war?

And why was Mum saying there was nothing wrong when there clearly was? Her parents never sat around in the middle of the day, and Bobble couldn’t remember ever seeing them clasping hands like this before.

She needed answers but didn’t want to upset her dad. So the three of them sat in silence for a moment.

It was Dad who spoke next, trying to reassure her. “D-don’t worry, lovely. Really, it’s nothing. It’s just that your mum has to go away.”

“Again?” Bobble complained. Mum was always going away. She’d disappeared several times over the last few months, and she never explained why.

Bobble eyed Mum, her mind already imagining the next couple of days and how she would have to look after her dad.

Dad suffered from something called shell shock because of everything he’d been through in the last war. If he had a bad episode with his nerves, Bobble would have to calm him down, sort him out. She might even have to stay home from school to look after him.

All that responsibility was overwhelming, so Bobble fixed her eyes on another sheet of paper next to the newspaper on the kitchen table. She’d not noticed it at first. The large black letters across the top read:

If the INVADER comes

WHAT TO DO – AND HOW TO DO IT

“You need to read that,” Dad said. “And you need to hide your b-bicycle. It s-s-says there: ‘Make sure no invader gets hold of your bicycle.’”

“Yes, Dad,” Bobble said, trying to sound calm and reassuring. “We talked about that before. I put my bike in the greenhouse when I get home from school.”

Dad frowned. He looked tired. Bobble knew they had to be careful. Calm and kind and careful. That was what he needed.

Dad spoke quietly under his breath. “You’re a good girl.”

“Do you want to sit in your chair?” Mum suggested.

“Yes,” Dad said. “M-my chair.”

Bobble watched Dad stand up and walk to the armchair by the fireplace. He slumped down, sighing.

Once he was settled, Bobble and her mum stepped out of the back door into the garden. It had just rained. The herbs and plant pots around the door were giving off a rich earthy smell.

“I have to go away for two nights,” Mum told her.

“Why?” Bobble asked, her voice low.

Bobble’s mum was a gardener. Well, her dad was a gardener, but Mum had to take on a lot of his work when he was unwell. They were responsible for a huge garden – a tamed wilderness – attached to a manor house on the coast in Cornwall. It was all owned by Lord Trescatho, and Bobble and her parents lived right next to the garden in a cottage that came with the job. It wasn’t her work that was taking Bobble’s mum away from home.

“Just like before, there’s something I have to do,” Mum said. “And please don’t ask where I’m going, as I can’t tell you. And you mustn’t tell anyone I’m away.”

Bobble said nothing. But inside she was asking herself where her mum went on these trips. Why did she sometimes come back all muddy and tired?

“So you need to look after your dad when I’m away,” Mum broke into Bobble’s thoughts. “You know

what he's like. He might be fine. He might not. And if he's not, you're in charge. Understood?"

"You don't need to worry," Bobble said dutifully.

"Thank you," Mum said. "And there's one more thing."

What now? Bobble wondered as Mum went into the house and took a package down from one of the shelves by the back door.

"I need you to take this to Cadan," Mum said. She glanced at the clock in the kitchen. "He'll be on the cliff above the beach in ten minutes. It's for his dad."

Bobble looked at the package in her mum's hands. It was small, wrapped in brown paper and tied with string. She wanted to ask what it was but knew she wouldn't get an answer.

They both heard the sound of Dad snoring gently in his chair.

"And make sure Dad eats when I'm not here," Mum said, holding the package out to Bobble. "Please?"

Bobble felt a rush of panic. “I don’t understand,” she complained. “Where do you go when you go away? Why is it a secret?”

“Can you take the parcel now, please?” Mum asked in a stern voice. “And make sure no one sees it.”

Bobble took the parcel. It was heavier than it looked.