

# The Book of Tudllan

Tim Hamer



Copyright © 2024 Tim Hamer

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, this publication may only be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form or by any means, with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publishers.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Troubador  
Unit E2 Airfield Business Park,  
Harrison Road, Market Harborough,  
Leicestershire. LE16 7UL  
Tel: 0116 2792299  
Email: books@troubador.co.uk  
Web: www.troubador.co.uk

ISBN 978 1805142 157

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed by XXXXXX

Typeset in 12pt Minion Pro by Troubador Publishing Ltd, Leicester, UK

**T**

*For my mother, Margaret Heaton Hamer, my wife,  
Christine and sons, Ben and Harry*

*Thanks also to C. Peever for her beautiful illustrations*



*There are certain special places,  
Places so ancient, unchanging and elemental  
They shape and forge the very nature of all who dwell  
in them*



# Contents

1	A Mystery in the Wood	1
2	The White House	7
3	The Battle	18
4	School	23
5	A Room with a View	31
6	The Discovery	35
7	Dr Finch	40
8	The Cup	44
9	The Bishop's Abbey	58
10	A Summer in Shadow	62
11	The Raid	73
12	Hidden in Plain Sight	85
13	An Old Photograph	97
14	Winter Comes	100
15	A Shot in the Dark	106
16	When the Night Is Darkest	113
17	Spring – The Season of Rebirth	122
18	Epilogue	127
	Notes	134





# 1

## A Mystery in the Wood



Alfie shrank quickly back into the shadow of the tree next to him. He pressed his face against its rough bark and froze. A faint tingle of fear raced down his spine. Just down the wooded slope, about twenty metres in front of him, a beam of white torchlight scythed through the cold dusk air, flicking left and right, and a rough, deep voice shouted commands. A heavy car door slammed shut.

Alfie often walked to the Abbey wood in the evening. It helped him wind down from the day and collect his thoughts. Some of the trees were huge. Oaks, chestnut, spruce, beech and ash towered above him as he strolled. During the day, sunlight would dance through the green leaves, making flickering



shadow-patterns on the soft leafy floor. Birds would flit through the branches, twittering, looking for tasty insects and bugs.


Further through the wood lay the ruins of the old Abbey. There, the tall trees thinned and the land transformed into the remnants of great orchards, which had once been full of damson, pear and apple trees tended by the nuns and monks of the Abbey, planted over a thousand years ago for firewood, timber and food. The orchards had dwindled to tangled scrub now, with self-seeded and straggly trees poking through layers of brambles. Reaching the ruins, Alfie would often sit on the huge limestone step of the Abbey's entrance, looking out to the sea. After a sunny day, the stone would soak up the sun's heat and become warm to sit on. It was a great viewpoint from which to observe the coast, as dusk approached. The ancient step had been worn into a scooped shape through heavy use, and he would often wonder who else had sat there over the thousand years since, looking out over the same sea. Who were they, what were their lives like and what did they think about the world? At night, however, it was silent. Velvety blackness was all-surrounding and muffled both light and sound. Deep earthy scents lingered in hollows and sometimes mist would creep along the ground. Alfie liked twilight the best, the in-between bit when light and shadow mingled. It was his special place and time, when it felt magical, secret and strangely safe.






Not tonight, though. Ahead of him, in the half-light, he could now make out three figures. Three tall men in combat kit, standing around a large black truck which had enormous wheels, his own height. The truck had ploughed up the surrounding soil into deep ruts as it had turned and stopped on the path. Alfie held his breath and watched. No-one came to the Abbey wood at night. Only foxes, bats and the occasional weirdo. Alfie included himself in the last category.


At that moment, a broad shaft of moonlight moved slowly across the forest floor until it bathed the truck in its bright silvery light. The figures positioned themselves around the truck, like celebrity minders, then one of them tapped three times on the truck door. The door swung open and a small figure stepped



out, carrying what looked like a suitcase. Alfie strained his head forward a little around the tree, so he could see better. The small figure was a smartly dressed woman, with pale skin and short, silver hair. She wore a dark suit, buttoned up to her neck and round, gold-rimmed glasses perched on the end of her nose. She looked around, seeming to check for further sound or movement. Then placed the suitcase on a low, flat tree stump, and took out a pair of white gloves from her side pocket and carefully put them on. She opened the suitcase and looked in, as if it was a deep well.



As she dipped her hands into it, twinkles of soft yellow, red and green lights escaped. Out came a book, a large leather-bound book, locked with a metal clasp and studded with brightly coloured jewels that glittered in the moonlight. She took out a large, ornate key from her pocket and inserted it into the lock, turned it once, and it sprang open with a “click”. Then, using two hands to lift the heavy cover, she opened the book, and turned quickly to a page that had been marked with a long ribbon. She ran her gloved finger along the written lines of the book. He saw her lips move, as her eyes scanned the text, but he was too far away to make out the words.



She looked up, in the direction towards the ruins of the old Abbey below, and a smile momentarily played across her face but quickly vanished again. She then carefully closed the book, and a crisp “click” issued from the book’s metal clasp as it locked again.

Gently placing it back in the suitcase, she closed it and swung it back into the truck.



As his eyes adjusted to the twilight, Alfie could now see the other three men better. They were all kitted out identically in dark combat trousers, heavy boots and roll neck jumpers, like commandos. Two had black beanies on their heads while the third, built like a rugby prop forward, had a shock of buzz cut red hair and a goatee beard.

The woman turned and spoke in a clear commanding way. “Poliakov, take your men down to the Abbey.”

There was a grunt of “Da, boss” from the goatee, and the rest of the men started to move down a narrow, muddy track to the ruins. The moonlight faded as a cloud passed in front, and an inky black manifested around them. *They’re going away*, Alfie thought, and instinctively breathed a sigh of relief. But in the new silence it sounded like a sneeze.

“What was that...?!” snapped the woman. “... Check it out, Poliakov.”

The goatee giant turned and began to crash through the undergrowth, like an armoured tank, heading straight for him. A sudden prickle of fear tingled all over Alfie’s body. Had he seen him? No, he couldn’t have. Could he? Should he run? He shrank back and pressed even closer behind the tree trunk. If he ran now, he could probably escape, he knew the fields, woods and tracks around here well, and he could run fast. The man was now almost in front of him, his torch beaming into the undergrowth near Alfie’s feet, and he was squinting into the dark that surrounded his tree.

*Run!* his mind screamed, *Run!* But Alfie’s legs wouldn’t move. The man reached forward, and Alfie closed his eyes.