

The Windspinner

Berlie Doherty

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About the Book

Tam has a secret. Great-grandpa Toby has been left behind in the land of Faery and the King, Oban, is hiding in Tam's cupboard!

When Oban changes himself into a little boy and starts causing all sorts of trouble, Tam and Aunt California set off to Faery to bring Great-grandpa home. But what will they do about Oban and the angry Flame-reader fairy, who has cast a spell on Great-grandpa . . . ?

The Windspinner

Berlie Doherty

Illustrated by Lesley Harker

RHCP DIGITAL

For Tommy and Hannah

This is what happened last time:

Oban, the king of the fairies, just loved Great-grandpa Toby's humming machine. It was really a harmonica, and sometimes it sounded wonderful, and sometimes it didn't, but he wanted it because he loved man-magic. He wanted it as much as he had wanted Great-grandpa Toby's starburster, which was really a kaleidoscope. He sent his fairy daughter, Pix, to bring Great-grandpa Toby and Tam to Faery, but she had to turn Great-grandpa into a nine-year-old boy to get him there. He was given a fairy name, Tobit, and was captured by Oban's mother, the fearsome Damson-hag. Tam found him with the help of the oldest fairy of them all, the terrifying Flame-reader. With the Blue Bear and Pix he rescued Tobit and locked the Damson-hag inside her own golden cage. At last they came face to face with King Oban, who made Tobit change places with him, and told Tam that he wanted to go back home with him and learn about man-magic.



The Secret

Tam had a secret. It was such a wonderful, exciting, strange, troublesome secret that he knew he had to share it with someone. All night he kept thinking about it, wondering whether he had dreamed everything that had happened, but as soon as it was daylight he could make out a strange blue light at the end of his bed. When the blue light grew stronger, it was just possible to make out a figure, shimmering so brightly that it hurt Tam's eyes to look at him. He knew it was Oban.

"So you really are here," he sighed. "I thought it was a magic dream."

"Don't tell anyone who I am," Oban said. "I want to be a secret. Don't tell them anything about my kingdom."

"All right, but you mustn't let anyone see you," Tam said. "I can't pretend you're just an ordinary person, can I?"

They touched hands, and the blue light disappeared, but the air in Tam's room had a strange, fluttering kind of excitement about it, and Tam could tell that Oban was still there.



But he knew it was going to be very hard, keeping such a huge secret from his parents. When he went downstairs for breakfast, he felt as if he was bursting, as if he had *I've got a secret* written all over his forehead, as if you only had to look into his eyes to know what it was. He very nearly told Mum, just before he went to school.

"Everything all right, Tam?" she asked, and he nearly blurted it out then and there, but Tam's little sister Baby Blue fell over and had to be comforted, and then the moment was gone, because Dad started asking if anyone had seen his lunchbox.

"I know I made my sandwiches last night," he said. "Lovely smelly stilton cheese sandwiches. And yours have gone too, Tam. What's going on?"

Tam knew very well what had happened to the sandwiches. Well, he could answer that bit without letting any secrets out.

"I ate mine, and Great-grandpa Toby ate yours," he said.

"What, in the middle of the night?" Dad asked. "Whatever for?"

“Erm, we were hungry,” Tam said. “But it wasn’t last night, it was ages ago,” and then he shut up, because he remembered that time was different in that other place he had been to. He rooted around in his school bag and brought out the two empty lunchboxes. He couldn’t help smiling inside himself to think that they’d been all the way to Faery and back.



“I’ll have to make more, but there’s no smelly stilton left,” Dad grumbled. “And where is Great-grandpa Toby anyway? He’s usually blowing that humming machine of his by now, the noisy old nuisance.”

“He’s out,” said Tam.

“*Out?* Where out, at this time of the morning?”

Tam ran upstairs, feeling miserable. There was no way he could tell Mum and Dad where Great-grandpa Toby really was. They’d never believe him, and it was all part of the terrible, wonderful secret. They would probably never see him again either. How could he tell them that?

He could hear Mum running up the stairs to look in Great-grandpa’s room. “His bed’s not been slept in!” she shouted

down the stairs. "He's been out all night!"

Tam flung himself on his bed. Spinner, his little silver spider who had come home with him from Faery, danced up to him across the pillow, singing a sweet, comforting song. "Ssh!" said Tam. "Don't let them hear you!"



Spinner curled up into a ball and bobbed back up the lampshade, tucking her silvery thread behind her as she did so. Baby Blue crawled into the room, tugging her favourite teddy along with her. She propped herself up into a wobbly sitting position and pressed Teddy's tummy.



"My word!" Teddy growled, sounding just like Great-grandpa.

Mum rushed to the room. "Here he is," she called to Dad, and then stopped, staring around. "That's funny, I was sure I heard his voice then," she said.

Tam picked up Teddy in case Blue pressed his tummy again.

“No Great-grandpa here,” he said. “Keep quiet,” he whispered to the bear. When the fairy Pix had turned Great-grandpa Toby into a nine-year-old boy, she had left his voice behind in Blue’s teddy bear, in case he ever needed it again. How could Tam tell Mum that all that was left of Great-grandpa Toby was his growly old voice? He didn’t know where to start, so he didn’t begin at all. He just frowned at Teddy and put him carefully on the shelf, well out of Blue’s way.

“Get yourself ready for school,” Mum told Tam. She propped Blue up in the little baby chair that was kept in Tam’s room so that they could listen to bedtime stories together. “I’ll bath you in a minute, Baby Blue. I’m going to ring Great-aunt California to see if she’s heard anything from him.”

Blue chuckled up at Tam. Tam wondered if it counted, telling secrets to a baby who wouldn’t understand, and who couldn’t talk yet. She certainly wouldn’t be able to pass the secret on. He decided to try. He had to tell somebody.

“Blue,” he said. “Guess where Great-grandpa Toby is?”

As soon as he said that, the air around him shivered with hundreds of tiny blue sparks.

“You promised. You promised!” a voice thundered. Blue burped in fright as the strangest person she had ever seen appeared: a tall creature with wild silver hair like the fluff on a dandelion, and eyes like round golden suns. He was dressed in a cloak that shifted and shimmered from white to silver to blue and back again.



“And you promised to keep hidden!” hissed Tam.
“Disappear, Oban!”

For a second the two glared at each other, Tam and the glimmering stranger, and then Mum called up the stairs, “School, Tam!”

The stranger disappeared; Tam ran downstairs. Blue clapped her hands together, not knowing whether to laugh with wonder or cry with fright.

“My word,” Teddy growled, all on his own on his shelf.



Back to School

It was bewildering for Tam to be back in the swirl of the schoolyard again. Apparently he had only been away from home for one night. No one had missed him, and yet so much had happened that he seemed to have been away for ages; weeks and weeks. He had had so many wonderful adventures and survived so many dangers, and all because of Great-grandpa Toby's humming machine. None of his school friends had ever been through anything like that, he was quite sure, and yet he had no way of sharing it with them. It was all part of the incredible secret. If only he could tell Shaz or Harry.

"What did you do last night?" he asked Harry.

"Watched telly, went to bed," Harry said.

"What did you do?" he asked Shaz.

Shaz shrugged. "Played a computer game with my dad."

Tam glanced round. "Ask me what I did," he whispered.



"All right. What did you do?" Shaz asked.

"I can't tell you! But it was really exciting," Tam yelled. He ran away and the boys started chasing him, but they were suddenly distracted by something that was happening by the school gate and they ran off in the other direction. One of the girls, Molly, was shouting to her friends, giggling about something that she had just seen. At that moment they were all called in for the end of break, and once again Tam had lost the chance of giving anyone a clue about his secret.

"What was all that about, Molly?" Mrs Ryan asked. "I could hear you shouting about something in the playground."

Full of excitement and importance, Molly told her that she had just seen a strange person peering through the railings.

"He was really weird," Molly giggled. "Really, really weird."

"A stranger?" Mrs Ryan said, frowning. "What was he like?"

"He had fluffy silver hair, and he was dressed in funny shiny clothes," Molly said. "He was a bit like a boy but he wasn't a boy really. Perhaps he was an angel."

Tam's heart started thumping. He knew exactly who it was. So Oban had followed him to school. Right, he thought, if Oban could break his promise, so could he. But everyone was laughing at Molly.