



*The*  
**Storyteller's**  
\* \* \* \* \*  
Tony Mitton **Secrets**  
*Illustrated by Peter Bailey*

# Contents

Cover  
About the Book  
Title Page  
Dedication

Chapter One  
Chapter Two  
Chapter Three  
Chapter Four  
Chapter Five  
Chapter Six  
Chapter Seven

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## About the Book

Some secrets are not worth knowing ... and some secrets you might already know. But the secrets in this book are special. They are the secrets of wonders, strange enchantments, buried treasure and magical far-off places.

They are the Storyteller's secrets and it is a very lucky child who gets to hear them.

*Tony Mitton's story poems are a rare and special delight. Read them and be amazed.*

The  
Storyteller's  
Secrets

Tony Mitton



*Illustrated by*  
Peter Bailey

**RHCP DIGITAL**

*To anyone who ever told a story and anyone who ever listened.*  
T.M.

*For Osian and Inigo with love.*  
P.B.



NOT SO VERY far from here, nor so very long from now, there were two children. Their names were Toby and Tess and they were twins. They lived with their mother in a cosy cottage beside a village green. In the middle of the green stood a great old chestnut tree, and beneath the tree was a stout wooden bench where Toby and Tess sat when they hadn't much to do or when there were things they wanted to talk about.

One day their mother shooed them out of the house. 'Go out,' she said. 'Go and play like children should. I've things to do and I can't be having you under my feet all day. The village is safe, the weather is good. And the fresh air will help you grow healthy and strong. I've made you a picnic for your lunch. Go out now and enjoy this fine day that the world has given you.'

Toby and Tess sat on the bench beneath the chestnut tree, wondering what the day would bring them, wondering where they should go and what they should do. And it was just at that moment that they first saw Teller.

Toby saw him first and nudged Tess. 'Look.'  
'A stranger!' gasped Tess.

At a distance, against the skyline, all they could make out was a rather ragged silhouette. The figure was dressed in an old-fashioned robe, like a character in a story book. He held a staff in his right hand and on his back there was a bundle.

The stranger paused on the crest of the hill. He looked back the way he had come. Then he gazed all around him, as if surveying the world as far as he could see. Then he peered down into the village and began to take the path that led towards where Toby and Tess sat beneath the great old chestnut tree.

‘He’s coming this way!’ said Toby.

As the stranger drew closer the children could see more and more of him. He was an old man with a weathered face, browned by the sun. His long, tousled hair was greying, as was his straggly beard. On his feet he wore stout leather sandals and in his hand his staff was like a knotty tree branch. Although he was old he seemed sturdy, as if he could walk for miles if need be. And his eyes! How they twinkled with an air of mischief and mystery.



He was making for the bench as if he meant to sit down. So Toby and Tess got up, partly out of respect for a grown-up, and partly out of uneasiness about such an odd character.

He flumped down onto the bench and gave a grateful sigh.

'Ah,' he said wearily, 'how good to sit down at last.' He took a swig from a flask that was slung round his neck on a leather strap. 'Water. The stuff of life, eh? But no lunch for me today. The squirrels took it out of my bundle while I was resting. Cheeky little devils. Still, they have to live, I suppose. So they take what they can get. And today they got my lunch.'



'You can share our picnic,' said Toby. 'Our mother has sent us out of the house today. She's busy. I hate it when she makes us go out. I wanted to play indoors. But she's made us a picnic so you can have some of that if you like. It's cheese sandwiches, plums and home-made biscuits. She makes good biscuits.'



The old man smiled at Toby. 'What a very kind offer,' he said warmly. 'I should like that. But if I'm to share your lunch I must give you something in return. Let me tell you a tale, an old story, a story about a mother who did not love, but hated instead, and about what happened as a result. Now I can see from this fine picnic of yours that you have a mother who loves you, who cares for you. And if she's turned you out of the house today it's because she wants to clean and cook and make good so it's all the more welcoming for you when you go back to it this evening for your tea. But imagine a mother who wanted to cast you out for good and all, who wanted never to see you again and who hoped that you might perish in the woods so she need never be troubled by you more. Now is that not a terrible thought?'

The children nodded. It was a terrible thought indeed.

'But I'm getting ahead of myself,' said the old man. 'If I'm to share your lunch and tell you one of my tales I must introduce myself. And I should find out who I'm talking to as well. That is only good and proper.' He looked from one child to the other and said quite simply, 'My name is Teller.'

I am called that because I tell tales. Good ones. Old ones.  
From long ago. And you are ...?' he asked.



*The two children seated themselves on the soft grass and Teller began*