



Goldilocks and the
Three Bears

Once upon a time...

on the edge of a great big forest there lived a little girl whom everyone called Goldilocks because of her long yellow hair. One morning she decided to go for a walk in the forest by herself. She hadn't been walking very long when she came to a little house. She couldn't see anybody about, and the door wasn't locked, so she pushed it open and went in.

The first thing she noticed was a delicious smell of porridge coming from three bowls on a table – a great big bowl, a middle-sized bowl and a little tiny bowl. Goldilocks picked up a spoon and tasted the porridge in the great big bowl. “This one's too hot,” she said. She tasted the porridge in the middle-sized bowl.

“This one's too cold,” she said. So then she tasted the porridge in the little tiny bowl.

“This one's just right,” she said, and ate it all up. Then she

looked round and saw three chairs – a great big chair, a middle-sized chair and a little tiny chair. First Goldilocks sat down in the great big chair.

“This one’s too hard,” she said. She sat in the middle-sized chair.

“This one’s too soft,” she said. So then she sat in the little tiny chair.

“This one’s just right,” she said, bouncing on the cushion. But she bounced so hard that the little chair broke all to pieces.

Goldilocks decided to explore upstairs. She crept up the wooden stairs and found herself in a long bedroom with three beds in it – a great big one, a middle-sized one and a little tiny one. They all looked so inviting that she suddenly felt very tired. She lay down upon the great big bed.

“This one’s too hard,” she said. She lay down upon the middle-sized bed.

“This one’s too soft,” she said. So then she lay down upon the little tiny bed.

“This one’s just right,” she said. And it was so comfortable that she fell fast asleep.

Now what Goldilocks didn’t know was that the little house belonged to three bears, a daddy bear, a mummy bear and a little baby bear, who had gone for a walk in the forest while their porridge cooled. When they came back they could tell straight away that someone had broken into their house. The first thing they noticed was the porridgy mess on their breakfast table.

“Someone’s been eating my porridge,” said the daddy bear in a deep growly voice.

“Someone’s been eating my porridge,” said the mummy bear in a high ladylike voice.

“And someone’s been eating my porridge,” said the baby bear in his little baby voice, “and they’ve eaten it all up!”

Then they looked round and saw the chairs.

“Someone’s been sitting in my chair,” said the daddy bear.

“Someone’s been sitting in my chair,” said the mummy bear.

“And someone’s been sitting in my chair,” said the baby bear, “and they’ve broken it all to pieces!”

The bears realised that there might be a dangerous criminal on the loose, so they crept slowly up the stairs and there were the beds all ruckled and rumped.

“Someone’s been sleeping in my bed,” said the daddy bear.

“Someone’s been sleeping in my bed,” said the mummy bear.

“And someone’s been sleeping in my bed,” said the baby bear, “and they’re still in it!”

And at that Goldilocks woke up, and saw the three bears standing round her. She was very frightened, as well she might be, and it would have served her right if the bears had eaten her up. But they were so surprised to see her that she had time to jump out of bed and out of the window into the forest before they thought to chase her. She ran straight home to her mother and never went into the forest alone again.

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Notes for grown-ups

The three bears' first appearance in print was in 1837, in an anonymously published book by the poet laureate, Robert Southey. He may have heard traditional versions, or he may have been inspired by a Norwegian story. Southey's bears were visited by a badly behaved old woman who uses bad language and, it is hinted, comes to a bad end. She didn't become a little girl until 1849, and went through several names referring to the colour of her hair – Little Silver Hair, Silverlocks and Golden Hair – before settling on Goldilocks in the early twentieth century.

The bears were originally a trio of bachelors. Southey used different type sizes to suggest their different voices, and this eventually led to their identification with family roles.

The appeal of the story rests in its repetitiveness, which small children enjoy, and the opportunity for the storyteller to demonstrate a repertoire of voices.

“Goldilocks” has become a term – “the Goldilocks effect” - used in astronomy and economics to describe something that is “just right”.