

What My Mother Left Out of the Story

There was once a girl
who was not good—
she was often quite naughty
and so restless!

She could not be kept

quiet

She could not be kept

at home.

She would often run out
when she was told

not to do so

She suffered.

She ran here. She ran there. She ran wild.

(She had often been punished for this naughty trick.)

She could not be kept.

She went so far she found herself
in quite a lonely place.

Empty.

She was too weary.

She jumped and escaped—falling
on some soft grass below.

She got up—

and ran as fast as she could.

She went so far she found herself.

Ever after this,

she was a good girl.

ABOUT THE POEM

“What My Mother Left Out of the Story” was created from “The Three Bears” in *Tick-Tock Tales for Children*, edited by Watty Piper (1922). About the poem and the process of composing it, Sarah Cummins Small writes:

I’ve been thinking about Goldilocks lately; in fact, I’d been writing a poem about how my mother elaborated on the story of Goldilocks, adding details that made the story more beautiful: specific flowers, how sweet the porridge was, the quilt patterns on the bed. When I saw this prompt, I pulled out an old nursery rhyme book that had been gifted to my great uncle as a child. The first story in the collection is “The Three Bears”—and what a different story than the one my mother told me as a child! The lines I found all came together: what she left out of the story—and yet, lines she speaks today. My mother is now in her late 90s and has mild dementia. Based on various factors, her daily judgment of me comes down to this: either I am a naughty girl, or I am a good girl. As I pulled out phrases from the story, I realized that this is, in fact, how I felt as a little girl, a teen, and even a young woman. Maybe we all feel like that. In my 50s now, I am back to being reduced to two qualities in her eyes: naughty or good. There is no in-between.

