

The Story of The Three Bears

Eleanor Mure



Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books





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THE STORY OF
THE THREE BEARS

metrically related, with illustrations locating it at

+ Cecyl Lodge +

in September 1831

BY

ELIZABETH WYLLIE

*The tale of the THREE BEARS
Little Horbook declares
He perfectly well can rehearse;
But Aunt Nello will tell,
Pretty nearly as well,
The very same Story in verse.*

The
celebrated nursery tale
of the

THREE BEARS

put into verse
and embellished with drawings

for a
Birth-day Present

to
HORACE BROKE

Sept: 26: 1831.

1.

Many ages ago, it was common, I find,
For dumb creatures to talk just as well as mankind:
Birds and Beasts met together 'tarrange their affairs;
Nay! the Frogs of the day, must needs give themselves airs,
And apeing their betters, not pleas'd with their station,
Talk'd of having a King to rule over their nation.

2.

In these curious days, it did raise no surprise,
(Though now 'twould make evry one open their eyes)
That three Bears, very sick of their woods and their den,
Should fancy a home 'mongst the dwellings of men;
So not caring a fig for what any one said,
They bought a large house, already furnished.



"Should fancy a home 'mongst the dwellings of men."

An old woman liv'd near them, who to their house went,
 As to make their acquaintance she was fully bent.
 They refused to receive her; and at this rebuff,
 The angry old woman went home in a huff;
 "Adzooks!" she exclaim'd, "what impertinent Bears!
 "I would fain know their title to give themselves airs."

She, without more reflection, resolv'd not to let
 The matter rest here; and work'd into a pet,
 She made up her mind, to watch them safe out,
 Then not at all thinking what she was about,
 She determin'd, without the Bears' leave, to explore
 Each part of the house; so popp'd in at the door.



"Adzooks!" she exclaim'd, "what impertinent Bears!"

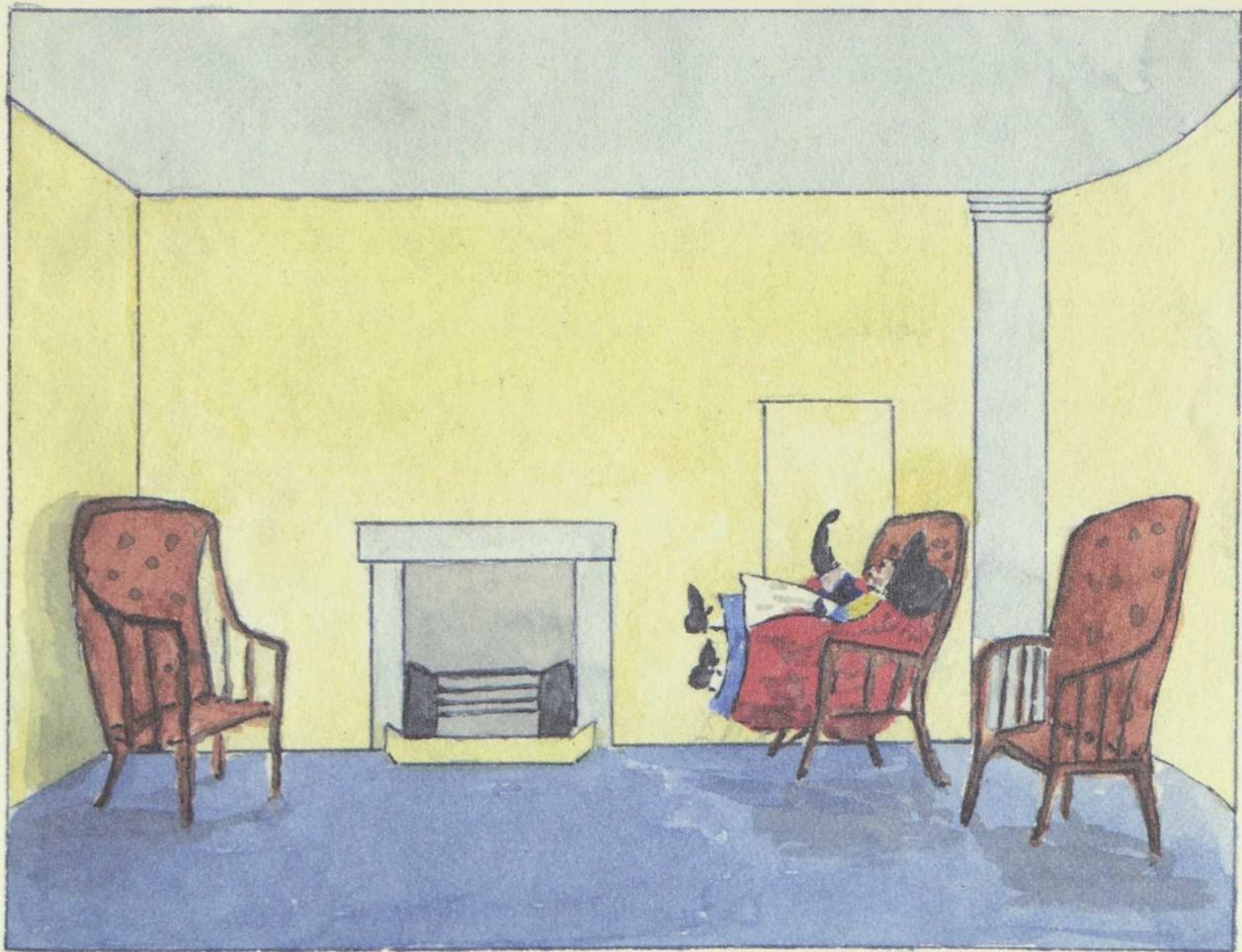
She went to the parlour; and there she did see
Some bowls of good milk, by one, two, and three:
She tasted the first, and then spit it about;
She drank some of the second, and threw it all out;
But when of the third, she had taken one sup,
Oh! greedy old woman! she drank it all up.



"Oh! greedy old woman! she drank it all up!"

6.

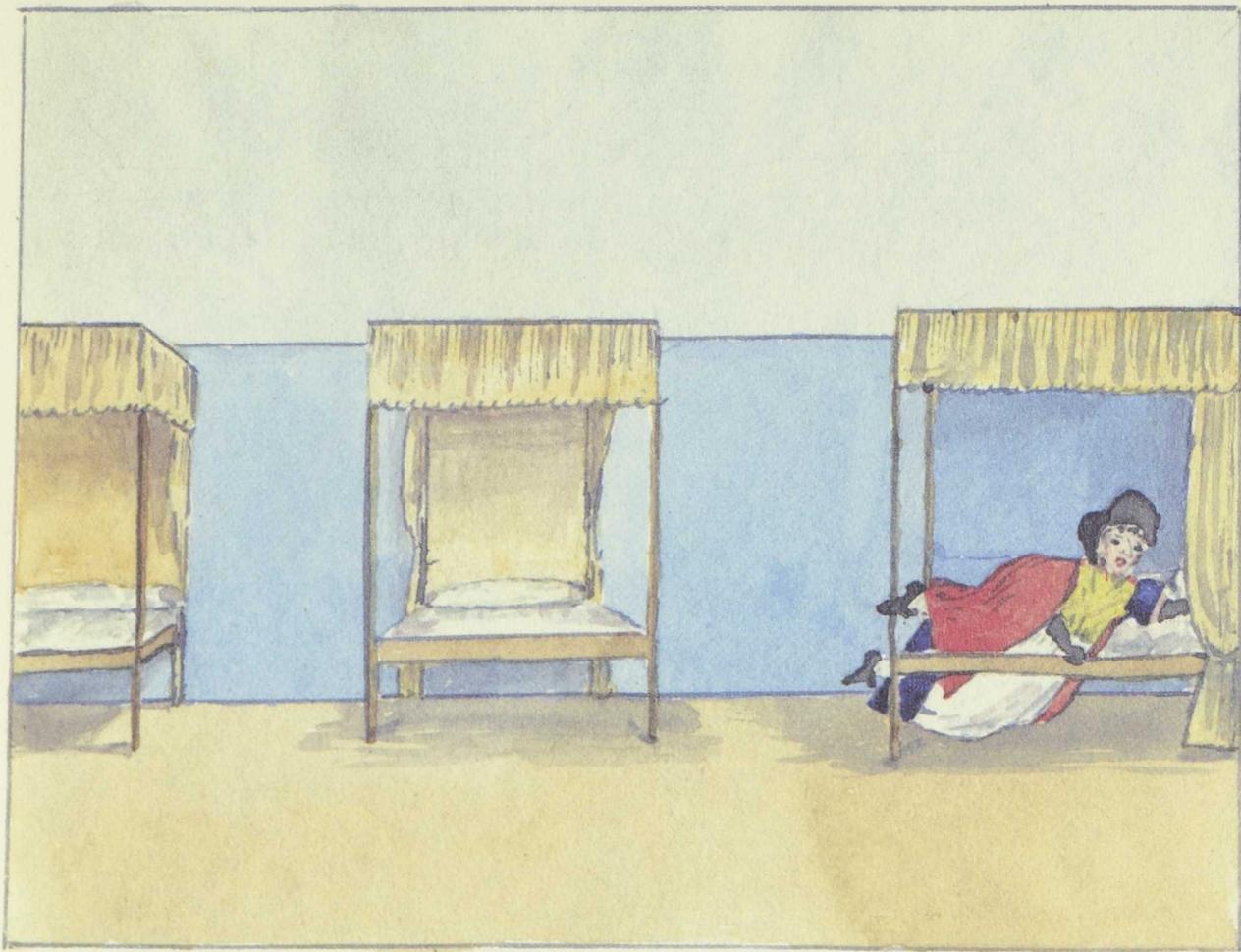
She went to the drawing-room, and she found there,
For each of the Bears, a most ponderous chair;
She sat down in the first, but she found it too rough;
She sat down in the second but that she felt tough;
She sat down in the third, without much ado;
When, good-lack-a-day! the bottom burst through.



"When, good lack-a-day! the bottom burst through!"

7.

She went to the bedroom, and there she did find
Three nice-looking beds, the best of their kind;
She lay down in the first; but she found little ease:
She lay down in the second, which still less did please;
She lay down in the third, without much ado,
When, good lack-a-day! the bottom burst through!



"When, good lack-a-day! the bottomz burst through!"

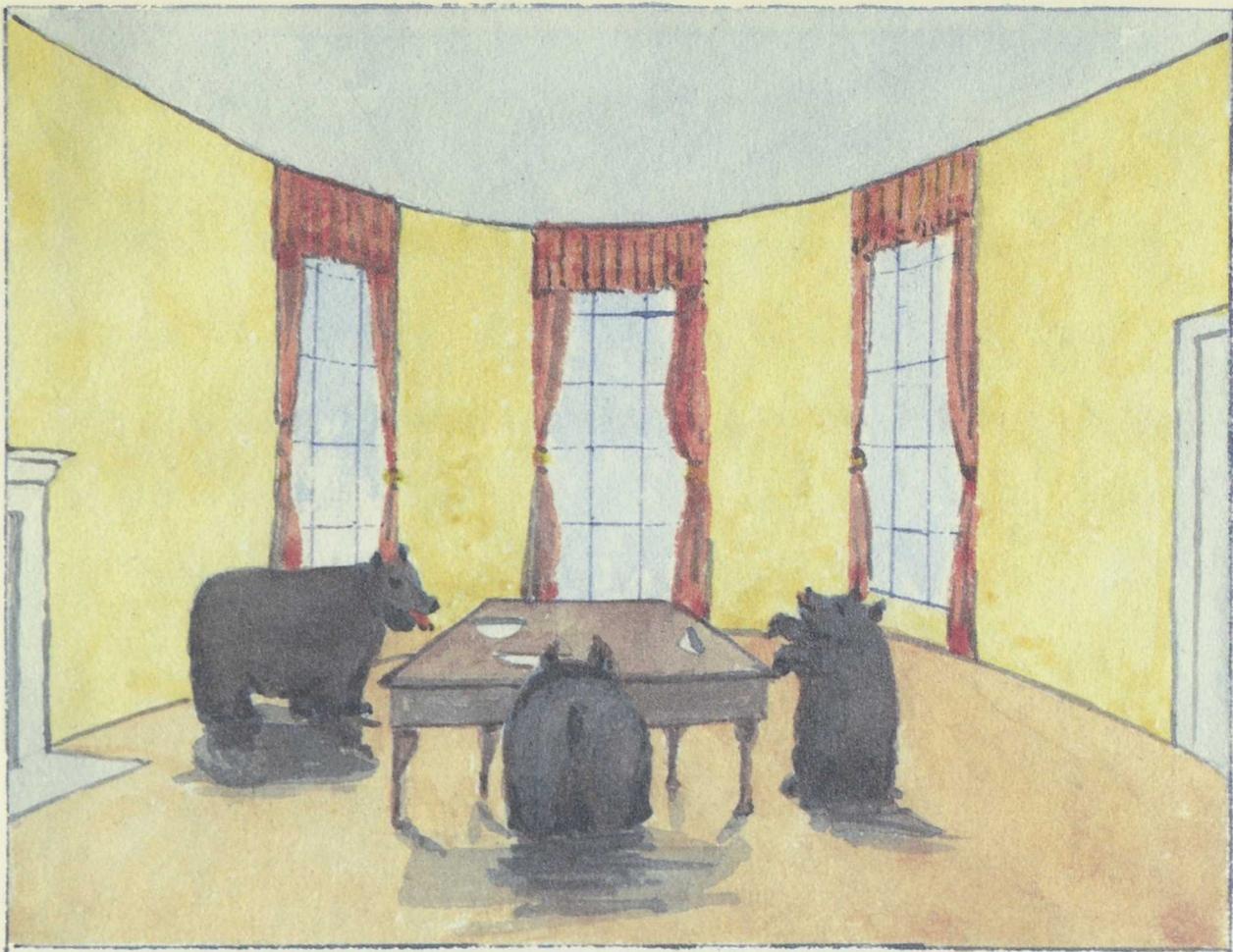
She look'd out of the window, and there she descried
The bears coming home-wards, with dignified stride.
"Oh!", quoth she, "I am lost, if the bears find me here."
So forth with in a closet, all trembling with fear,
She hid herself; hoping she might get away,
Before the three Bruins could find where she lay.



"The bears coming homewards with dignified stride."

Meanwhile the poor bears who had been out to roam,
 Were coming as fast as they could to their home:
 Tired, hungry, and longing for food and for rest,
 Unsuspecting of harm, to the parlour they prest;
 As they opened the door, a sight greeted their eyes,
 Which fill'd their rough breasts both with wrath & surprise.

The first bear, roaring loud, exclaim'd, "What do I see?"
 "Who's been tasting my good milk, without leave of me?"
 The second more gently said; "I can't conceive"
 "Who's been drinking my milk without asking my leave?"
 The little bear scream'd, looking into his cup,
 "Who's been drinking my milk, and drunk it all up?"



"Who's been drinking my milk, and drank it all up?"

They went to the drawing-room; where the first bear.

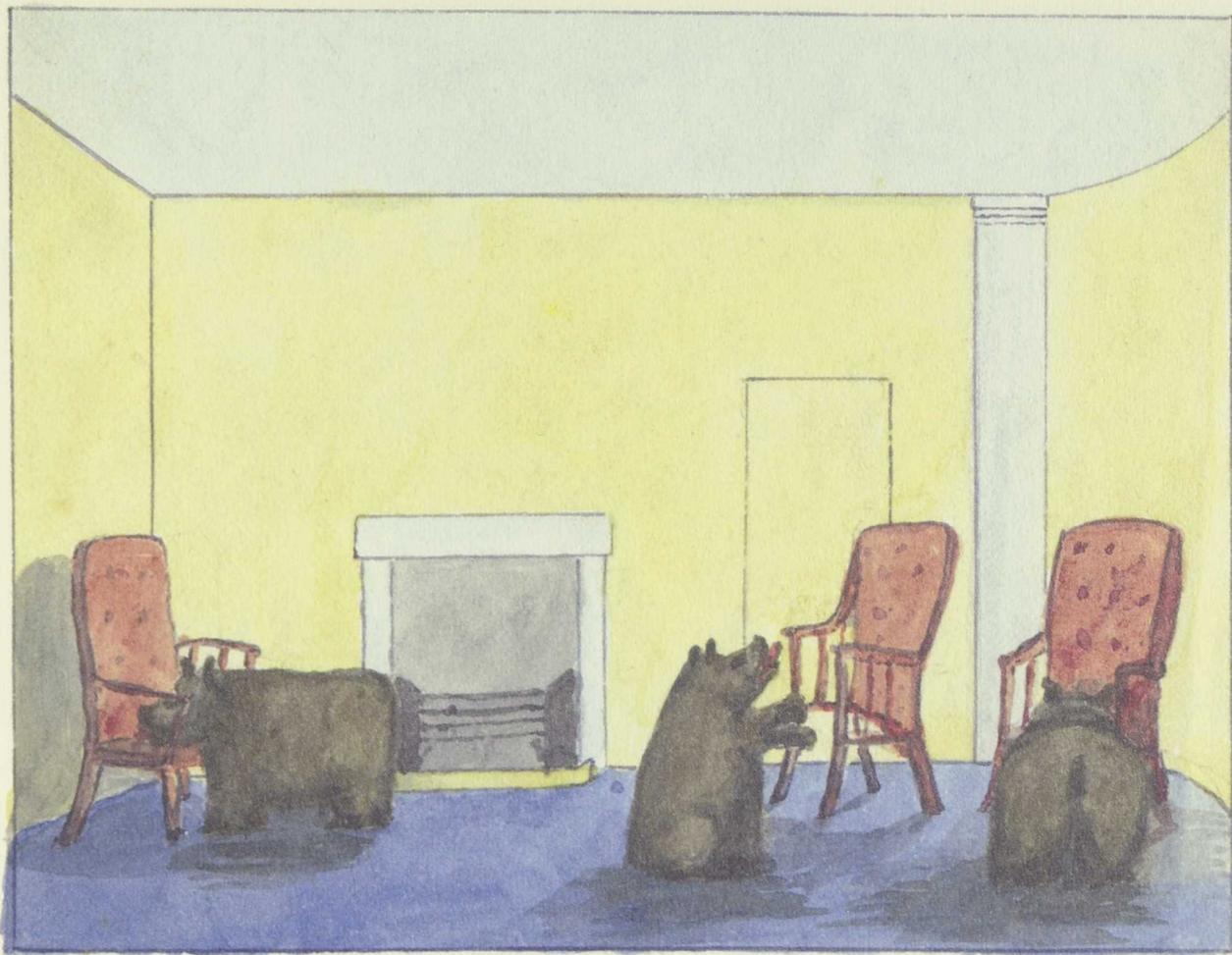
Roz'd, "Who, without leave, has sat down in my chair?"

The second, astonish'd, more mildly did say,

"Who's been sitting in my chair, when I was away?"

The little bear madly cried; "What shall I do?"

"Who has sat in my chair, and the bottom burst thro'?"



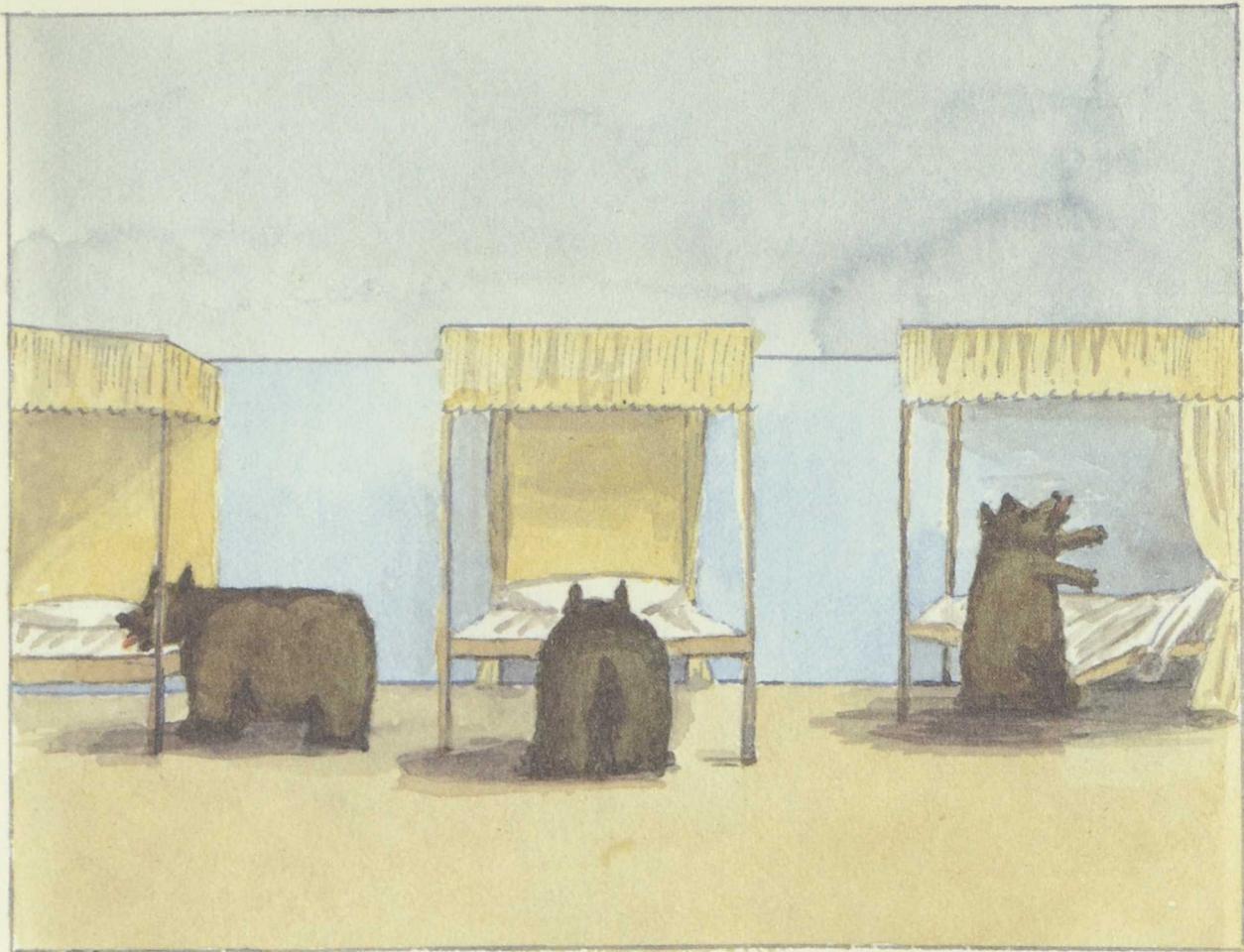
"Who has sat in my chair, and the bottom burst thro?"

To the bedroom they went; and the first bear then said
"Who since I've been out, has lain down in my bed?"

The second bear, quite aghast, fiercely did say,
"Who has had the presumption in my bed to lay?"

The little bear scream'd out, "Oh! what shall I do?"

"Who in my bed has lain, and the bottom burst thro'?"



"Who, in my bed has lain, and the bottom burst thro?"

Indignant they run the delinquent to find;
Each corner they search, and each door look behind:
The closet they open, exclaiming, "She's here!"
And drag forth the dame, half expiring with fear;
Quite determin'd to punish her, long they debate
What, in justice, should be their old enemy's fate.



"And drag forth the dame, half expiring with fear."

14.

On the fire they throw her, but burn her they couldn't;
In the water they put her, but drown there she wouldn't;
They seize her before all the wondering people,
And chuck her aloft on St Paul's church-yard steeple;
And if she's still there when you earnestly look,
You will see her quite plainly...my dear little Horbook!



"On the fire they throw her, but burn her they couldn't"



"In the water they put her, but drown there she wouldn't."



"And chuck her aloft on St Paul's church-yard steeple:"

Eleanor Mure's manuscript *The Story of the Three Bears*

Eleanor Mure was a devoted aunt, as this manuscript shows. The booklet, created as a birthday present for her four-year-old nephew, Horace Broke (who pronounced his name "Horbook"), features spirited, though uneven, verses and equally charming and energetic watercolour illustrations.

Mure's manuscript, dated 1831, is considered the first recorded version, and the story is not found in print until Robert Southey's prose version in *The Doctor*, volume IV (1837). A second print version by "G.N.," consisting of a retelling of Southey's tale, appeared the same year. Its derivation is acknowledged in the dedication, addressed to the "Unknown Author of 'The Doctor,' / Great original Concoctor / Of the rare story of the Bears / Their porridge-pots, their beds and chairs."

According to Judith St. John, the bibliographer who first described the manuscript, these three early versions all depict the intruder as a "meddlesome old woman," not to be changed to a naughty little girl until Joseph Cundall's *A Treasury of Pleasure Books* was published in 1850. Cundall explained to readers that this version of Southey's tale, reproduced with permission, was changed because "the tale is better known with 'Silver-Hair and because there are so many other stories of old women." Subsequent authors, including Walter Crane (1876) and Leslie Brooke (1904) adopted Cundall's change, using the variant names "Silverlocks" and "Goldenlocks," but the most popular version, "Goldielocks," was the creation of Flora Annie Steel in *English Fairy Tales* (1918).

St. John also notes that the relationship of the three bears changes from that of brothers of equal size in Mure's manuscript to a family in Southey's version, as illustrated in Frances Elizabeth Barrow's *The Apple Dumpling* (1852).

Joseph Jacobs, in *More English Fairy Tales* (1894) corrected his earlier description of "The Three Bears" solely as the creation of Robert Southey. Jacobs provided an alternate source: an old folktale, "Scrapefoot," about a fox that intrudes into the castle of the bears, offering a possible explanation that the fox, or vixen, was interpreted as an "Old woman" by Southey; but as the earlier version by Mure and Southey's own introduction to the tale indicate, the story was a nursery classic long before it was rendered into text.

Eleanor Mure was born in 1798 or 1799, the third daughter of James Mure, and granddaughter of William Mure of Caldwell, a Baron of the Scottish Exchequer. Mure was a barrister in Westminster until his retirement around 1827, when he moved to Cecil Lodge, the setting of the story. This house, which no longer exists, had been given as a wedding present in 1773 to Viscount Cranborne, the eldest son of the seventh Earl of Salisbury, and was "pleasantly situated in grounds of seventy acres amidst beautiful scenery." Among her childhood books was *A True History of a Little Old Woman Who Found a Silver Penny* (1806), with folded leaves, which may have been the model for "The Three Bears." Mure died, unmarried, in 1885 after a long quiet life.

Horace was educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford, became a barrister-at-law, and died in 1909. When his library was sold at auction, Edgar Osborne, County Librarian of Derbyshire, bought it for his personal collection, which he donated to Toronto Public Library in 1949, and bears his name. Osborne was a scholar and bibliophile who recognized and preserved many important early children's books, this title one of his personal favourites. This manuscript has been exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum during the Festival of Britain in 1951, and at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

The publication of this facsimile, the 1967 facsimile edition of which is long out of print, was made possible by a grant from the Friends of the Osborne and Lillian H. Smith Collections. The Osborne Collection is a reference library that spans the development of English-language children's publishing, and includes books, book-related art, author archives, games and ephemera. Toronto Public Library and its Friends invite readers of this book to visit the Osborne Collection, home of "The Story of the Three Bears."

Leslie McGrath

Head,

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Toronto Public Library





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