



# *Barry and the Bears*

Margot Ogilvie  
Retold Fairy Tales

---

Once upon a time, in a city just like yours, or one nearby, or maybe somewhere far, far away, there was a handsome man named Bartholomew Bronzkey. Everyone but his mother called him Barry for short. His mum hated it when they did that, but what could she do?

Barry worked in an office where everyone wanted him to do things quickly.

‘Barry, bring me the Lavender file, and be quick about it,’ the head of one department would say.

On his way to that department, his phone would buzz with a message from another department, ‘Where are you Barry? We need the PowerPoint for the Cumin presentation. Get it to us as fast as you can?’

Before he got back to his desk to do that, another boss phoned with, ‘I’ve got Mr. Nutmeg in my office. He wants to see the mock-up for his ad campaign. Can you hurry and get it to me?’

This had been going on for days. They’d had him working through lunch, snatching a snack from the tea cart, a coffee from the machine in the break room, a cake from the tray set aside for clients. But enough was enough.

Today, Barry would make his point, stand his ground, eat his lunch.

He’d been on the run since the day began and had the mother of all headaches, extending down his spine to an aching back. He ran angry fingers up through his long golden curls, massaging the back of his neck and up over his skull. His head still throbbed. He needed Aspirin. He needed roller skates. He needed a lunch break. He would go out for lunch. Away from the office. Away from the phone. Away from all the bosses wanting things done quickly.

He went for a walk in the park. He stood in the shade of the tall trees and inhaled deeply, just able to detect the freshness of the pines above the smog. He wandered past a lake littered with leaves, ducks and the odd bit of rubbish, enjoying having no-one telling him to rush.

The freshish air and exercise gave Barry an appetite, and he sauntered across to a food court spilling out from a

shopping mall onto collections of tables and chairs under brightly coloured umbrellas. Stopping at an advertising board, he read through Today's Best Picks.

'Papa's Choice' was Indian vindaloo. 'That's way too hot for me,' Barry exclaimed, to no-one in particular. Next on the list was 'Mama's Choice.' When Barry saw the frozen watermelon salad served with ice-cream he declared, 'That's way too cold for me.'

The third and final listing on the recommendations display was 'Baby's Choice.' 'Fish fingers and chips,' Barry read aloud. 'That sounds just right for me,' he said happily as he headed for the recommended eatery, The Bear's Table.

Pretty soon, he came to the right place. He walked right in, ordered and paid, then proceeded to eat his entire plateful, at a leisurely pace. A sign above the servery boasted 'All you can eat,' so Barry helped himself to more. And more. And more. When the waitress looked at him suspiciously, he got up and returned to the office. After two weeks more without a lunch break, Barry determined to make another stand. It had been a particularly busy day, with bosses from all floors of his building wanting things done quickly. The morning wore him out, but when the maintenance crew shut down all the lifts for urgent repairs, forcing Barry onto the stairs, he became exhausted.

He sent a group text to all his bosses, 'I'm taking several hours of accrued lunch time. I will be back at your beck and call first thing tomorrow morning.'

Then he turned off his phone and left.

After eating an especially filling late lunch, Barry realised how very tired he was. He found a furniture store called The Bear Essentials and meandered through the showroom. In the living room section, a large sign said, 'Feel free to sit in these chairs – it's the only way you'll know.'

So, he did.

Barry eased himself into the first chair he came to. The sign on the huge recliner said, 'Here's one for Papa!' It had every button and bow imaginable. His feet couldn't touch the ground, and after he'd tried adjusting the back, the head rest and the foot rest, he jumped up in frustration.

'This chair is too big! And too hard to adjust!' he exclaimed to the strangers passing by.

He moved on to a second chair. The sign on this one said, 'Here's one for Mama,' but he was tired and sore from climbing all those stairs, so he thought he'd try it anyway.

He sank into its softness. And sank. And sank. His knees were nearly hitting his chin, he'd sunk so low. And when he pushed his elbows into the arms of the chair to prize himself out, they sank into fluff and feathery downiness.

“This chair is too soft!” he whined, twisting himself onto his knees to extricate himself from Mama’s chair. He’d hate to see his Mum trying to get out of this one with her recently replaced knee and her arthritic hip.

Over in the corner, he spotted a small, upright chair. It didn’t look comfortable. The sign said, ‘Here’s one for Baby,’ and Barry decided it must be because of its size relative to the others, and not because it was a high chair with a seat belt like his sister used for her kids.

He sat in it and gasped with surprise.

‘Ahhh, this chair is just right,’ he sighed, astounded by its comfort and support. But just as he settled down into the chair to rest, it broke into pieces!

Once again, Barry found himself twisting onto his knees to get up, this time from amongst the splinters. He looked around. No staff in sight. He stood tall, brushed the chair debris and crinkles from his clothes, and walked through the store and out the door with his head held high.

Three weeks later, Barry reached for his hankie with one hand and his phone with the other. His brow was beaded with sweat. His thick golden curls were damp and stuck to the back of his neck. His body ached, right down to the little spaces between the finger bones in his hands. What had been a cold for the past week had now become the flu. He needed more Aspirin. He needed another hankie. He needed to go home to bed. Instead, he had a list as long as his aching arm of errands to run for his bosses. Files to deliver, conference centres to book, appointments to make. And they wanted all of it done quickly. He should have made more of a stand before he got so wobbly. He should have brought more hankies. He should have called in sick.

Early in the afternoon, he nearly collapsed. Not because of his fever. Not because of his body aches. Nor because of his exhaustion. But because one of his bosses looked up when he went into their office. Maybe they heard him wheezing, or sneezing, or grumbling under his breath. Anyway, they looked right up at him.

‘Whatever is wrong with you, Barry? You look contagious. Get out of here before you bring the whole staff down with whatever dreaded lurgy you’ve got.’

Barry would have liked some appreciation for his efforts to keep going regardless. He would have liked some sympathy for his unwellness. He would have liked a drink.

But he took the rest of the day off.

He trudged to his spot in the car park. Empty. He remembered he’d taken the train this morning because his car was in the workshop for repairs. He plodded back out of the carpark and headed for the station. A shortcut through the shops would save some time.

He cut through a department store called The Bear’s Den. Barry was very tired by this time, so when he found himself in the bedding section, he couldn’t resist laying down in the first bed he came to. It was so high, he

barely had the energy to climb up onto it. When he finally got there, he regretted wasting the effort.

‘This bed is too hard and too high,’ he croaked between coughs.

When he lay in the second bed, he collapsed into its softness. It was so saggy, his body formed a ‘v’ and his aching back spasmed, making him feel so much worse. He scrambled out as fast as the springy softness would allow.

‘This bed is too soft,’ he snivelled.

When he tried a third bed, Barry felt his aching body relax. He felt his splitting head nestle against the perfect pillow. He felt himself drifting into dreamland and was powerless not to. He fell asleep murmuring, ‘This bed is just right.’

He dreamt that two young women stood over him, giggling and pointing. At him. One of them looked familiar. She leant close to her friend and whispered, ‘That’s the guy from a few weeks ago. Remember I told you about a glutton at The Bear’s Table. That’s him. He very nearly ate up all we had.’ He stirred as she walked away snickering but couldn’t seem to wake himself up.

Sometime later, Barry growled and coughed and spluttered, rolling over away from the voices that had disturbed him again.

‘There’s a guy asleep on that display,’ said one uniformed young man.

‘Hey, I think I know that dude. Where have I seen him before?’ answered the other fella, also in uniform.

‘Isn’t he the guy from the security camera photos. The guy who broke a display chair into pieces a few weeks ago, and ran off without paying the damages?’

‘Yeah. So, do we wake him up and drag him off to The Bear Essentials?’

‘He looks crook as a dog. I say we leave him right where he is. I don’t wanna catch what he’s got.’

So, they walked away, leaving Barry to fall back into a deep sleep.

Which was interrupted again later that afternoon.

‘Bartholomew!’ Someone shook his shoulder, and Barry stirred from his fever-induced sleep.

‘Bartholomew Bronzkey. What do you think you are doing sleeping in the middle of The Bear’s Den? Wake up this instant and explain yourself.’

A startled Barry sat up to face the one person who called him Bartholomew. The one person he might get sympathy from. The one person he never expected to see today.

His mother.

He saw his mother, hands on hips, scowl on face, words gushing through lips too fast for him to decipher in his addled state. He saw a crowd of curious shoppers looking over her shoulder. At him.

He screamed. He grabbed his head because the scream hurt his still-throbbing head. He jumped up and ran out of the bedroom section.

From behind Barry heard snatches of what his mother was yelling as she limped after him, ‘... wretched Bears you work for...own nearly every business in town...think they own you...make a stand...find you lying down...’

He ran through the shop, and away into the forest of tall buildings in the city just like yours. He dodged traffic, until he came to the train station. He lept onto the train just pulling out of the station, not even caring where it was going.

Exhausted, he slumped into the nearest seat. Embarrassed, he sneezed and coughed and hung his head.

Ashamed, he realised it wasn't a terrible, horrible nightmare. It really happened.

The sudden wake-up, the mad dash, the befuddled crowd, were all real. He'd never be able to eat from The Bear's Table again. He'd forever have to go without The Bear Essentials. He'd have to avoid The Bear's Den for the term of his natural life.

And if word got back to his bosses at The Bear Corporation, he may well lose his job.

What on earth would his mother say to that?

**Read more fairy tales on [Fairytalez.com](http://Fairytalez.com)**