



The Cottage in the Woods

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For fans of Shannon Hale, Adam Gidwitz, and Michael Buckley comes a luminous new twist on a tale readers only thought they knew. . .

Once upon a time, there was a girl with golden locks. But that's just the beginning of this tale. The real story begins with a bear.

Ursula is a young she-bear who has come to work as a governess at the Vaughn estate. Although she is eager to instruct her young charge, Teddy, she is also frightened, especially when inexplicable things happen in the huge house after dark. Ursula is sure she has heard footsteps in the hallways at night, and that something is following her during her walks in the Enchanted Forest. Then there is Mr. Bentley, a young bear also employed by Mr. Vaughn, whose superior disposition is enough to drive Ursula to tears . . . and yet *why* does he also make her heart race? As Ursula works to unravel the mysteries of the Vaughn manor, she will have to be very, very careful. After all, true love, justice, and a girl with golden locks are at stake. And in the Enchanted Forest, not every fairy tale is destined for a happily ever after.

The Cottage in the Woods Details

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Author : Katherine Coville

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From Reader Review The Cottage in the Woods for online ebook

Aeicha says

Jane Eyre + The Three Little Bears, this is what Katherine Coville's The Cottage in the Woods is...and yet, it is so much more. In the Enchanted Forest, home to humans, enchanted animals, and regular animals, there is a cottage. Well, really it is a vast estate. This is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Vaughn and their young cub, Teddy. Fresh out of school Ursula has come to the cottage to be Teddy's governess. Ursula soon finds herself wrapped up in a golden haired mystery, the unlucky nemesis of a grumpy nurse, in the middle of a community war, and losing her heart to the infuriatingly handsome Mr. Bentley.

The Cottage in the Woods is one of the most original and loveliest fairytale/classic retellings I've ever read. I'll admit that I had my doubts when I first learned of this book and its Jane Eyre inspired, full of talking bears premise...but Coville certainly squashed my doubts and impressed me with her captivating storytelling. This story may be full of fairytale elements and talking animals, but it is anything but childish. With its classic, Victorian prose and dialogue, The Cottage in the Woods has such an eloquent and refined air about it, without feeling stiff or flowery. Coville creates a wonderfully charming, believable setting with the Enchanted Forest, the Vaughn estate, and the little hamlet around it. The fairytale elements are just the right mix of whimsical, humorous, and refreshing. Coville introduces many well known fairytale stories and characters in completely new and entertaining ways!

One of the things I like best about this book, is the way that after the first few pages, I almost forgot that the main characters were enchanted animals and merely saw them as complex, interesting characters. Our heroine Ursula is a sweet, smart girl who isn't afraid of a little adventure and I really liked getting to know her. Ursula is surrounded by an eclectic and amusing group of enchanted animals and humans, from fun Teddy, endearing Goldilocks, nasty Nurse, lovable Mr. Wright, and of course, the handsome Mr. Bentley.

But The Cottage in the Woods isn't all fairytales and romance. With the brewing tension between the enchanted animals and a sect of humans, Coville makes a poignant and relevant statement about prejudice and human nature.

My Final Thoughts: Unique, enchanting, clever...The Cottage in the Woods is all of this and more!

Rena says

5 stars. I loved this book. Not really for children, despite being a "children's book." So topical to the times we live in right now

Tamora Pierce says

This is one of the most unusual fairytale retellings I have ever read--I'd say so even if I didn't know the writer! In a way it's a new look at "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" from the point of view of the bears, but in a far larger way it is not. The bears are well-to-do, civilized people, citizens of a town that is half human

and half beings from what we would recognize as fairytales.

Coville has introduced some new wrinkles, particularly racism on the part of both populations, with violence rising in the human community. There is also a wonderful touch of romance for Ursula, the bear governess who comes to work with the family's son and ends up sheltering a human child who has been badly abused. Coville gives the fairytale characters their own, unique personalities, seldom all good or all bad. Ursula is a female hero who grows from girl into woman during the course of the book, finding the source of her own bravery, and the court trial is absolutely wonderful.

It is a read for more advanced young readers, but I'd also recommend it for adults to read aloud to younger children. It's the kind of book that begs for someone to interpret the different voices and talk about the ideas that are raised. Adult readers too will find it a fascinating read, and Katherine Coville a wonderful new writer to watch! (Yes, the name isn't a coincidence--she's kidlit king Bruce Coville's wife and often illustrator who has found a wonderful new string to her bow.)

Gail Gauthier says

"*The Cottage in the Woods* has been described as *Jane Eyre* meets *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. It certainly is. *Jane Eyre* fans can have a fantastic time picking out the connections. A young, powerless, single female enters a large house as the employee of a wealthy man. This is a wealthy, married man with a family, which is one of the ways this book is different from *Jane Eyre*. But he's also a bear, as is the young female, Ursula. (Relating to ursine, I'm guessing.) Ursula is there to act as a governess to the bear's son, Teddy. (Oh, my gosh. Teddy Bear!!! No, actually his last name is Vaughn.) Ursula has a love interest, and, shades of Mr. Rochester, he's not free to love her. There is a mystery in this house, as there is in *Jane Eyre*. And it's related to a female, as is the mystery in *Jane Eyre*. This female, though, is young, with golden hair."

Excerpt from Original Content

Cate Brooks says

Fun little lark of a read in the fractured fairy tale meets period romance - I think the line being used is "Goldilocks meets Jane Eyre." Very unusual, witty and well done - the only trouble will be who to recommend this one to. It will take the right kid who has a pretty sophisticated sense of humor and range of vocabulary but is young at heart and wants a very Austen/Bronte kind of romance...with bears from an enchanted forest. There's a niche for all books but I don't see high circ stats on this. Just hitting the spot with a few of my old soul readers. There are a handful of those in these parts. And as one myself, I really enjoyed this one.

R. E. Banks says

The ending made me cry.

At first, I got the impression that the story was going to be boring and silly, with the whole plot revolving around the mysterious walker in the night. Oh, and the Mr. Bentley, which we are told from the blurb that he 'makes her heart race'. Sigh. Predictable.

Not so.

This book had several issues revolving around it, with surprisingly deep and more serious concepts than usually found in children's books. This is NOT one of those empty, dumbed-down books for children. (And it's a rather hefty novel, if I do say so myself.) THE BLURB DOES NOT DO IT JUSTICE! It only focuses on the minor aspects of the plot, and makes it seem like the book is full of magic. IT IS SO MUCH BETTER THAN YOU FIRST THINK.

The romance -- where to begin?

WHY CAN'T YA BOOKS HAVE LOVE LIKE THIS? It's all, "Oh my gosh! Like, he's so hot, like, that must mean I love him! *dreamy sigh* He's so MUSCLY!! And flirty!"

BUT THIS BOOK FOCUSES ON QUALITIES! PERSONALITY! The kind of love you know is true, and will last. The feelings that will never go away. The author does a SPECTACULAR job, writing out the emotions and feelings you can't describe. Cliche is abandoned here. I had to stay up until midnight to finish it, which is highly unusual for me.

So unpredictable.

I cried at the end because it had the same kind of Whisper-Of-The-Heart feeling of true love. BY THE WAY, I can't remember the last time I cried over a book. This novel is truly moving. Actually, it made me want to chuck my own novel in the garbage in despair, because I'll never be able to craft a romance like this. Oh yeah, and there was a plot besides that too. *scratches nose sheepishly* But what was truly astounding was the love. I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR A LOVE STORY LIKE THIS FOR AGES.

The last two pages or so I wasn't too big on, but overall, great climax, great unpredictable romance, great story.

I will re-read this for sure.

Munro's Kids says

In this retelling of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, we see through the eyes of the new young governess hired by the Vaughn family (AKA the three bears) to educate their young son Teddy. She quickly realizes that the household carries secrets: who or what scurries around the house at night? And who is young Mr. Bentley, the arrogant but compelling bear who shows up when least expected?

That's probably the best way I could paint this book. I really have no idea who the intended audience is: the writing style really clashes with the content. This book is basically a Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte mash-up that tries to retell a classic fairy tale while throwing in cameos of many others: the Pied Piper, Mother Hubbard, Peter Pumpkin-Eater, the little old lady who lives in a shoe, the Musicians of Bremen Town, etc. It was just too much. The author also brought in a lot of moral issues into the book: racism, family values, alcoholism, etc. which made me wonder exactly who this book is for.

To sum up: while well-written, the classical Austen/Bronte tone and complex moral issues clashed with the "kiddish" context of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, making this book difficult to recommend.

My biggest complaint by far, though: they really missed out on an opportunity to call this book "Jane Beyre" (Bear/Eyre? Eh? Eh? Humour me here....)

Shoshana says

In two words: absolutely phenomenal.

In more than two words:

The book opens with Ursula, a she-bear, introducing her story of her time as a governess at The Cottage. From the get-go it has a very "Jane Eyre" feel - now, "Jane Eyre" is my favorite book in all the evers, and I have to admit at first I kept a wary eye out for this just being a JE re-telling, but with bears. But it's so, so much more. Yes, the Bronte-like tone carries throughout the book, but the story is very, very much its own. (Even as a Goldilocks retelling.)

Characters from other stories - Mother Hubbard, Peter Pumpkin Eater, among others - peep in and out of the story, giving it color and fairy-tale feel. Setting the story in Bremen was a stroke of genius on Coville's part. Of COURSE the figures of tales would live in the city with the folklore of the animal musicians.

Ursula exists in full, not just as a mouthpiece for the story. All three bears and Goldilocks are fully realized and grow in their own ways throughout. The subplots of "racial" discrimination never feel shoe-horned or out of place, and serve to give the story depth and realism.

I can't really sing this book's praises enough. Fans of Austen, Bronte, Shannon Hale, Patricia C Wrede, and Tamora Pierce should all give it a go. And everyone else too.

Bonnie Jean says

Jane Eyre meets Goldilocks and the Three Bears is probably the best one line summary that I could give this novel. Throw in cameos by several fairy tale and literary figures and a plot that revolves around racism (speciesism?) with a dash of regency romance and you end up with a very odd but fun to read book whose intended audience leaves me puzzled. I found this book on the new reads shelf of the children's section, probably because of the fractured fairy tales aspect, but I'm pretty sure that it doesn't really belong there. The writing and storyline are very much like one might expect from someone like Jane Austen, the adventures and romance of a governess... except that the setting is the Enchanted Forest, and our heroine is a young bear. The writing style and vocab used would probably be a bit off putting to the younger crowd (I'm not sure I can remember the last book I read that used words like "physiognomy" or "vituperation"), and I'm pretty sure that many of the literary cameos would go over their heads (Edwin Drood makes an appearance, for instance). Older readers who love both period romances and fractured fairy tales might get a kick out of it, though. The romance aspect of it was tied up a bit hastily at the end, and the book seemed to end rather abruptly, but overall I enjoyed the book a lot and I found the plot compelling- definitely kept me wanting to find out what came next.

Sarah Adamson says

Wow. Thanks to Tamora Pierce for recommending this. Where to start - it's a combination of Goldilocks and the 3 bears, Mother Goose nursery Rhymes, Jane Eyre, Pride and Prejudice and a book on the U.S. civil rights movement.

The closest I've ever come to this style and fantastical writing before is Jasper Fforde's Nursery rhymes Crime books.

I really enjoyed this book and found it a real page turner. It has amazing characters, huge twists and beautiful writing.

Ursula Brown, a young bear of good education, takes the job of governess at the Cottage in the Woods, a manor house.

Along the way we have romance, intrigue, racism or rather speciesism (is that a word?), mysteries, action and adventure.

I am not sure what age should read it, I think it contains some pretty controversial and dark elements for younger readers but understand it is a YA book. Many adults won't get all the references - ok have to go and read it again now!!

Monica Edinger says

my blog review.

I love fairy tale reworkings. At the same time their popularity of late has resulted in a lot of mediocrity and so when I come across something new I'm both excited and wary. Is it going to be a goofy-movie-Shrek-imitating-like thing or more in the vein of Michael Buckley's Fairy Tale Detectives, Christopher Healy's Hero's Guides, or Adam Gidwitz's Grimm series? And if YA dark is it going to be a lame bodice-ripper or something with heft, like Tom McNeal's Far Far Away? And so seeing a description of Katherine Coville's debut novel *The Cottage in the Woods on Edelweiss*, I requested it on a whim and began reading it with very low expectations. And so what a lovely surprise when it turned out to be completely engrossing, a book I read steadily until I was done. In other words, reader, I liked it very much.

The story is a unique melding of a Regency Romance/Victorian Gothic set within a fairy tale world. Our heroine and narrator is Ursula Brown, a very proper young bear who has come to the Cottage in the Woods, the wealthy Vaughn family's estate near Bremen Town, as their young cub's governess. The three Vaughn bears live an elegant and refined life and Ursula slips into it without much difficulty, tolerating Mr. Vaughn's stern admonitions, appreciating Mrs. Vaughn's kind gestures, and falling very much in love with her sweet young charge, Teddy. But life in the area is not easy. The Enchanted -- those animals who talk, dress, and act as humans do --- are struggling with envy, prejudice, racial hostility, and out-and-out vigilantism from some of their human neighbors.

The publisher indicates that this is a reworking of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." It is indeed, but I don't wish to give away just how. I will say that I found it an enormously clever rethinking of that particular story, very much in keeping with the literary tradition Coville is working in, that of the Victorian novel. I've been reading and listening to a lot of them these days and so I was very impressed with how well Coville used those tropes in her story. Ursula is very introspective, the various Enchanteds in her world are as proper and polite as anyone in an Austen, Bronte, Eliot, or Trollope novel. There is plenty of drama here, but not the swashbuckling sort of some of the other fairy tale workings. And while somber on occasion it isn't as dark as some of the YA ones around.

There are so many clever fairy tale/nursery rhyme touches that also allude to the Victorian novel tradition. For instance, Teddy's nurse is an illiterate tippling badger who is quite jealous of our heroine and an amusing contrast to the cozy cute ones of Potter and others. Best of all is the Goldilock's plot thread --- it is a brilliant rethinking of the story within a classic Victorian Gothic setting. And I love the representation of the doctor

who comes to examine her at one point with his Freud-like Viennese accent.

So keep an eye out for this one. I can't wait to see what others make of it.

J says

The Cottage in the Woods is an odd book. It's largely a Gothic romance with enchanted forest animals as the main characters intermingling with the odd human here or there. The story is told in first person by Ursula Brown, a young bear taken on as governess at the Cottage in the Woods. Her ward is young Teddy who she finds to be smart and trusting. But there are mysteries and dangers afoot including the discovery of a young girl that could cause the tensions between enchanted creatures and humans in Bremen Town to come to a head.

While the publisher states this book is aimed at 10+, it reads more like an Austen or Bronte sisters novel. In fact, some bits have directly been pulled from Austen or Bronte stories, but also a number of Grimm's fairy tales appear and play large in Miss Brown's telling of her story. I suspect that, as an adult, I pick up on and appreciate the references much more than a child or teen who is unfamiliar with the hinted at texts. Even more, I suspect that the target group will have a hard time getting into the rhythm of the book. Katherine Coville's writing is quite dense and littered with SAT vocab words, a few of which this experienced reader had to look up. If it weren't for the interminable adjectives and overly verbose explanations of happenings, I would have flown through rather than slogged toward the end. At times the book is compelling, but mostly it's a long winded, detail filled account with a hefty amount of allegory about race relations thrown in. I didn't hate the book. I just wanted it to not feel like a chore to get to the inevitable conclusion.

Note: ARC received via Amazon Vine in exchange for a review.

Dana says

I loved this story and if you like fairy tale retellings, Gregory Maguire, and Jane Austen novels then this is the book for you! That being said...it's hard to imagine what child I would recommend this too apart from my own (on audiobook).

5 stars for narration and story, 4 stars for its limited audience (since this is intended for middle grades, but it would have to be middle grade readers who don't mind a slower story.)

The audiobook is narrated by the amazing Katherine Kellgren so definitely listen to this one! The audiobook world is just not going to be the same without her!!!!

?Jinglemarco? ??????? - ??????? (Nursery rhymes enthusiast)* says

WOW!! I had so high expectations for this book! =D

...

And they were fully rewarded! <3

Wonderful book! Gorgeously written and built, it is THE Goldilocks and the three bears retelling - with a flavour of Jane Eyresque victorian age!

Liviania says

I love fairytale retellings, and was familiar with Katherine Coville's art from the work she did on her husband Bruce Coville's novels. I was quite curious to see what she would do with the story of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." It turns out that she would marry it to Victorian romance and social issues in an engrossing pastiche.

Ursula travels to the Vaughn home to be a governess to Teddy, an unusually well-behaved child. She soon discovers that the house holds a secret, a young blonde human. Meanwhile, she finds herself drawn to Mr. Bentley, a fellow employee of the house, despite a disastrous first meeting. She also finds herself involved in local politics, as the Enchanted of the town work to live with the humans as equals, not lessers.

I loved how the fairytale story weaved together with a Pride-and-Prejudice-esque plotline for Ursula and the tensions between the Anthropological Society and the men's choir (as the pro-humans and equality factions are known). What I'm not so sure is that the middle grade audience will enjoy it. It's a long story, and the style is somewhat old fashioned. I think it's a treat, but would a ten year old?

I think it is worth a try for any fan of fairytales. The twists on Goldilocks are clever, as are the references to other stories such as "The Musicians of Bremen." At the very least, it might make a good read-aloud book. But I think the main audience is older, the sort who enjoy classic literature as well as a bit of whimsy.
