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2140 words

**THE THREE LITTLE PIGS:
HOW IT ACTUALLY HAPPENED
(A statement by the Animals' Commissioner of Truth,
As told to the author)**

Once Upon a Time, there lived three little pigs. Well, there we go already, stretching the truth. Actually they weighed more than five hundred pounds each by the end of the story, but they were little once, and that's when they decided to call themselves the "Three Little Pigs". It was sort of a club, you see, and they used to build little forts out of sticks and things. The Three Little Pigs pledged 'Perpetual Mutual Fealty and Fidelity', which was Hugo's fancy way of saying they promised to always stick together. Hugo, the oldest, read a lot and liked big words. Waldo was kind of sweet, but gullible, and Bruno, the youngest— well Bruno was always trying to distract the other pigs so he could steal their food.

Before long they started to outgrow their forts and stopped hanging around together, in favor of eating a lot and lying in their manure, which is kind of gross, but they *were* pigs, after all. Anyway, when they were a year old and weighed four hundred pounds each, a terrible thing happened: A truck backed up to their yard with jelly donuts in the back (their favorite kind), and they, of course, clambered up the ramp, right inside. I mean, wouldn't you?

“Look at the sky!” exclaimed Bruno. “Is that a fledgling Zarf?” Hugo looked because it was something he'd never heard of, and Waldo looked because Hugo did. While Bruno snarfed all the donuts and the other pigs squinted at the sky, someone shut the tailgate.

Of course, most people don't know this background; they just know about the house of straw, the ‘big bad wolf’ and all that. But over the years folks have been clamoring to know how the three pigs came to be on their own, like if they were so little, where were their parents? And how did they learn to build those houses? These questions nagged at the public mind, threatening to spoil the story until finally there was that Children's Librarian Strike in Walla Walla, Washington last year. I'm sure you heard about that, where the librarians dressed up as mimes at major intersections and so irritated everyone in the city that a commission was... Sorry, we're way off track. Let's get back to the story.

Well, when farm animals get taken away in a truck, especially one that arrives without explanation, and especially one with jelly donuts on board, it's not a good sign.

It means— Well, I hate to tell you, but it means they're going to get made into meat. Okay, so technically they're already meat, mostly, same as you and me. But you know what I mean, right? So they're in the back of this truck, and they'd heard these ugly rumors around the farm after dark, you know, but they never thought it would happen to *them*, and they got to talking. After they finished licking the jelly off the floor, that is.

“Say, Hugo, you don't think we're going to the uh, you know, the meat place?” asked Waldo.

“Don't be stupid,” Bruno interrupted. “There's no such thing. It's like the tooth fairy and animal rights groups.”

“There's no tooth fairy?” asked Waldo, eyes wide.

“Shut up,” said Bruno, who wasn't very nice when he was frightened. “We're not going to the meat- packing plant. We've uh, been accidentally locked inside a donut truck. We're probably going back to the bakery now.”

Waldo looked to Hugo, who rolled his eyes.

“Look,” said Hugo. “We have to stick together to survive. Remember our pledge of Perpetual Mutual Fealty and—?”

“Stop with the long words and get to the point,” snapped Bruno. “Like my mother used to say, never use a big word when a diminutive one will do.”

“Bruno, you just—” but Hugo nudged him.

Hugo cleared his throat. “My point is, we need to work together to get out of here. Look, the top is open. If we stand on one another, one of us can get out and, um, well, get out. And hopefully run for help.”

“Don't be ridiculous,” Bruno snorted. But they were going through downtown

Podunk just then and, as the truck turned a corner, the smell of hot dogs cooking at a hot dog stand wafted into the truck. The Three Little Pigs looked at each other, horrified.

“Here, one of you guys get on my back,” Bruno said quickly.

And so it was, that through ingenuity and minor acrobatics that Waldo, the smallest (he weighed only three hundred and ninety- nine pounds), was able to get to the top. But it was a long way down, and he hadn’t thought about the fact that he was afraid of heights. So he stood on his hind legs on the roof of the truck cab, and thought about what to do. Thinking, as you probably know, attracts hornets, which explains why so few people get stung. But animals get stung all the time, and right then a hornet flew up and stung Waldo on the throat as he stood thinking.

“Ow!” And, without thinking (which protected him from further stings), Waldo brought his front hooves up to his throat. Now, bringing one’s front hooves, or hands if you have them, to one’s throat is the universal sign for choking. Your mother no doubt has told you to never, EVER bring your front hooves or hands to your throat in public unless you are actually choking. Now as luck would have it, there was a conference of paramedics that day, and they were all hanging around in front of a donut shop on coffee break eating jelly donuts, their favorite kind, when the truck stopped for a light.

“Hey!” someone yelled, pointing his jelly- covered finger toward the truck. “That pig is choking!” (It was this picture, the concerned paramedic in the foreground pointing to the disconcerted pig in the background, that appeared in the *Podunk Post- Patriot* the next morning.)

Instantly, the truck was surrounded by sticky- fingered paramedics, and the panicked driver was forced to stay put while they swarmed up the sides. There was some confusion as to which pig was choking, so all three pigs were removed to the sidewalk where the paramedics performed the Heimlich maneuver (so- called because ‘Heimlich’ is the sound most people make when they start to choke) on them to get them un- choked.

While the pigs were getting Heimliched, someone brought out a fresh tray of jelly donuts, and in the ensuing paramedic melee (the worst kind) the pigs slipped away. Here the record becomes a bit sketchy, but it seems an itinerant shoelace re- tipper named Benjamin Better picked them up hitchhiking and dropped them off at the Calm Creatures Collective, where their famous brick house now stands.

It was there that the story we’re familiar with began to unfold, although many inaccuracies have been corrected, as you’ll see.

The pigs got a warm welcome at the Collective, and were given an old Volkswagen van to live in, seeds with which to plant a garden (which Bruno promptly ate), and best of all, plenty of food. Life was good there, except when the pigs rolled over in the night, the van tipped over. So they decided to build a house together.

“A straw house,” said Bruno for the eleventy- seventh time. “That’s the easiest. I hear that in town you can go in the dumpster behind McMilkshake’s and get all the straws you want.” He was thinking of all the leftover food that might also be in the dumpster.

“Is that the right kind of straw? I thought real straw was grain stalks,” Waldo said.

“Silence!” snarled Bruno.

Hugo, who had been reading War and Pigs, glanced up. “Huh?” he said.

“Permanent Mutual Fealty and Fiddle-dee-dee!” proclaimed Bruno, raising a hoof. Even though he didn’t know what the occasion was, Hugo brightened at Bruno’s attempt to say ‘Let’s always stick together’ and also raised a hoof. Waldo, who hated to be left out, raised a hoof as well, and so they were all happy for a few minutes, until Bruno trooped them over to McMilkshake’s.

“Bruno,” Hugo said as he loaded drippy straws into a backpack, “I don’t think this is going to work.”

“Perpetual Motion Filter and Fidelity!” said Bruno, with such conviction, and such a welling of tears in his eyes, that Hugo went along with the plan.

In a few days, with some help from the community (particularly the songbirds), The Three Little Pigs had a house of straw, or straws to be exact. It swayed gently in the breeze and smelled pleasantly like a sour milkshake. They moved right in.

So the next day a wolf came to the door. It wasn’t what you think, not at all. This was a retired wolf, very old and grizzled, with bad teeth. She pulled a painted wagon that read ‘R.L. Huffenpuff Blown House Down: Simply the Finest Insulation Anywhere, Guaranteed’. She was selling, you see, feathers, the small ones called down, for insulation. All sales went to buy feed for the old animals at the Calm Creatures Collective. The wolf hobbled up to the door and rapped with her cane. Waldo peeked out.

“It’s a wolf!” he cried. Bruno dove under his bed.

“Well, ask what it wants,” Hugo said.

“What do you want?” asked Waldo.

The wolf cleared her throat. “Open up, R.L. Hufflepuff Blown House Down,” she said proudly, if somewhat indistinctly. “R.L. Hufflepuff Blown House Down.”

“Nnnot by the hhhair on my chchinny- chin chin!” said Bruno, shivering from under the bed.

“Maybe even less,” said Waldo. He was thinking of Bruno’s long beard.

“Wait, what did she say? I’m going to let her in,” Hugo said. But Bruno reached out and kicked him in the shins (which wasn’t very nice, of course, but he did). While Hugo danced around in pain, the wolf gave up and went away.

Waldo and Hugo made pancakes for supper, but Bruno stayed under the bed, saying over and over, “Our house is gonna get blown down, I just know it.”

As luck would have it (that seemed to happen a lot in this story), there was a terrible windstorm that night. And being made of straws, naturally their house blew down.

“I hate wolves, I hate ‘em, they’re *bad*,” said Bruno as he paced the yard while Waldo and Hugo picked up straws.

“Can a wolf really blow a house down?” Waldo asked. But Bruno shot him a mean look and he didn’t ask again.

Hugo, who wasn’t afraid of mean looks, said, “I think it was a storm.” But he *was* afraid of shin kicks and became quiet after Bruno tried to kick him again. As you know, they made their next house (with lots of help from the beavers) of sticks, a compromise between bricks, which Hugo favored, and straws, which Bruno still wanted.

Soon after, the wolf returned, and the same thing happened: Bruno shouted from under the bed while Hugo tried to hear what she was saying.

“Open up, R.L. Huffenpuff Blown House Down,” said the wolf.

“Nnnot by the hhhair on my chinny- chin- chin,” Bruno stammered.

Their house of sticks lasted longer than the house of straws, but every night Bruno said from under his bed (where he now slept) “Our house is gonna get blown down, I just know it.” As anyone who’s ever lived in a stick house knows, they aren’t very sturdy either. And one night a really big storm came and the stick house got blown down.

“It’s that wolf again!” snarled Bruno in the morning. “We need a security fence!”

“She must have huge lungs,” mused Waldo.

“I think it was another storm,” said Hugo, staying well away from Bruno.

After much squabbling they all agreed to build a brick house, although Bruno developed a terrible hangnail during the weeks of building and wasn’t able to help. Not surprisingly, the wolf showed up soon after the house was done.

“Open up, R.L. Huffenpuff Blown House Down,” she said in a tired voice. She was beginning to think the pigs were not going to buy insulation. But to her surprise, Hugo, having dodged Bruno’s kicks from under his bed, opened the door. The rest happened very quickly.

The following day, contrary to popular belief, the brick house got blown down: a team of ducks and geese shook feathers into a hopper, and the wolf worked a giant bellows. It huffed and puffed, sending feathers through a hose into the walls and attic.

The pigs' house was warm in winter and cool in summer, and they had the wolf over many times for pancakes. Bruno, of course, stayed under the bed during her visits.

And they lived happily, relatively speaking, ever after.

The End