

A Walk Before Breakfast

By Vicki Riba Koestler



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About the Author...

Vicki Riba Koestler has produced several plays including the full-lengths *We Gather Together* and *Epsilon Precious (The Play About the Cat)* and the one-acts *Googling Fin*, *Snedekker's*, *Bad Move*, *Minna Kwasnik's Stupid Blouse*, *That Time at Black Lake*, and *In the Gardens of Eden*. Several other of her plays have had staged readings and placed in competitions. Her short play *Orange Sunset* was published in the volume *Stage This! Too*. Vicki's personal essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Child* magazine, *New Jersey Monthly*, and *The Record* of northern New Jersey, among other places. She has also co-authored two books with self-help author Gary Null: *Choosing Joy* and *The Baby Boomer's Guide to Getting it Right the Second Time Around*. A native of New York City, Vicki now lives in Alexandria, Virginia.



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About the play...

A Walk Before Breakfast is a comedy with all your favorite fairy tale characters! Papa Bear thinks his middle-school-aged son has "an attitude." Worse, he considers him lazy and uninterested in learning. But when the Bear family takes a walk in the woods, the bear formerly known as Baby Bear offers assistance to several storybook characters along the way and Papa Bear has to revise his opinion. A hilarious comedy for kids and teens!



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CHARACTERS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

BABY BEAR—he isn't actually a baby, but a somewhat awkward pre-teen

PAPA BEAR

MAMA BEAR

SNOW WHITE

SLEEPING BEAUTY

PRINCE PLEASANT

HAPPY, a Dwarf (*the dwarves may be played by boys or girls*)

SLEEPY, a Dwarf

DOPEY, a Dwarf

SNEEZY, a Dwarf

BASHFUL, a Dwarf

GRETEL

HANSEL

GOLDILOCKS



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A beautiful morning in beautiful woods. There's a winding trail and perhaps a few rocks to sit on. Birds tweet sweetly as MAMA BEAR and PAPA BEAR enjoy a walk down the trail. BABY BEAR is with them, but he's bored.

BABY BEAR

Can we go home now?

PAPA BEAR

Why would you want to go home? We've been walking all of five minutes.

BABY BEAR

That's why.

MAMA BEAR

Surely you can walk for more than five minutes, Baby Bear.

PAPA BEAR

Yeah—man up!

BABY BEAR

Bear up. We're bears.

PAPA BEAR

Don't be a wise guy.

(ALL walk on for a few seconds)

BABY BEAR

This is lame.

PAPA BEAR

Hey! Never say that! Don't you know that lameness is a sign of extreme vulnerability in a wild animal? It's nothing to make light of. You'd better watch your mouth.

BABY BEAR

Whatev.

MAMA BEAR

(cheery, looking to make peace) All I know is—I think it's great to get out of the house, into the fresh air. I hate that cooped-up feeling.

BABY BEAR

It didn't seem to bother you the six months we were hibernating.

PAPA BEAR

Don't be snarky to your mother. And by the way, bears don't *do* snark.

BABY BEAR

What do bears do?

PAPA BEAR

Shock and awe.

(BABY BEAR attempts to shock and awe MAMA BEAR with a growl and a display of claws)

PAPA BEAR

But not directed at your own mama! Where is your brain, Baby Bear?

BABY BEAR

In my head, which will soon be on an analyst's couch cause of all the damage you've done to it by giving me that stupid name! Baby Bear! I'm practically a teenager!

MAMA BEAR

I guess we just got carried away when you were born—you were so cute! A fuzzy-wuzzy, cutie-tootie, little baby teddy—

BABY BEAR

(mortified, overlapping previous line) No! Make it stop!

MAMA BEAR

Well, you *were* cute, Baby. *(to PAPA BEAR—)* And he still is, isn't he, Papa Bear?

PAPA BEAR

Yeah, but now he's got an attitude.

BABY BEAR

I can't help it if I don't want to go on this dumb walk.

PAPA BEAR

Well, you're going on it, so deal. A walk is good exercise. Besides, we had to let the porridge cool.

BABY BEAR

(sotto voce) I hate porridge.

PAPA BEAR

What did you say?

BABY BEAR

I hate porridge. It's lumpy and yucky. All the other cubs get to eat corn flakes and Honey Nut Cheerios.

PAPA BEAR

If all the other cubs jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge, would you do that too?

BABY BEAR

Probably. *(Pause)* What's the Brooklyn Bridge?

PAPA BEAR

(dismissive) Oh, it's like a beaver dam....only higher...and with traffic.

MAMA BEAR

Never mind all that. Let's just enjoy this beautiful morning.

BABY BEAR

(dramatically enjoys sunshine for a nanosecond) Okay, did it. Can I go home now?

PAPA BEAR

Cut the backtalk and walk.

BABY BEAR

Okay, okay. Chillax.

(BABY BEAR puts earbuds connected to a music source into his ears and bops as ALL continue walking)

MAMA BEAR

(stopping, suddenly dismayed) Oh my gosh.

PAPA BEAR

What.

MAMA BEAR

I don't remember if I checked the stove before we left.

PAPA BEAR

You did. I saw you. It was after you poured the porridge into the three bowls—the great big bowl, the medium-sized bowl, and the wee little bowl. And after you set the spoons beside them—the great big spoon, the medium spoon, and the wee little spoon. We decided to go out, and that's when you checked the stove. On the way out, I locked the door—so you don't have to worry about that either.

MAMA BEAR

Oh good...and the windows? You locked the windows too?

PAPA BEAR

Nope—left them open, for the air. But I don't think there's anything to worry about, Mama Bear.

MAMA BEAR

Well, I hope not. It's just that I heard this thing on the news...something about a burglar who's been active in this part of the woods.

BABY BEAR

(intrigued, taking out his earbuds) A burglar? Around here?

MAMA BEAR

Yes...they said it was a female...blond...

PAPA BEAR

What species?

MAMA BEAR

I didn't catch that.

BABY BEAR

Well, blond—couldn't be a bear.

PAPA BEAR

Unless it's a polar bear.

BABY BEAR

(snorts) Yeah, right. There's a whole lotta snow around here.

PAPA BEAR

Enough with the snark!

BABY BEAR

Maybe it's an albino squirrel...or maybe a skunk—they have those blond streaks. *(happy)* Maybe she's breaking into our house right now and smelling up the whole place!

(MAMA BEAR and PAPA BEAR look askance at BABY BEAR)

BABY BEAR

Or at least stealing the porridge....Then we could eat corn flakes or Honey Nut—

MAMA BEAR

Well, that's the strange thing. They said this burglar doesn't actually steal anything from the places she breaks into. She just tries out different pieces of furniture and different foods and then criticizes them. "Too hot," "too cold," "too big," "too small," "too hard," "too soft," that sort of thing.

PAPA BEAR

You mean she just breaks in and makes catty remarks?

MAMA BEAR

Yeah.

BABY BEAR

Maybe she's a cat. A cat burglar! I think we should go back and check.

PAPA BEAR

Oh, there's no one breaking into our house. You just want to go back so you can goof off, and raid the honey jars, and do screens. But that's not happening, buddy.

BABY BEAR

Fine. When we get back and see a bobcat's clawed her way through your stamp collection, don't blame me.

PAPA BEAR

Bears don't collect stamps.

BABY BEAR

Whatev.

MAMA BEAR

They don't even send letters.

BABY BEAR

(snorts) Yeah, like *anybody* does any more.

PAPA BEAR

Look. I have just about had it with your sarcasm.

BABY BEAR

I was only trying to make a point.

PAPA BEAR

Yes, but in that nasty, know-it-all tone...when you know nothing...Nothing! *(muttering—)* Cubs these days!

MAMA BEAR

It's just a phase, Papa Bear. He'll outgrow it.

PAPA BEAR

I don't know. Maybe if you hadn't coddled him so much...buying him that "wee little chair," and that "wee little bed," that wee little this, and that wee little that...No wonder he's growing up to be such a *weenie!*

MAMA BEAR

That's right, blame the mother. It's always the mother's fault.

BABY BEAR

(sotto voce) Gee, I just love this quality family time.

PAPA BEAR

What'd you say?

BABY BEAR

I said...I knew this walk was a bad idea.

PAPA BEAR

Well, you know what I have to say to that?

BABY BEAR

What.

(PAPA BEAR growls, assuming a threatening stance directed at BABY BEAR, who gets scared and withdraws to the periphery)

MAMA BEAR

Bruno! Cool it with the shock and awe. He's only a cub!

(The BEARS, now estranged from one another, sulk in separate spaces, perhaps sitting on rocks. But they are soon distracted by the entrance of three characters. PRINCE PLEASANT is being fought over by SNOW WHITE and SLEEPING BEAUTY who pull at his clothes from opposite sides in their attempts to lay claim to him. SNOW WHITE and SLEEPING BEAUTY are disheveled, in the manner of people who have just awakened from a long sleep.)

SNOW WHITE

He's mine! I kissed him first.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

You didn't kiss *him*—he kissed *you*.

SNOW WHITE

Proves my point. He's mine.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

Nope. Soon after he kissed you, he kissed *me*, which proves *my* point—you weren't satisfactory, so he had to find somebody better—*me*. Q.E.D.—he's mine!

SNOW WHITE

Dream on, sister! Mine!

SLEEPING BEAUTY

What part of *mine* don't you understand?

PRINCE PLEASANT

Girls! Girls!

SLEEPING BEAUTY

Hey—don't call me 'girl'. I've been sleeping for a hundred years, so I'm thinking I'm a woman by now.

PRINCE PLEASANT

Sorry. No offense.

PAPA BEAR

Uh...what's going on?

PRINCE PLEASANT

They both want me.

MAMA BEAR

(celebrity-struck, to PAPA BEAR) Oh my gosh—do you know who that is? That's Prince Charming!

PRINCE PLEASANT

Actually, he's my brother. I'm not quite charming, I'm afraid, but I'm pleasant enough. They call me Prince Pleasant.

PAPA BEAR

How did you wind up in this fix?

PRINCE PLEASANT

I guess it all started when I woke up this morning and turned on CCNN—the Castle and Cottage News Network—and I heard that there was a blond, female burglar prowling around these parts.

MAMA BEAR

Oh right, I heard that too.

PRINCE PLEASANT

I figured I'd go looking around the neighborhood to see if I could catch her. Do a good deed—giving-back-to-the-community kind of thing. So I'm walking along in the woods, *(re SNOW WHITE—)* when I see this gir—*(corrects himself)* uh, woman—

SNOW WHITE

You can call *me* a girl—I'm not a century old.

PRINCE PLEASANT

—when I see this person lying perfectly still in this kind of big glass box. She looked trapped. I went and opened the box, and she was so beautiful...I...I admit it was without consent...but I kissed her. As if by magic she came alive...and got up...

SNOW WHITE

(remembering, dreamy) And we started to fall in love!

PRINCE PLEASANT

I guess we *were* hitting it off pretty well as we walked through the woods getting to know each other. But then we came upon an old castle practically hidden by overgrown briars and brambles. And outside the highest castle tower was a sign that said, "SLEEPING PRINCESS INSIDE. LONG-TERM SLUMBER—DO NOT DISTURB."

SNOW WHITE

So genius here had to go disturb.

PRINCE PLEASANT

Well, I figured I was maybe on a roll and could perhaps help the poor gir—woman—wake up. So long story short, I cut through the briars and brambles, accessed the tower, climbed to the top, she was in there sleeping—there was, weirdly, some kind of yarn-spinning device... Anyway—cut to the chase—I kissed her.

SNOW WHITE

(disgusted) And the rest is history.

(SNOW WHITE and SLEEPING BEAUTY continue to tug on PRINCE's clothing)

PRINCE PLEASANT

I could really use some help getting out of this situation.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

(still waking up) I could really use a cup of coffee. Does anyone know if they've invented Starbucks yet?

BABY BEAR

(stepping forward) No, but I think I know how you can all solve your problem.

PRINCE PLEASANT

Super! I'm afraid we haven't met.

BABY BEAR

I'm Ba...*(corrects himself)* I'm the Bear Formerly Known as Baby Bear.

SNOW WHITE

(patting BABY BEAR's head) Aw, he's cute.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

(to PRINCE) Oh, she's just trying to impress you with her motherhood potential. She's about as maternal as a viper.

SNOW WHITE

I'll have you know I've been taking care of seven little—!

PRINCE PLEASANT

People! Let's hear what the bear has to say.

BABY BEAR

The problem is simple: Two princesses plus one prince equals misery. But two princesses plus *two* princes equals happiness. So all you need to live happily ever after is one more prince. And I know where you can find one.

SNOW WHITE, SLEEPING BEAUTY, PRINCE

You do? Where?

BABY BEAR

Over there. *(pointing)* Down through the woods, there's a pond. And in that pond, there's a whole lot of frogs. And frogs...well...everyone knows that when a princess kisses a frog, there's a good chance he'll turn into a prince. I'd estimate that by the time you've kissed, oh, maybe nine, ten frogs, you'll have yourselves another prince.

SNOW WHITE

Well, okay...but no way am *I* kissing any frogs. Let *her* do it.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

Are you kidding me? That's disgusting!

BABY BEAR

Uh, why don't you just take turns?

PRINCE PLEASANT

Good idea, Bear Formerly Known as Baby Bear. Come on, let's do it.

(SLEEPING BEAUTY and SNOW WHITE grudgingly assent, and, still adhering to the PRINCE, they exit with him)

MAMA BEAR

(impressed) Wow, Baby Bear, that was—

(ALL are distracted as five DWARVES march in, singing "Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, a-searching we will go...." When they come to a halt—)

HAPPY

Excuse me, have you seen our housekeeper?

PAPA BEAR

You are..?

HAPPY

Happy.

SLEEPY

Sleepy.

DOPEY

Dopey.

SNEEZY

Sneezy. (*sneezes*)

MAMA BEAR

Gesundheit.

BASHFUL

Bashful.

ALL DWARVES

We're dwarves.

SLEEPY

And about our housekeeper...

DOPEY

She seems to have wandered off.

SNEEZY

Have you seen her? (*sneezes*)

MAMA BEAR

Gesundheit.

PAPA BEAR

What does your housekeeper look like?

WHICHEVER DWARF IS THE SHORTEST

(*reaching up, on tippy-toe*) About yay high.

HAPPY

Lips as red as roses.

BASHFUL

Hair as black as ebony.

DOPEY

Skin as white as snow.

BABY BEAR

We've seen her!

PAPA BEAR

Yes—she went that-a-way with a prince and a gir—woman—who'd been sleeping for a hundred years.

BABY BEAR

They went to look for frogs.

DWARVES

Huh?

BABY BEAR

It's complicated.

SNEEZY

Well, thanks for the info. *(to DWARVES)* Come on, guys, let's go get her. *(sneezes)*

MAMA BEAR

Gesundheit.

BABY BEAR

Wait a minute. Aren't there supposed to be seven of you? There's only five. Where are the other two?

HAPPY

Grumpy and Doc stayed back at the cottage, to guard it. We heard there was a burglar around who breaks into people's houses and makes cutting remarks about the furnishings. We don't need anyone carping about our beds being too small or too messy. We know they're small—duh—it's 'cause we're dwarves!

SLEEPY

Yeah, and we know they're messy—that's why we're looking for our housekeeper—to make our beds!

PAPA BEAR

Hmmm...you know, even if you find her, I don't know if it'll do you much good. I get the impression she's looking to enter into a different kind of domestic arrangement.

(DWARVES grumble. Pause)

BABY BEAR

So, uh, why don't you guys make your own beds?

HAPPY

It's too hard—the blanket, the bottom sheet, the top sheet. Do you know how hard it is for little guys like ourselves to line up the top sheet just so and then smooth it out and then fold it just so over the top edge of the blanket? Fuhgeddaboutit—it's a nightmare.

BABY BEAR

But...but...you don't have to do all that anymore. They've been saying for a few years now that a top sheet isn't really necessary. You can still be considered a good housekeeper if your bed doesn't have a top sheet. *We* certainly don't use one when we hibernate.

(MAMA BEAR and PAPA BEAR nod their heads to validate this.)

BASHFUL

You sure about this?

BABY BEAR

Absolutely. It's the Middle Ages already—why should we have to stick with the old ways?

SLEEPY

Well, this certainly casts a new light on things.

DOPEY

Yeah, it's almost like it's the Enlightenment. Let's go home and make our own beds.

(DWARVES ad-lib good-byes and march out. As they exit—)

BABY BEAR

Bye, Happy...Sleepy...

MAMA BEAR

Dopey...Sneezy...

(SNEEZY sneezes)

MAMA BEAR / PAPA BEAR

Gesundheit. / Bashful.

BABY BEAR

Good luck with the beds! *(Pause. BABY BEAR looks in the direction of the pond, then enters the woods, scanning)* So they must've kissed a lot of frogs by now. I wonder if they're heading back. *(He notices something on the ground)* Whoa.

PAPA BEAR

You see them? They got another prince?

BABY BEAR

No, it's not that. There's something on the ground—a trail of bread crumbs!

MAMA BEAR

Don't eat them. They'll have dirt on them.

PAPA BEAR

(getting hungry) Hmm...they white or rye?

BABY BEAR

You don't understand—this means trouble! I've gotta do something!

MAMA BEAR

What're you talking about, Baby?

BABY BEAR

I know who left these crumbs—Hansel and Gretel.

PAPA BEAR

Hanslangretle? What species is he?

BABY BEAR

(fast—it's urgent) Human—and there's two of them—small!

PAPA BEAR

More dwarves?

BABY BEAR

No, cubs—I mean little children. They're in terrible danger!

MAMA BEAR

Because..?

BABY BEAR

I met them last week—okay?—when I was out playing in the woods. They told me about their situation... *(referencing crumbs—)* which has now gotten more dire.

PAPA BEAR

Cause they lost a little bread?

BABY BEAR

No! Listen! You know that old cottage over in the next valley?

(PAPA BEAR and MAMA BEAR draw a blank)

BABY BEAR

Well, there *is* one—trust me. And in that old cottage live Hansel and Gretel, with their father, an old wood-cutter.

PAPA BEAR

Is everything in the next valley old?

BABY BEAR

(hitting his forehead with his paw) Da-ad!—everything in this whole woods is old—it's a primeval forest! But this is serious.

PAPA BEAR

Okay. Go on.

BABY BEAR

These kids live with their father and their stepmother. And she's a real b... *(he censors himself)* 'B'.

MAMA BEAR

I thought you said this family was human. Now they're bees?

BABY BEAR

No! They are! I mean human! It's just that—I meant—this stepmother is a real...she's like a witch. And she hates Hansel and Gretel. Every day she makes them go out into the forest to look for firewood, with only a crust of bread for nourishment. She's hoping they'll get lost and never return. But these kids are smart. As they walk, they leave a trail of bread crumbs so they'll be able to find their way back home.

PAPA BEAR

So what's the problem? Just leave the crumbs there and—

BABY BEAR

The problem is—this is a fresh trail—left today—and it looks like they're now heading right in the direction of that witch's house!

MAMA BEAR

Huh? That would be in the direction of their own cottage.

BABY BEAR

No!—not the stepmother—she only *seems* like a witch. I mean the *real* witch—the one who built that gingerbread extravaganza over behind the pine-covered mountain...You *do* know that gingerbread extravaganza behind the piney mountain...the one held together with gumdrops, and marshmallows, and peanut brittle...with the gaudy candy cane fence?

(MAMA BEAR and PAPA BEAR draw a blank; BABY BEAR hits his forehead with his paw)

BABY BEAR

You people—I mean animals—have got to get out more.

MAMA BEAR

But we do go on walks in the woods practically every day we have porridge.

BABY BEAR

Yeah, but you stay on the beaten track. I go into the actual woods...anyway, this house behind the piney mountain—it's like a McMansion on a sugar high. I've gone up to it to sniff the gingerbread, but no way would I eat as much as one gumdrop from that thing. 'Cause I suspect it's a trap—a trap for young creatures that the witch wants to fatten up and then eat! And Hansel and Gretel are heading right toward it! I've gotta go save them!

PAPA BEAR

How do you plan to do that, Baby Bear?

BABY BEAR

Shock and awe. *(He demonstrates.)*

PAPA BEAR

Wow, son—I was wrong. I thought you were naive...lazy...a smart-aleck. But now I see I was mistaken. I mean, even though you love sweet things, you were savvy enough not to eat from that suspicious sugary house. I thought you were doing nothing but screens all day, but in reality, you've been exploring your environment, learning survival skills, and having actual face time with other youngsters. Plus the advice you gave to the prince and those women—and to the dwarves too—it was very wise. Not wise-guy-ish—just wise. And the way you're willing to take on a witch to protect the innocent? That's courage! I'm proud of you, son—you have a good heart, and a good head on your shoulders...although...do bears even have shoulders?

BABY BEAR

I don't know, but thanks, Dad...*(starting for the woods—)* Catch you later—gotta go.

(As BABY BEAR heads off in the direction of the bread crumbs, he bumps into HANSEL and GRETEL who are entering.)

BABY BEAR

Hansel! Gretel! I was just on my way to rescue you!

GRETEL

Oh gee, thanks, Baby Bear, but she already did.

BABY BEAR

Who already did?

(GOLDILOCKS enters from same direction)

GRETEL / HANSEL

(pointing at GOLDILOCKS) She did.

(Now PRINCE PLEASANT, SNOW WHITE, and SLEEPING BEAUTY enter, tired, from the direction of the pond. SNOW WHITE and SLEEPING BEAUTY are no longer adhering to the PRINCE.)

PRINCE PLEASANT

(approaching GOLDBLOCKS) Gadzooks!—you’re the one they were talking about on CCNN—the blond burglar! You’re under arrest—I’m making a citizen’s arrest! *(puffs himself up—)* No, actually, I meant a royal arrest!

(He takes hold of GOLDBLOCKS, or produces handcuffs.)

PAPA BEAR

Hey—by the way—where’s the other prince?

SNOW WHITE

Oh, we decided not to do that frog thing.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

Yeah, when we got to the pond, she and I realized we aren’t at a place in our lives where marriage really makes sense. So...I’m aiming for law school. That’ll help me when I sue that malevolent fairy who put me out for a hundred years.

SNOW WHITE

I’m planning to open a yoga studio.

BABY BEAR / MAMA BEAR

Cool.

PRINCE PLEASANT

Now can I arrest her?

GRETEL

Oh, please don’t!

HANSEL

She saved our lives!

GRETEL

Yes, she got there just in time! Broke in and told that awful witch that the peanut brittle on her house was too hard...

HANSEL

...and that the marshmallows were too soft...

GRETEL

...and that, in fact, nothing in her house was just right.

HANSEL

The woman was so stung by the criticism that it took her a moment to get over it—and that's when we made our escape!

MAMA BEAR

Well, that's wonderful, children. (*now to GOLDILOCKS*) But still—why would a young girl like you be breaking into people's homes and making catty remarks?

GOLDILOCKS

Oh, I never meant anything by it! You see, my family, like many in these woods these days, is having a hard time making ends meet. So my parents decided to turn our cottage into a bed-and-breakfast, and they sent me out to get design ideas—to see what works, what doesn't work—in, like, home furnishings, and menu items. I was merely thinking out loud. I never meant anyone any harm!

(PRINCE PLEASANT, convinced, unhands GOLDILOCKS)

PAPA BEAR

Uh...just wondering...This morning...we left our house around a quarter to eight....Have you already broken into it?

GOLDILOCKS

Dunno....What does your house look like?

MAMA BEAR

It's a large one-bedroom? Mid-century modern?

BABY BEAR

Fifteenth-century.

PAPA BEAR

Three of everything in three different sizes? Great-big?...Medium?...And wee-little?

GOLDILOCKS

Oh my gosh—yes—that was the first house I hit! I am so sorry!

MAMA BEAR

Don't worry about it....Really.

GOLDILOCKS

Yes, but I broke the wee little chair! I am so, so—

BABY BEAR

Really—don't worry—it was time.

PAPA BEAR

(proudly drawing BABY BEAR to him) Indeed it was....And now it's time for our breakfast. I do believe the porridge has cooled....Say, why don't you all come over for breakfast?

MAMA BEAR

Yes, I'm sure we can stretch the porridge.

BABY BEAR

Plus we've got some corn flakes. Don't we, Mama Bear?

MAMA BEAR

We do. And, you know, I think we may even have some Honey Nut Cheerios stored away.

(ALL are enthused)

GOLDILOCKS

Oh boy! Let's go! That sounds *just right!*

(GOLDILOCKS runs to join BABY BEAR under PAPA BEAR's protective arm; HANSEL and GRETEL join MAMA BEAR.)

CURTAIN



Need another script?



Have a play to share?

