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CHILDREN'S BOOKS
To Share a Chair With Bear

By PAMELA PAUL
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Ever since the story of the Three Bears, the notion of sharing a home with woodland beasts has stimulated the popular imagination. Two new books, "The Summer Visitors," by Karel Hayes, and "The Next Door Bear," written by Mary Kuryla and illustrated by Eugene Yelchin, offer very different takes on the intersecting domestic lives of people and bears.

"The Summer Visitors" seems like one of those childhood treasures you discover on a musty bookshelf in a furnished summer timeshare: unexpected yet perfectly seasonal, a small pleasure that ends up somehow intrinsic to the vacation experience. Once again, as in 2007's clever "Winter Visitors," Karel upends the idea that it's bears who intrude on human space. Here, finely drawn pen-and-ink and watercolor illustrations, often appearing in panels, tell the story; the economical text is almost unnecessary.

This is a tale of two families. First, there are the humans, a couple and their two children, bikes on the station wagon roof and suitcases jumbled in the trunk, who descend upon their summer cottage, nestled near a lake that could be in New Hampshire, northern Wisconsin or Minnesota. Meanwhile, an ursine family of four, hidden in the forest, observe the newcomers with anticipation. Thereafter, the alternating stories of both families are recounted with humor and affection: The humans unpack their belongings in the house; the bears grope at the remaining baggage in the car trunk.

At intervals, the humans pause to contemplate the ensuing disarray. Children, especially those who enjoy wooded summer retreats, will love looking at the two families' lives, with boat rides, fireworks, picnics and other summery pleasures playing out in often comic parallel (the mother's bathing suit inexplicably stretched, the boy's kite mysteriously rescued from a tree).

Thus is the Goldilocks tale retold askew. Bears, who in the familiar telling pose a threat to human safety and shelter, live harmoniously beside people in these books. If only that were really the case in the suburbs of northern New Jersey.