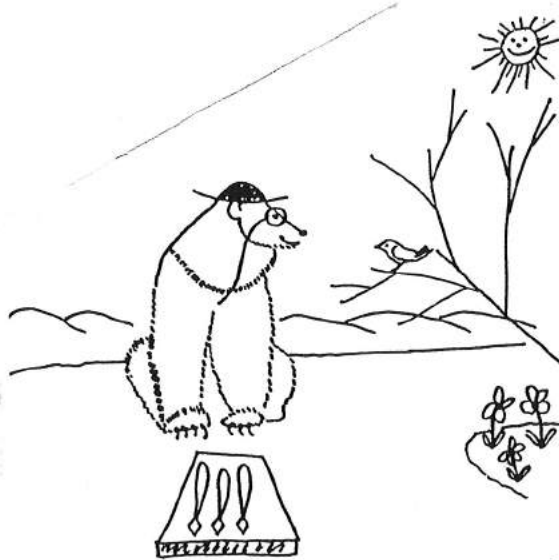


AILEEN BOYD-OTLEY

THE VERDI BEARS PICNIC

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Old Man Coniston and Lady Windermere were proud Verdi Bear parents, and loved their three green cubs dearly.

Today was a very special day, for their green cubs were to be given their names and begin their lessons....

"Your name is Bassenthwaite" announced Old Man Coniston as he placed a green slate name tag, suspended from a green silk cord, around the first young green fluffy neck, that of the she bear.

Bassenthwaite shuddered as she heard her name, a name she didn't want.

The Verdi Bear cub next to her giggled, but stopped as Old Man Coniston placed a green silk cord around his young green fluffy neck too, saying, "and your name is Buttermere."

Bassenthwaite giggled now, because she knew he had wanted a foreign and exciting name.

"And your name is Grasmere" said Old Man Coniston, placing yet another green silk cord around another young green fluffy neck, but this little Verdi Bear smiled, he liked his name.

"You young Verdi Bears have some very hard work in

the coming months..."

His voice trailed away as he looked down at pretty little Bassenthwaite, she didn't look too happy, and he rather suspected he saw a little tear trickling down her cheek.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"I don't like my name" she said quietly. "I want to be called Juliet."

Old Man Coniston took the monocle from his eye, and smiled, saying, "Verdi Bears can't have human names. We are the Green Guardians of the Lake District and we take our names from hereabouts, therefore, we cannot have a Verdi Bear called Juliet climbing about in our trees."

"Well then, can I be called Alice" asked Bassenthwaite. "She lived in Wonderland, and she talked to animals, and grew smaller and went to an exciting tea party. I read all about her in a book."

Old Man Coniston shook his head, "You read too many books. Verdi Bears don't usually read books, we write in them, not read them. We write in note books and the like, we haven't time to read story books!"

There was silence for a moment, and another tear trickled down her face.

"Tell you what" said Old Man Coniston kindly, as he wiped away her tears, "why not call yourself Bassy. It would be a nice way to shorten the name Bassenthwaite. Would that help?"

Bassy smiled, and Old Man Coniston sighed with relief!

"What a good idea" said Lady Windermere to herself, "Bassy for short."

She smiled a little as she wondered just what Bassy would think of the forthcoming lesson....perhaps she should stay and watch.

Lady Windermere was sitting under the damson tree on her wicker armchair. It was rather cool, so she was wearing her green velvet cape.

She felt sorry for the three young Verdi Bears, just a little. It would be hard work for them at first, but they would soon learn their lessons of one kind or another.

But just in case this, their first day, proved too hard, she would sit under the damson tree, and pretend to sketch, so that she could help sort out any little problems should they occur!

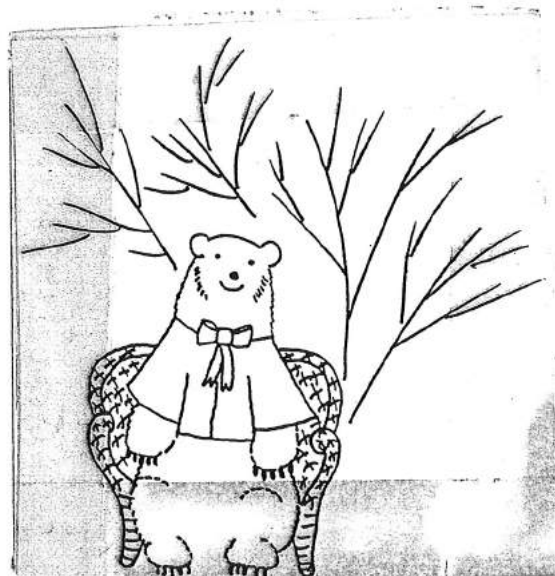
Lady Windermere smiled as she thought how excited Bassy had been when she had been given her green school satchel for the very first time, that morning. She had checked through the contents over and over again.

Here, in the garden, Bassy was looking once more into her Satchel, and looking at her yogurt carton, part of the contents, and part of the daily diet of a Verdi Bear.

"When can I eat my yogurt?" she asked for the second time in just one minute.

"When I tell you" replied Old Man Coniston, as he handed them a piece of squared paper which was clipped firmly onto a small green board. "One board and one piece of paper for each of you" he added.

"Stand in line, and face me" he said, as he polished his monocle, and replaced it smartly.



"I want you to draw a large square on your paper, then mark on it the number of bushes in these hedges surrounding this garden. All four sides. One side of a hedge to one side of your square."

He paused now, and watched four sided squares being drawn on paper. So far, so good, he thought.

"After you have completed marking on it the number of bushes, I would like you to count the number of old bird nests in the hedges. Then make a list of the various types of bushes which make up the hedges. You will find for instance hawthorne, and one or two wild geese^{berr} Etcetera, etcetera, and etcetera."

"Oh deary me" said Bassy sadly. "What a lot of words, and what a hard task. I don't think I can manage all of that work to-day. Not even in a week!"

"Course you can" said Old Man Coniston grumpily. "Nothing to it, just watch me."

He knelt by the hedge, and with his walking stick crook-side first, gave part of the hedge a good examination, explaining as he did so.

"See Bassy. Pull the old twigs clear, and you see one bush. It is only the branches and twigs which have grown together. Easy. Here, use my walking stick!"

But she wasn't looking at Old Man Coniston, or the hedge. Instead, she was looking inside her green satchel yet again.

Actually, she was making sure the silver foil was still on her yogurt carton, and while doing so, accidentally said aloud "Can't we have pink with pieces of strawberry in it for a change! I'm so bored with green!"

"What in the world are you talking about now?" said

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Old Man Coniston crossly, polishing his monocle and replacing it with a flourish. "Pink with pieces of strawberry in it? Upon my word. What kind of a hedge is that pray?"

"Yogurt" said Bassy, having lost interest in the bushes and the old nests.

Buttermere and Grasmere sniggered, and said rather unkindly. "Pink yogurt - imagine Verdi Bears eating pink yogurt!"

"Enough of that" said Old Man Coniston. "Keep your minds on your tasks, and forget pink yogurt. Green is full of vitamins, and keeps our coats a good green colour! Pink is for people, or something of that order!"

Grasmere stepped forward, and said, "Leave me in charge of her, Old Man Coniston, she doesn't mean any harm. She doesn't know very much yet."

Lady Windermere laughed aloud. "What a fuss. Get on with your counting the bushes and the old nests, GRASMERE, Bring all your satchels over to me, please do."

Grasmere brought the ^{green}satchels over quickly, and as he laid them at her feet, she whispered in his ear, "Yes, you help little Bassy, there's a good little Verdi Bear. She will soon learn." She popped a piece of vanilla fudge into his mouth.

It was difficult to reply with a mouth containing vanilla fudge, but nevertheless, he managed, "Just leave it all to me Lady Windermere. You know I will help her. I promise faithfully."

He turned away from Lady Windermere, and walked back to where Bassy was standing, and held her paw.

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"You and I will work as a team, that way we will work much faster" he said to her, and their voices faded away into the distance as they walked to one of the corners of the large garden.

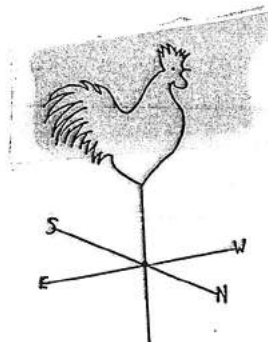
Lady Windermere sighed with relief, and put another piece of vanilla fudge into her mouth. Bassy could be very trying when she tried. Thankfully, Grasmere was now in charge.

It was such a lovely day, the birds were singing, and she could hear in the distance the sound of human voices, and laughter, and the sound of a tennis ball hitting a racquet, or a racquet hitting a tennis ball, but she couldn't play tennis at all and was never quite sure about the correct words to use when even thinking about tennis!

She knew about the weather needed for playing tennis in, and knew it was a lovely day for tennis. She knew perfectly well who was playing tennis too, it was Museum Sandy and his wife, who were both keen tennis players, and such a nice family to have as neighbours.

Through the high section of the hedges, the part which separated their garden from that of ^{Museum} Sandy and his tennis court, she could see the white clothing they were wearing quite clearly. Why did tennis players need to wear white clothing, she often wondered, but didn't like to ask.

There were of course four sides to Old Man Coniston's garden, and four hedges of course, but this high hedge between the Verdi Bears and their neighbour seemed to interest Bassy too.



There was now the sound of a shrill young voice amid the birdsong, and Lady Windermere shuddered.

"Why are those legs wearing white shoes and stockings?" demanded Bassy, loud and clear, as she looked through a gap in the high hedge.

Lady Windermere sighed, and put away her sketch pad and pencil, no point in trying to sketch, or even pretend to. She would go indoors and get on with some cooking, but perhaps, she would just finish her piece of fudge first!

Bassy asked quite loudly for a second time. "Why are those legs wearing white stockings and shoes. Why are they running around on the grass, and why is that strange piece of wood with a darn in the middle hitting a white ball? Look everyone!"

"They're playing tennis" said Grasmere, not taking Bassy at all seriously. Instead, he studied a section of the hedge, and then said to her "Mark on the paper two old nests."

She could hardly believe him, were there really nests in hedges?

"Lined with mud. Must be thrushes. " he went on, sounding very learned indeed. "Here Bassy, see this one, it's a double nest. The parent bird has put a plastic bag on the old nest, and built a second storey nest on top. How very clever. How very interesting. Come and look Bassy."

Bassy stood on the tip of her paws, and looked into the old bird nest built on another bird nest, but wasn't at all impressed.

Her shrill voice carried to the four corners of the garden!

"I don't want to look at old dirty nests full of spiders. Oh how boring all this is" she said, and knelt down once more to peer through the hedge, to where she could see the tennis players.

Still in a shrill voice, she said "Why do we have to bother about counting things. Why can't I play tennis through that hedge with THEM!"

Grasmere laughed. "We Verdi Bears have to keep an eye on things, the forests, and the countryside. We have to count the trees from time to time, and bird nests, the old ones, just to keep an eye on things!"

"Well," said Bassy, "I'm bored, and I want to have my yogurt and I want to play tennis, so there!"

She sat down near the hedge and pretended to cry. "I want to play tennis, it looks such fun!"

Lady Windermere now began to feel rather guilty. Grasmere had to be helped now. He was really too young to be left in charge of Bassy all of the time, and the wise Old Man Coniston had already skedaddled off to read his newspaper indoors, in peace and quiet!

Wise Old Man Coniston, she thought to herself as she said quite loudly "Bassy!"

Bassy looked up, pretending to wipe away her pretend tears.

"Come over here dear" said Lady Windermere, holding out her arms towards the sad looking little Verdi Bear.

As she held Bassy very close, she said very softly, "We are Verdi Bears, and Verdi Bears don't play tennis."

Only human people play tennis."

"Oh how I wish I was a human people" sighed Bassy and this time she didn't have to pretend to cry, for her tears were now very, very, real.

Lady Windermere began rummaging into the depths of her very large handbag. She found what she was looking for.

"Look at this Bassy, this is pretty" said Lady Windermere, as she took the top off a yogurt carton. "Shhhh! It is a secret - it is a strawberry yogurt - and it is pink. Eat it all up, and dry your tears."

She handed her a handkerchief as she spoke, a Monday one, which too was pink.

"Pink for Mondays" she said, as she dried Bassy's tears and smiled. "Mondays need cheering up!"

Bassy looked up at Lady Windermere, with tears once more, but this time they were tears of gratitude, or perhaps even happiness.

"Why are you so kind Lady Windermere?" she asked shyly. "I am just horrible myself!"

Lady Windermere laughed aloud, and said "I am just horrible myself too, at times. Just quite horrible!"

It was now Bassy's turn to laugh aloud.

All the while Grasmere and Buttermere were working quickly and quietly, admiring beautifully shaped leaves and gnarled old stems and slender twigs as they did so.

Hearing Lady Windermere and Bassy laugh, they looked at each other and shrugged their green shoulders.

"Female Verdi Bears are very difficult to understand" said Grasmere. "Very difficult indeed!"

And so the remainder of the first day's lessons

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went on quite quietly, that is, compared to earlier on!

At least, that's what Buttermere wrote in his diary!

Bassy didn't bother to write anything in her diary on this first day, she was much too tired!

Grasmere wrote many things in all sorts of books at the end of that first day, making sure that one of the books he wrote in contained a very good shortish poem which Old Man Coniston had written on the blackboard all about muddy lined nests built by thrushes! He used his very best paw writing, saying the poem aloud as he penned each word slowly -

YON THRUSH!

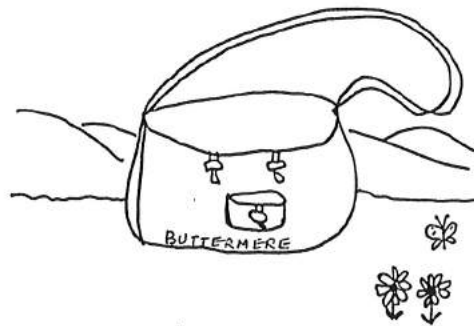
Yon spotted Thrush,
Building in the bush,

Knows he should,
Line his nest with mud,

If he could carry mud on a spade,
In an hour twould be made,

Twill surely take a week,
Carried by a little tweaky beak!

Oh, you tired little Thrush,
Building s-l-o-w-l-y in the bush!



But the next day was Tuesday, and was quite different....

"Check your green school satchels now" said Old Man Coniston, as they all left the breakfast table.

"I checked mine yesterday" said Bassy, "I shan't just bother today!"

"But satchels have to be checked each and every day" said Old Man Coniston. "Hurry up Bassy, we haven't all day. Time is a-wasting. Check your school satchel!"

Bassy sat on the floor, and emptied her satchel by turning it upside down. She wasn't any too pleased.

She then checked each item against her list, and slowly and deliberately replaced it.

She held her paw out to Grasmere to take the last item from him. He had rescued it from under the table from where it had rolled.

"Cucumber yogurt!" she said aloud. "How dreadfully horrible."

She stood up now, and put the satchel over her

shoulder.

"Ready" she said, "but I just won't be able to eat that green cucumber yogurt. I just know I will be starved all day!"

"But we will be back home for lunch " said Old Man Coniston with a shake of his head.

Lady Windermere laughed aloud and left the room quickly.

"Now stand in line in front of me and listen carefully" said Old Man Coniston. "All present and correct?"

"Yes" said Grasmere.

"Your task for today then is all to do with colour. Take out your colour cards," said Old Man Coniston.

There was great excitement now, as the colour cards were searched for deep in the satchels.

He watched their frantic search, but eventually, they had their packs of colour cards ready. He continued.

"Now. All these small cards have colours painted on them, and the colours are numbered. Can you see what I mean?"

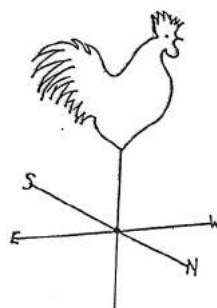
Grasmere nodded, and said "yes."

So too did Buttermere.

But Bassy wasn't at all impressed. Her shrill voice carried to the four corners of the house, and down into the cellar and high into the attics!

"I don't want to learn about these colours on these cards. It's boring. Can't we do something more exciting today?"

Lady Windermere, who had been busy at the top of



a ladder in the larder came rushing in.

"Whatever is wrong now Bassy? I can hear you all over the house!" she asked.

Bassy looked her saddest look, and then asked "Oh why do we have to learn such silly things on cards? Human young ones don't have such silly tasks as we do!"

"Oh yes they do" said Grasmere. "They have sum cards, and they have tables to learn. The five times and ten times are easy, but the twelve times is a horror!"

"Yes indeed" said Buttermere. "I would rather learn our colours than the twelve times!"

"Tell you what" said Lady Windermere. "You can start with an easy one. The colour white. The first card in your packs."

"Capital idea" said Old Man Coniston. "White it is, and off we all go now into the Old Meadow behind Scribblings!"

So Bassy, Grasmere, Buttermere, and Old Man Coniston, left the house. Eventually, that is, after one or two minor skirmishes, and as they left the garden gate, Lady Windermere came down the garden path carrying a tea spoon carefully in front of her.

"Bassy" she called, holding the spoon high in her direction.

Bassy came running eagerly back. Had Lady Windermere found a Silver Spoon in the washing up bowl?

Better still, a Golden one? Or even a Magic one, and the Magic one had spoken and said "let Bassy have a day's holiday today!"

"Open your mouth dear" said Lady Windermere.

Bassy looked up at the spoon in horror.

"What is it first" she said. "Tell me first and then I will open my mouth!"

"Well, it is a spoonful of White Clover Honey, and it will give you strength" said Lady Windermere.

So Bassy gladly opened her mouth, and licked every last drop off the spoon.

"Oh deary me" she said, as she handed it back to Lady Windermere. "I don't think I can manage today at all. I don't understand why we need to know about colours at all."

"Well," said Lady Windermere. "These are your first lessons. Just try your very best. But I think I can help you" she said, smiling. "Listen, then tell the others

"Today is a Tuesday, white handkerchief day for everyone. Look in your satchels and you will see them. All I want you to do, the three of you, is look for something the same colour as your hankies, and also remember look for something white which can be eaten by cattle and visited by the bees!"

She stooped, and pinned a bunch of white clover onto Bassy's satchel.

"Now off you go, and enjoy yourselves."

Bassy ran quickly to catch up with Old Man Coniston and the others, and as the field was really quite near they were soon going over the stile. In fact, it was less than a minute.

"Here is where I say cheerio" said Old Man Coniston, looking at the three troubled looking small green faces.

"Now, you all know to look for a small white flowery

head. And you shouldn't be too tired, you all had WHITE CLOVER HONEY on your toast at breakfast. So now, sharpen your pencils and off you go!"

So they stood and sharpened pencils, opened their notebooks, and then waved him goodbye.

And as he walked away smiling, as he polished his monocle on a white handkerchief, he overheard Bassy say "what a silly thing we have to do today. Look for something white which can be eaten by cattle and visited by the bee!"

He heard Grasmere and Buttermere laugh at her.

Then Bassy said aloud, in fact, very aloud, "Well, all I know which is white and can be eaten by cattle and visited by bees is white cheese, white milk, and white bread sandwiches if you're having a picnic!"

"All one can do under the circumstances is jolly well keep on looking" said Grasmere, seriously and and quietly, trying hard not to laugh, "Something is sure to turn up!"

But as Bassy looked at him, she was sure, or just about sure, he was just joking. She was sure his eyes looked as though they were laughing, and the sides of his mouth looked as though they were happy.

But a tone in his voice told a different story!

Buttermere sounded pompous, but here again, his eyes were shining the way they usually did when he was laughing, and he said "Something white with a small white flowery head and can be eaten, and the bees visit. Shouldn't be too difficult for us."

Then Grasmere and Buttermere exchanged glances.

"Well then" sighed Bassy, "let us walk all around the Old Meadow and see what we shall see, and to this Grasmere and Buttermere agreed.

It was a large meadow, so they thought, and the cattle were grazing quietly. It was pleasant, for the birds were singing and the sun was shining.

They paused beside the stile, after completing the fourth side of the hedge, the last side.

"Well, did you see anything which might be what we are looking for Bassy?" asked Grasmere.

"No, I didn't" she said and sat down beside the stile.

"Never mind" said Buttermere, "better luck next time. Perhaps on our second or third trip around the field, we might see something."

"I can't be bothered to go on any second or third trips around The Old Meadow. I shall just sit here and keep my eyes open, I just can't keep on walking. I'm bored. All I seem to notice are old black feathers sticking in the ground like pens!"

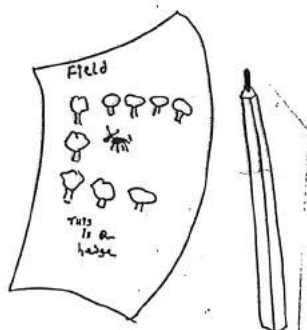
To her surprise, there was no argument from the other two Verdi Bears, instead, as she sat on the grass, she could see both Grasmere and Buttermere were scribbling away for dear life in their notebooks, with smiles showing on their faces for all to see!

"Have you got secrets in those books?" she asked them.

"Yes, a big secret" laughed Buttermere unkindly.

"Let me see what you're writing in there" she said.

"Shan't! No copying!" he teased, closing his notebook.



"I don't care a button!" she said. "I'm just going to sit here and eat my Cucumber Yogurt and have a good sulk at the same time. I don't care what you have scribbled in your silly books!"

She took the yogurt carton out of her satchel and put it down on the grass beside her, because at that very moment, she noticed something which scared her, and her eyes widened in horror!

Buttermere began to laugh as he saw her expression, and when he saw what was making her scared, he laughed all the more, for it was the cows who were advancing towards them!

Nearer and nearer came the cattle!

"Oh I don't think I like those beasts coming nearer to us" she said. "Chase them Grasmere, please!"

But Grasmere was busily writing in his book, and didn't pay any attention to her pleading.

She shouted at the fast approaching cattle "Shoo, away you go!"

Buttermere laughed even more.

"You are such a noisy little madam, they are coming over to have a good look at you" he said.

Grasmere now laughed, and this was more than Bassy could stand.

She threw her satchel at Buttermere, but missed him.

"Now that isn't very ladylike, is it?" said Grasmere.

"You missed me by a mile!" jeered Buttermere.

Bassy picked up her yogurt carton, and took the silver top off it, jumped to her feet, ran over to where Buttermere was standing, and emptied it over his head!

He stopped laughing immediately! He then picked up his satchel, and walked sadly and miserably towards the stile.

"I'm going back to the house" he said, as he climbed over it, and out of the Meadow.

"Serves him right" she said, "Sometimes he isn't very nice to me."

But she felt rather sad, as she stood at the stile, and watched him walk down the road.

"But you aren't always very nice yourself" said Grasmere, rather unwisely.

Bessy turned to him, but there wasn't anything left to throw, and she saw the yogurt carton was empty, much to Grasmere's relief!

She looked at her satchel, which was lying a short distance away.

"Goodness" she said. "That animal is eating my satchel!"

"No it isn't" said Grasmere. "Look again, here, use my binoculars and have a really good look!"

He opened his satchel, and took out his green binoculars, which he handed to her.

She put them to her eyes, and gazed at the thrown away satchel, and the big brown and white cow.

"Would you believe, it is eating the clover Lady Windermere pinned on my satchel, she will be vexed!" she wailed. Grasmere laughed.

"Doesn't that tell you anything Bessy?" he said.

"Cows can't speak. How can it tell me anything?" she jeered.

"But I mean tell by the clues, not speak tell" answered Grasmere.

"Oh I am so bored with all of this guessing. I think I will just write white clover into my note book, the cow seems to be enjoying it very much. How interesting!" said Bassy.

"Right you are! You have guessed after all!" laughed Grasmere. "Clover it is, white clover. Even Lady Windermere tried to help you. She pinned some onto the satchel, and gave you some White Clover Honey to eat to help you guess! You clever old thing!"

But Bassy didn't laugh. "You are mean, and so is Buttermere. You should have told me."

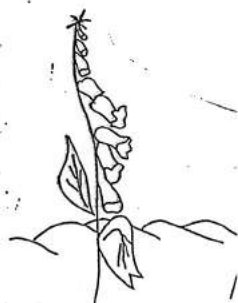
He shook his head. "No we shouldn't. Actually, you are far more clever than you think you are, you just haven't enough confidence in yourself Bassy. You just lack confidence."

"Oh Grasmere, you sound so old when you speak those old sensible kind of words" she said, as she handed back the green binoculars.

"Really, now Bassy, surely you don't mean it?" he asked.

"No, not really I suppose. But the trouble is, I don't really understand old words, and grown up Verdis very well yet, do you?" she said, as she watched him pack away the binoculars and bring out his yogurt.

"No, not always" he agreed, "but I am glad grown up Verdi Bears understand that we young Verdi Bears need nourishment mid mornings. I'm glad they understand us. Time for yogurt."



It was at this precise moment she realised she was hungry, and that ^{had} she a better temper, she would not have to be wishing a wish and hoping, and hoping, and hoping, that Grasmere might just remember she hadn't eaten since breakfast either.

"I poured my yogurt over Buttermere" she said sadly. "I haven't anything to eat now."

Grasmere took her empty carton and poured half of his own yogurt into it.

"It was his own fault anyway, serves him right" he said as he handed it to her.

So they sat on the stile and ate the Green Cucumber yogurt, and watched the cow who was watching them eat it!

As they ate, they talked, and eventually agreed that learning about colours was quite interesting, particular when one lived in the country, as they did.

Bassy was also thinking about something else!

She was thinking about what she had seen with her look through those binoculars - through the hedge - as she had studied the satchel and clover. Through the hedge she had caught a glimpse of a long net and wooden posts, and someone playing tennis again, and what is more, they had been laughing!

In fact, it looked even more fun than ever she had realised.

"Yes, much more fun than I realised before" she said aloud, and as she spoke she heard the ping of a tennis ball on a racquet somewhere over the hedge!

"Yes, I am so glad you agree" said Grasmere, scraping the sides of his yogurt tub, thinking she was speaking

of colour cards. "I believe we are to study green, and green grass tomorrow."

But Bassy was still thinking of white, not clover, but shoes and stockings. And the cows munched steadily on!

Meanwhile, Buttermere was trying to shake the yogurt off his green fur without letting anyone see, but it was difficult, especially when you were trying to walk at the same time!

As he passed a small horse trough just outside the Scribblings, he suddenly thought, "why not wash myself here?" And why not indeed!

He placed his satchel on the ground, and with cupped paws poured the water over his green head over and over again.

The cold water was terribly cold, really terribly cold, but probably worth it, he thought, as he now saw some of the pieces of cucumber floating in the trough.

"That is a good sign" he said to himself, but when he put his paws to his head, he realised he was still covered with the yogurt, and worse, it seemed to have spread out all the more!

He didn't want to be seen! Oh how much he didn't want to be seen. Oh how embarrassed he felt, so he ran all the way ^{home} up the garden path and into the garden.

"Now, where can I hide just for a moment or two until I make plans?" he thought.

He looked around him. He saw the damson tree. Could he hide behind it? No, it wouldn't do at all.

Behind the Garden Shed? No, it wouldn't do at all.

But inside the Garden Shed? Yes, that was a different kettle of fish. Capital idea, inside the Garden Shed would be the place!

He crept stealthily to the door, opened it, and walked in, thinking, "there is always a moment when one opens a door, when one walks in, when one hopes for better luck inside."

He had better luck inside, for neither Old Man Coniston or Lady Windermere were inside!

He sat on Lady Windermere's wicker armchair, and began to think about making plans for his clean up campaign!

But he found he couldn't make any plans to deal with the removal of yogurt and pieces of cucumber, instead, now alone, in this shed, he realised that it was an interesting place.

For a start, it was warm, and there was a large fly buzzing against one of the windows.

A huge spiders web spread out on one of the panes of glass nearest to him. He noticed that the windows surely could do with a clean.

There were huge bunches of onions and things hanging from long nails. Other buggies of things hanging from nails. In fact, the shed was choc~~a~~-bloc~~k~~ with all manner of things. There were strings and nails absolutely everywhere.

There were notes scribbled on pieces of paper, and nailed on the walls.

A bored young Verdi Bear could really have a fine old time in this Garden Shed he thought. Perhaps he

should offer to tidy it up one day.

Perhaps even clean the cobwebby windows one day, perhaps even clean the windows today, no time at all like the present. At the least, the exercise would warm him up because what with the cold Cucumber Yogurt and the cold water from the horse trough on his head, he was now feeling decidedly chilly!

"I can use my clean white handkerchief to clean the windows" he said aloud with a grin.

It was at that precise moment he realised he hadn't a handkerchief. In fact, he hadn't anything at all with him apart from the green fur he stood up in. His precious satchel and the contents, which he treasured dearly, were still lying at the horse trough!

It was also at this precise moment a very puzzled Old Man Coniston said to a busy Lady Windermere, as she approached the Garden Shed door en route for an onion for her stew - "Just look at what I found just a moment ago at the horse trough. Covered in pieces of cucumber too!"

Now at the door of the Garden Shed, Lady Windermere halted, put her paw on the door ready to open it, but hesitated a moment and turned her head to look back at the satchel.

She laughed and said "but won't it be interesting to hear the reason why, when the young Verdi Bears come in to lunch!"

"Very interesting indeed" laughed Old Man Coniston, trying to calm his fraying nerves. "Goodness only knows what they have been up to!"

Buttermere however, clean forgot about the moment when one opens a door, and hopes for better luck, for he had a lot on his mind.

As he opened the Garden Shed door and walked out, he walked under Lady Windermere's outstretched paw. She was still laughing as she looked over her shoulder at the yogurt and cucumber speckled satchel.

Nevertheless, she became aware her paw was resting on something very cold and very nasty! She closed her eyes and shuddered.

"You can open your eyes" said Buttermere, "it is only me covered in yogurt, and please don't ask how it got there!"

Lady Windermere opened her eyes and said "thank goodness for that, it is our Buttermere. For one awful moment I thought you were something horrible from another planet!"

Buttermere laughed, so now did Lady Windermere, even louder than before.

"Problem is" said Buttermere "how to clean me up!"

"Shampoo" said Lady Windermere.

"And a swift hose down with the garden hose on the front lawn!" laughed Old Man Coniston.

So Buttermere went meekly into the house, and for once in his life allowed someone to shampoo him without one word of complaint.

He then walked out of the house, thanking Lady Windermere for shampooing him as he did so.

He then stood meekly on the front lawn, and allowed Old Man Coniston to hose him down.

Luckily, the water wasn't quite so cold as that in the horse trough. Even so, Buttermere shrieked from time to time!

And so it happened that Bassy and Grasmere, who were at that time returning from the Old Meadow, mistook his shrieks of shock for shrieks of glee!

"Seems to me some Verdis have good times playing with hose pipes on lawns whilst other Verdis like us two do all the learning!" said Bassy.

"Doesn't seem fair somehow" said Grasmere, "and doesn't his coat have a lovely green colour today, just look at him. Must be the yogurt on his fur nourished the hair roots somehow! Interesting! Must look it up in a book!"

"Not at all" said Bassy indignantly. "His coat is a lovely green colour today because he has been washed!"

And Grasmere just didn't on this occasion dare argue with her. Instead, he said quietly, "I wonder what Old Man Coniston will write a poem about today?"

"Probably about silly quilly feathers" said Bassy, sounding rather crotchety.....

QUILLY FEATHER

Sometimes a bird	by Old Man Coniston.
Will drop a Quilly Feather	
Which will land point down	
In a Grassy Meadow	
And look like a Quill Pen	
Which is writing on a Grassy Green Page!	



"Check your green satchels now" said Old Man Coniston, as they all left the breakfast table.

As they checked through the contents, they saw green handkerchiefs.

"It must be Wednesday" whispered Grasmere, "we study green today."

"Yes indeed" said Old Man Coniston, looking pleased with Grasmere, who seemed to be showing a lot of interest. "And it is Green Grape Yogurt today, that should be nice, shouldn't it Bassy?"

"Yes," she replied, "nicer than cucumber." As she spoke she looked across to Buttermere. Poor Buttermere. She wondered was he sulking today, but it didn't seem so. She liked green grapes, so she was sure she wouldn't throw any yogurt at anyone, well, not today, and she had plans for today which didn't include throwing yogurt!

"We must make a brave start on our very important study of green grasses" she heard Old Man Coniston say as he wound up his wrist watch, and checked the time.

"Why?" asked Bassy. "Why bother about grass at all. It can't be that important, people just walk on it!"

"Upon my word, Bassy, haven't I told you before that Verdi Bears have to learn about many things in order to keep an eye on things, and that includes green grass!"

"I would rather study trees" she said. "They look more exciting."

"You must learn something about grass first. Trees come later" he replied.

She sighed as she packed away the yogurt. "I've come to a very big conclusion" she said.

"And what might that be?" asked Grasmere.

"I've come to a very big conclusion that I don't enjoy my lessons very much!" she answered.

But her conclusion was completely ignored. Old Man Coniston glared at her, and said, "take your colour cards out of your satchels, turn to the page for greens, and follow me!"

They walked quickly down the garden path, and out of the gate, and within a short while had reached the Old Meadow and the wooden stile.

Over the stile they stepped and into the Old Meadow, but not so Old Man Coniston, who stayed on the outside of the meadow.

"Now pay attention all of you" he said in a loud voice. "I want you all to walk around the field for one hour, and see how many types of grass you can collect in that one single hour. After one hour, you

must return to the house. Check your watches."

They stood in line, checking their watches, but as they did so, Old Man Coniston thought uneasily that Bassy looked unusually cheery, and he wondered was she planning more mischief? He hoped not.

"The hour starts from the very second I turn away from you and start to walk to the house. Is that clear?" he asked.

They nodded, it was clearly understood.

Old Man Coniston turned away from the Old Meadow and the three young Verdi Bears, and thankfully walked away.

With a bit of luck, he would be in time for the last cup of tea in the teapot. What the three young Verdi Bears did for the next hour was to be learned all in good time upon their return.

An hour's peaceful study of the morning paper was nothing short of bliss to Old Man Coniston as he walked swiftly down the road and out of the sight of the trio!

"Thank goodness he's gone at last, I can get on with my work" said Bassy as she laid her satchel on the stile, opened it, took out her notebook and pencil and started to write.

Buttermere and Grasmere put their satchels down on the grass beside the stile.

"You two can go walking without me" she said, without looking up from the pages.

To their amazement, Bassy was already finishing her page of writing.

"Easy" s he said as she pulled a handful of the grass nearest to her, put it between the pages of the note book, closed it, and put it into her satchel.

"You two had better just go on walking and looking without me" she said. "I now have something important to do, I have finished with grass."

"Lucky old you" said Buttermere, but Grasmere didn't want to say anything. Grass interested him, and he just couldn't wait to start collecting.

"Let's get started" he said to Buttermere. "She evidently has other plans."

They began walking away from her now, leaving her near the stile.

"She must have become exceedingly clever quite quickly" said Buttermere, looking rather amazed. "She seems to have done her work in the twinkling of an eye, whereas it is going to take us the full hour."

But Grasmere didn't say a word. There was no understanding female Verdi Bears, and especially Bassy!"

Bassy was keeping a watchful eye on Buttermere and Grasmere. When they had walked quite a distance away from both her and the stile, she walked quickly to the hedge which was part of Scribblings boundary, or hedge.

Looking through a gap in the hedge, she could see the tennis court quite clearly, and it was deserted.

She took her green binoculars out of her satchel and had an even better look.

Why was there a wire mesh fence around the tennis court? What was so special about this small square of

short green grass. Was it valuable?

What kept it nibbled so short? A goat? A pet sheep?

Another strange thing she noticed was a droopy string mesh net stretched across the middle between two shabby wooden posts.

Another strange thing she noticed was some thick white wool which was trailed around the edges of the lawn.

Were her eyes deceiving her? Or was it a fact that the thick white wool seemed to have made a pattern of sections or squares on the lawn?

Did tennis need white wool lines and green squares?

What was there about this square of short bright green grass, and white wool lines, which made people laugh, and start to enjoy themselves?

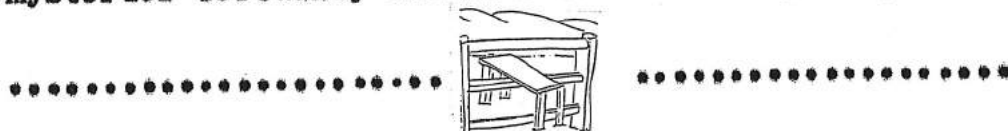
"I don't understand something about this" she said aloud.

"In fact, I don't understand a lot of things about this tennis game!" she sighed.

Was this large green square grass? Or, was it perhaps a Green Magic Carpet?

She would just have to make it her business to find out, because she just loved Magic!

Meantime, she would just walk back to the stile, and eat the Green Grape Yogurt. Puzzling out mysteries certainly did make one extremely hungry!



Bassy sat on the stile feeling very happy,

Nevertheless, she became gradually aware that she could hear the happy laughter of Grasmere and Buttermere, and she realised that they, too, must be feeling happy, perhaps even happier than she herself was feeling because she herself wasn't laughing out loud as they were!

They sounded very excited too. Strange?

The tennis court had looked exciting, but then, Grasmere and Buttermere hadn't seen it yet, so that couldn't have made them excited.

The Green Grape Yogurt had tasted exciting, but Grasmere and Buttermere hadn't yet eaten theirs, so that could not have made them excited either.

Their excitement was a mystery to her, and she loved solving mysteries.

She couldn't stand the suspense any longer, she would have to investigate!

She walked quickly to the far end of the Old Meadow to where the other two Verdi Bears were walking and searching.

"Hello" she said, "you seem to be having an exciting time."

"We are indeed" said Grasmere. "I hadn't realised just how many types of grass there were in the Old Meadow. It is so absolutely exciting!"

"It all looks alike to me" she answered. "Green and spikey."

"Far from it" said Buttermere. "I reckon there must be dozens of sorts of grass if one had a mind to search for it."

"A good book to help us identify it is what we need" said Grasmere. "Solve all our problems."

"Speaking of problems" said Bassy. "I think you should hurry to the stile and eat your yogurt before it gets warm, the sun is quite hot over by the stile."

They all started to walk towards the stile.

Bassy looked at the grasses the other two had collected and were now carrying in their paws.

"I don't know how you can be bothered Grasmere" she said. "It all looks alike to me I am afraid."

Grasmere smiled and said "you will learn Bassy, actually I think you do extremely well, after all, it isn't everyone's cup of tea you know, the study of grasses."

"I am interested in one sort of grass" she said.

Grasmere was by this time anxious to know all about her one sort of grass.

"It is at Scribblings, on the tennis court" she explained. "But I can't pick any for my notebook, because it seems to be fenced off for some strange reason."

Buttermere, who had been eavesdropping, said rather unkindly - "It is fenced off to keep YOU out Bassy. They have a huge notice on the fence, saying KEEP BASSY OUT!"

She laughed, but even as she did so, she thought there might just be a word of truth in what he had said. She would just have to find out. She would ask Lady Windermere to help her. Lady Windermere was rather clever!

When the others were eating their yogurt, she

decided she would put a P.S. on her notes.

As she wrote the last few words of her P.S. she realised the two other Verdi Bears were now finished their snack. She must get her notebook into her satchel quickly now, as Buttermere was always teasing her, and she didn't want to be laughed at again today.

But, unfortunately, she wasn't quite quick enough, Buttermere snatched away her notebook, and laughing, read aloud her notes and thoughts and P.S. on grasses.

"Oh just listen to this Grasmere" he said, and then he read aloud.....

"We are seeing how many types of grass there are. Well, as far as I can make out there is just one sort, green, and it is always there along the side of the roads, under hedges, and in fields, and I can't be bothered with it at all. In fact, it just seems to be everywhere you look. P.S. But Tennis Court grass seems nicer, shorter, and smoother, and seems to be fenced off to keep me out!"

Grasmere, too, laughed when he heard about the tennis court grass. "Oh poor little Bassy" he said, as he tried to take the notebook from Buttermere.

Bassy now realised that her work, when read aloud, didn't sound just as nice as when it was written secretly, just to read to ones self.

Grasmere saw her troubled look. Wasn't she going to retaliate today? Wasn't there anything worth throwing at Buttermere, for Buttermere was asking to be taken down a peg or two, really!

"No yogurt to throw at him today Bassy?" he asked.

"I've eaten it" she said, "and anyway, it would have been much too nice to waste on him today."

Grasmere chuckled, and thought "pity" but didn't say it.

Suddenly, they heard a voice boom from somewhere over the stile - "Have all your watches stopped? Don't you see the time? I've had time to read the newspaper twice and do the crossword too!"

It was Old Man Coniston! Glancing at their watches, they saw they were ten minutes over the hour!

Grasmere and Buttermere grabbed their satchels, and over the stile they scrambled, pausing once over the other side to wait for Bassy.

Grasmere said "come along Bassy" and looked over his shoulder into the Old Meadow to see if she was following them.

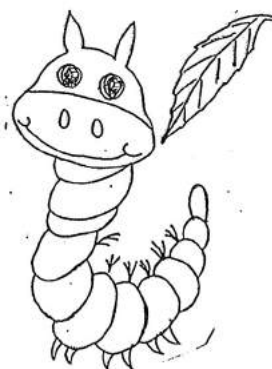
Bassy, however, was walking in the opposite direction! And, it wasn't even in the direction of the tennis court! And that indeed, was what worried Grasmere!

"Leave her" said Old Man Coniston. "She must just have forgotten something, perhaps she wants more grass specimens."

Grasmere breathed a sigh of relief. Old Man Coniston was so often right. Probably needed more grass specimens.

Nevertheless, he cast a few worried glances over his shoulder in the direction of the sad little green figure in the Old Meadow, as he walked back to the house.

Bassy, meanwhile, was feeling embarrassed. She couldn't help it if she didn't always do things quite



right.

Notebooks and homework and male Verdi Bears were an ab-om-in-ation, to be sure.

She saw a patch of beautiful clean orangey coloured sand near the hedge. Rabbits, she thought with glee, and with this clean newly scratched out sand, she knew there would be a newly scraped out rabbit burrow.

She quickly rolled up her notebook, opened out her green handkerchief, and wrapped the book in it like a parcel. She then knelt down and put the green parcel inside the entrance of the sandy tunnel.

"And that is the end of that!" she said. "Thank goodness, and I am sure the rabbits won't mind."

She then walked back to the stile, and sat down on the grass. "I think I might just as well try to have forty winks. Who knows, with a little luck I might waken up and find it was just a nasty dream!"

"Am I dreaming?" said Lady Windermere, as the three other Verdi Bears returned to the house. "Or are we one Verdi Bear missing? Who have we lost?" she laughed.

"Bassy" said Buttermere. "We are without Bassy!"

"Where is she?" asked Lady Windermere, as she looked at time ticking away on the large clock on the sideboard.

"Forgotten something I think" said Old Man Coniston.

"What am I supposed to do about the meal, wait for her?" she asked, looking hungrily at the salad bowl. "What has she forgotten, she is usually first at the table?"

"Probably needs more grass specimens" said Old Man Coniston.

Buttermere, however, wasn't now too sure that it was quite as simple as that. He had seen how anxiously Grasmere had kept looking backwards, and he knew that Grasmere wasn't usually to be seen looking backwards!

"Perhaps I can take her lunch to her, as it is cold salad, and I suppose I can take mine there too, and keep her company" he said.

"What a capital idea" said Old Man Coniston, who liked to eat his meals in peace and quiet whenever he got the opportunity to do so, and now saw an opportunity of doing so. "You go and have a picnic!"

"Let's all go and have a picnic!" said Lady Windermere, who liked to eat her meals in the peace and quiet of the countryside, especially in a field, whenever she got the opportunity to do so, and now saw an opportunity of doing so. "What a capital idea!"

Old Man Coniston said quietly "oh dear!"

Lady Windermere, however, was now in her element!

"Don't stand on ceremony" said Lady Windermere, "just grab something and run before Old Man Coniston changes his mind!"

So they busied themselves.

"How do we know when we have everything we need for a picnic?" asked Grasmere, packing his satchel with all he could reach, and keeping an eye on Old Man Coniston, who's only worry seemed to be finding a cushion and his panama hat.

"As soon as the table is empty, we know we have

everything we need" she replied, "the meal was ready on the table an hour ago!"

Old Man Coniston winked at Grasmere, as he wrapped his knife and fork in a napkin. "Do the same, unless you want to eat salad with your paws" he whispered quietly. "She won't take the cutlery outside, because she says she loses it that way!"

Grasmere heard Buttermere ask "What about the cutlery?"

"Leave it" Lady Windermere said. "Paws were made before knives and forks. Everyone ready?"

Yes, everyone was good and ready.

"Well let us be on our way. I do so love an unexpected treat," she said happily, as she made for the door.

Buttermere was first out of the door, and the gate. He was worrying about Bassy as he carried his very heavy rucksack, and his satchel.

Grasmere came second, and couldn't spare a thought for Bassy because of his very heavy rucksack, and his satchel.

Lady Windermere came next with the table cloth hanging over her shoulder, she also had a very full shopping basket.

Old Man Coniston carried a cushion, he liked forty winks after a picnic, with his head on a cushion. He also carried his panama hat which he wished he hadn't bothered about finding, for in the hat, Lady Windermere had packed the 'spares', spares such as extra boiled eggs, tomatoes, and apples!

"But Bassy" he heard Lady Windermere say, later, as he lay on the grass with his head on his cushion, as the others cleared away the picnic things.

"But Bassy, even little nesting house sparrows know about grassy heads and moss and which to use for nesting in walls....."

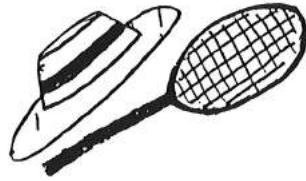
Old Man Coniston laughed, and said, "Well, just as long as the nesting house sparrows know about the grass, let us not worry too much if Bassy doesn't understand about grass....."

So then, he composed one of his short poems, just for the occasion, and read it aloud to anyone who cared to listen.....

NESTING SPARROW

A twist of moss
A grassy head
A piece of thread
And lo!
A Sparrow
Who likes our house
Quiet as a mouse
Builds a nest!





Bassy felt very excited as she stood on the Scribblings front door step with Lady Windermere early next morning.

She noticed that the golden door knocker was shining brightly, as was the letter box. Someone had evidently been busy polishing them earlier that same morning.

She pushed the flap of the letter box up, and looked through the gap.

Lady Windermere raised the golden^{door} knocker, and as it was dropped against the door, it made a dreadful noise.

"Stop peering in" said Lady Windermere. "Someone's coming to answer the door."

In just one second, the door opened, and a smiling woman appeared. She was dressed in a tartan skirt and a jumper. It was Museum Sandy's wife, Poppy.

"Why, Lady Windermere, and one of the young Verdi Bears, what a lovely surprise. Do come in, both of you."

"Nice to see you Poppy" said Lady Windermere, as leading Bassy by a paw, she stepped over the threshold. "We were just out for a walk, and thought we would drop in."

Bassy was surprised to hear Lady Windermere tell a fib, and look so happy at the same time. She knew Lady Windermere had left the house with every intention of calling at Scribblings in order to talk about tennis court grass, and to find out from someone at Scribblings just how a young Verdi Bear could begin to learn just how to play tennis!

Lady Windermere had made no plans at all for a walk! Still, if telling a sort of fib got her a game of tennis, what did it matter, thought Bassy. It was all in a good cause.

Poppy said "shh!" as they passed a brown varnished door. "Lecture in preparation in there!" she said as she smiled. "Sandy is preparing a lecture he is to give to school children about wild flowers and local wild animals and the like, and lecture preparation seems to bring out the worst of tempers in him!"

"Kitchen please" said Lady Windermere. "I do so like your bright kitchen, Poppy."

As they walked down the hall, away from the doors, Bassy noticed there was a lovely kind of smell in this house. A smell of God perhaps, she wondered?

It was an exciting house, she thought. As she looked around she saw the carpets were dark brown. Even the stairs had the same brown carpet, and there were beautiful golden bars across each stair, holding the carpet in place.

Old Pictures of olden times, and God, on the walls. In fact, she thoroughly approved of everything about Museum Sandy's house, well, so far.

"Actually, you're just in time for a coffee" said Poppy.

This seemed to please Lady Windermere. She lifted the brim of Bassy's hat, and smiled down at her. "You'll like the coffee Poppy makes."

Bassy watched Poppy put some little brown beans into a little wooden box, then turn a handle. What came out of the box was put into a sort of teapot, and what came out of the sort of tea pot and out of a milk pan was put into big cups.

Bassy sniffed with her nose held high in the air, as young, barning, intelligent Verdi Bears, are allowed to do.

"My word," she said, as Poppy gave Lady Windermere a packet of brown coffee beans to take home as a gift, "coffee beans are magic things," she couldn't help saying.

They now ^{on wooden chairs} sat around a wooden topped table. On the table were wire cooling trays. On the trays were scones, some of which Poppy buttered and handed to them, and the butter melted into the scones before Bassy's eyes.

My, but this kitchen had a lovely smell, for not only was there a smell of coffee, there was a beautiful aroma of bread. Oh how she liked the smell of warm bread too!

She was having such a lovely time now, she had almost forgotten all about tennis. Oh yes, baking bread had a lovely smell.

So too had this coffee, and she was gld to see it was in a grand big grown ups cup, and there was a lot of froth on the top.

Magic things were little brown coffee beans which one

bought in somewhere called a city, in something one called paper bags, from something called a shop, which had a wondrous machine near the window which roasted magic coffee beans, and filled the street with a magic aroma which cheered everyone up!

Oh my, this popping into Scribblings had been a good idea, she thought as her nose dipped into the froth as she drank.

Having finished her coffee, she began looking around the kitchen. She noticed there were some white shoes standing on newspapers on a long silver topped fender which was in front of the large fireplace. They were empty shoes of course.

"Can I sit on the fender?" she asked hopefully.

"Mhm!" said Poppy with a smile. "Make yourself comfy!"

So Bassy sat on the long silvery fender, and put out a paw and picked up a white shoe. It was a tennis shoe, and it was damp she noticed. What strange shoes. Did one have to play tennis in damp shoes? Why?

She sat on the fender, day dreaming happily, between a large dish of rising dough and a mound of white shoes, holding in one paw her empty coffee cup and in the other a damp white shoe.

This was much better than collecting grass! This was very much better too than counting silly old ^{empty} bird nests.

A voice said from somewhere "interested in tennis shoes are you?"

She looked up into the face of Museum Sandy. She dropped the damp shoe in alarm, but then, she saw he was drinking coffee, so that calmed her. He liked the things she liked, and she couldn't help noticing he looked nice

and friendly.

"Actually" said Lady Windermere, "Bassy is studying grasses, and seems to want to study tennis court grass. In fact, I rather think she would like to learn how to play tennis too."

"Well now Sandy" said Poppy, "Why don't you give her a lesson now while Lady Windermere and I finish our coffee."

Museum Sandy looked down at the little green Verdi Bear. He couldn't see much of her face, because the brim of her hat was well down over her eyes.

"I prefer tennis to writing lectures" he said, putting down his coffee cup. "It would be a real pleasure. Come on Bassy."

He walked over to a tea chest which stood in ~~the~~ a corner of the kitchen. It seemed to be filled with all kinds of sports equipment. He picked up an armful of racquets and walked out of the door.

"Follow me, we, what did you say your name was?" he said, reading the name BASSENTHWAITE on the green slate name tag which hung around her green fluffy neck.

"Bassy for short" she said as she hurried to catch up with him, as he started to walk as if in a hurry.

She walked by his side as he made his way over a cobbled path, and through a garden gate.

She felt very excited as she stepped into the enclosed tennis court and gazed around her in rapture.

"I wonder if ^{OLD MAN} ~~CONISTON~~ hens realise they have the same wire netting around them as you have around your tennis court?" she asked him.

"I don't suppose anyone knows if hens realise anything at all" he answered.

"Old Man Coniston's hens fly over the wire netting fence sometimes" she told him. "He gets very angry when they eat the seeds and things. He really becomes quite crotchety, but he is very nice when he isn't crotchety!"

Museum Gandy wished at that moment he could just walk out of the tennis court, and seek the sanctuary of his study.

This young Verdi Bear was making lecture preparation look more inviting every second. In fact, he was beginning to feel rather crotchety himself, and there wasn't a flying hen to be seen anywhere.

There was a long garden seat at the side of the court. He walked over to it and laid the racquets on it, and began unlacing his black shoes in preparation for changing into the white tennis shoes.

"Why do you need to play in damp shoes?" she asked.

"There is no need to play in damp shoes" he answered.

"Well, those ones are damp" she said.

"Oh, I see what you mean" he said. "We put white liquid on them to make them look clean and that's what makes them damp" he explained.

"Can't you play in dry dirty ones then?" she asked.

"I suppose one could" he answered, wiping his perspiring brow. "But cleanliness is next to Godliness!" he said.

"Does God watch you play tennis?" she asked, looking rather surprised as she raised her hat brim to look straight into his alarmed blue eyes.

"It wouldn't surprise me at all if he did" he said.

There was the distinct sound of laughter from somewhere behind the hedge. Sounded like Buttermere, but it couldn't be, he was busy preparing salad for lunch. He couldn't possibly be in the garden spying

on her through the hedge!

He handed her a racquet. "This one is a light one. Just see if you can grip it firmly."

She held tightly onto the handle. "Yes I can grip it firmly" she whispered, because she was in truth so excited at holding a tennis racquet for the very first time, she could hardly speak.

"Don't you think you would do better without your hat on?" he asked.

"No I don't" she said, quite firmly. "I feel much braver with it on." She could now speak normally, as she had become used to holding the racquet in just a few seconds, so she thought she was doing rather well!

Sandy didn't argue with her, but continued "I think we should practise the service."

"Oh I don't want to say any prayers, I just want to play tennis" she answered.

There was a distinct sound of muffled laughter from somewhere. In fact, it sounded like Old Man Coniston. But, she thought, it couldn't possibly be, he was supposed to be cutting the front lawn.

"Service means you serve the ball to the person over the other side of the net!" he said wiping his brow. "Watch!"

He threw a tennis ball into the air, just above his head and hit it with his racquet. It sailed smoothly over the net and came to rest on the grass.

She stood looking at it, and didn't speak.

"Now, if you were over there, you would have to hit the ball, and it would then come back, and then I would have hit it again, and so on" he said.

"Is that all tennis is?" she asked.

"I'm afraid so" he answered wearily.

"Well then, I don't think it can be as much fun as I thought" she said, "in fact, it sounds rather boring!"

Museum Sandy wiped his perspiring brow, hoping as he did so that God would neither be watching, listening, or reading his mind at that particular moment, in the tennis court.

Now, not at all sure just who was watching and listening, and from which direction, he thought he might just as well put on a bit of an act, show, willing, just in case. He wasn't sure if God was watching, but there was a sound of giggling coming from the hedge!

"Let's try to play tennis, shall we?" he asked with renewed enthusiasm, forcing a smile. "I will walk over to the other side of the net. See if you can manage to send the ball over the net to me the way I have just shown you."

She agreed. She watched him walk around the side of the net, and remembered something "Oh I forgot to ask why you need white wool edges on a tennis court" she shouted.

She was sure there was someone laughing behind the hedge. But, she wasn't worrying too much, for she was having a nice time, really.

She pointed a paw at the white wool which made a series of oblongy sort of squarey patterns. "What are they off and why are they on?" she asked.

"They are the lines, white lines, and we need white lines, and I make them with old wool and tapes" he replied.

Bassy, however, was none the wiser for the information, and she couldn't help noticing, from under the brim of her hat, that Museum Sandy didn't look very happy.

She wondered if this lecture he was preparing for schoolchildren was making him crotchety? He certainly did look troubled, she thought to herself. When Old Man Coniston prepared his lectures on why Verdi Bears had to keep their eyes on things in the country, he always looked crotchety too! How strange, she thought.

She threw a tennis ball into the air, and hit it fair and square with the racquet, and miraculously, it sailed over the net.

It seemed to startle Museum Sandy, however, he managed to hit the ball and it sailed back to her side of the court.

She stood and watched it, without making any effort to send it back to him. It bounced out of the green square inside the white wool and white tapes. "That was real clever of you!" she laughed.

"You should have hit that!" he said.

"It didn't come near enough to the racquet" she said.

"You have to run about, and hit it back, no matter how far away it is" he said weakly.

"But it's too warm to run about" she said. "I can't be bothered to run about."

"Well, unless you want to lose every single game you will have to jolly well run about and around" he said.

"Oh, I couldn't be bothered with that" she said.

"Try," he said, "just try."

Now, it may have been beginners luck, but, Bassy

did get the ball over the net several times.

She thought she had won, and asked the score.

"I don't understand what you say" she said as she heard the reply. Tennis words were strange indeed, she couldn't help thinking. "I thought I had won!"

"No, you lost!" he said, and of course, she realised one couldn't argue with a Museum man.

She looked around her, "all the tennis balls are used up from near where I am!"

"Walk around and pick them up" he said unkindly she thought. "Retrieve them!"

She was now feeling very tired. She walked slowly and unwillingly and collected the tennis balls. She noticed as she did so that the grass was no better than Old Man Coniston's front lawn.

So, the Magic Green Carpet was only a lawn after all?

"So you haven't any sheep or goats to nibble the grass short after all" she said aloud as she also saw a lawn mower standing in a corner of the tennis court.

"Sorry" he said, "no sheep or goats."

To his dismay, he realised she seemed ready to ask another set of questions, when miracles!

"Cooee" was heard loud and clear from the region of the back door. "Time to go Bassy."

As Museum Sandy and Bassy walked rather quickly out of the tennis court, which was really ^{only} an honest to goodness lawn when one removed the white wool and tapes and hauled in the net, Bassy took a last look at the high wire netting which surrounded it.

"Don't worry if your hens start flying, because

you can clip something off their wings I believe, like a feather" she said.

He managed to find the strength to smile.

"Do you suppose God can clip the Angels wings if they fly too high too?" she asked.

"I wouldn't be at all surprised" he said with yet another smile. "No Sirree, I wouldn't be surprised at all!"

Bassy ran to Lady Windermere, and took her by the paw as they now walked out of the front gate of Scribblings. As Lady Windermere closed the gate behind them, Bassy turned to Museum Sandy, and said very politely.

"Thank you very much for tennis. Perhaps one day I might try again. But perhaps not. Perhaps one day I might come and tell you about old birds nests. But then perhaps not" she said.

He didn't seem to smile much she thought. Perhaps preparing lectures wasn't much fun either, like tennis, she thought. Or perhaps he was worrying about birds nests.

"Don't ever worry about birds nests and Verdi Bears, because Verdi Bears are only allowed to see very, very, old nests. Verdi Bears never-never look at nests with eggs in - it isn't allowed!"

He smiled now, as though a little happier, and as she and Lady Windermere walked towards their own house and lunch, Bassy couldn't help remarking "Perhaps humans don't have as much fun as we Verdi Bears do " and then added, "In fact " she said quite happily "I'm just glad to be a Verdi Bear after all!"

Well, that was a relief, thought Lady Windermere,

Bassy feeling glad, and a nice chat with Poppy, and someone else making lunch.

Yes, life was wonderful at that moment, as they walked paw in paw to lunch!

For the rest of the day, Bassy was heard to ask Old Man Coniston many questions, all of which began with the same two words - "Who teaches?"

For example, "Who teaches the spider to spin, and who teaches the butterfly to fly, and who teaches a fish to swim, and who teaches a bird to fly....."

Old Man Coniston was rather glad when lessons were over for the day, and his usual short poem or rhyme could be chalked on the blackboard, by way of a reminder of something or another of the days events.

This is what he made up for the day of the famous tennis lesson -

WHO TEACHES?

Who teaches a fish to swim?

Who teaches a bird to fly?

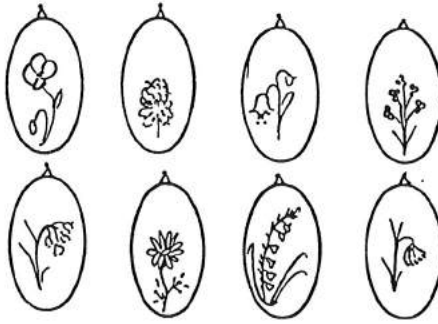
It may be you,

and you,

and you!

But it certainly isn't I!





"Why didn't someone tell me tennis would make my arms sore?" Bassy asked, finding it difficult to pick up her cup next morning.

Everyone laughed.

"A good hot bath is what you need" said Old Man Coniston sympathetically.

"No, a soak in a warm lake is what you need" said Lady Windermere, "and I know exactly how to make one which will have the scent of pine trees!"

"Really?" said Bassy.

"Pine Essence in a bath in the bathroom!" said Lady Windermere. "What is more, you can sit in that pine scented lake right this minute!"

She looked imploringly at Lady Windermere. "Will you ask the others to wait for me. We are doing something very exciting this morning. We are looking at Wild Flowers in the hedges and all sorts of places, and we have green gooseberry yogurt this morning, and I like wild flowers and green gooseberry yogurt. Please don't let the others go without me."

Old Man Coniston, Grasmere and Buttermere stood waiting for Lady Windermere's decision.

"Oh let them go without you Bassy. I will let you see the Wild Flowers in my Wild Flower Picture Gallery instead," she said with a smile.

"Do you mean she can learn all about Wild Flowers without having to walk miles, and get tired?" asked Buttermere, looking peevish.

"Yes, of course she can. What do you think City folks do when they want to learn all about Wild Flowers. They look at books and pictures," she replied.

"But you're not a city folk, so why do you have all your wild flowers in a Wild Flower Picture Gallery?" he asked.

Lady Windermere smiled proudly. "I keep an eye on things too, you know, and my speciality is the wild flowers. Those are my official records, in my Picture Gallery."

"Quite so, quite so" said Old Man Coniston, polishing his monocle.

"Old Man Coniston, however, specialises in trees. Ask him about them when you are out walking this morning, that is if the three of you ever get walking, that is! Buzz off, the three of you!"

"Yes, we have work to do" said Bassy. "Come back at lunch time."

Needless to say, the warm lake was a great comfort, to Bassy who so deeply regretted trying to learn about tennis, and when the lake had gone cold and the pine scented water disappeared when the plug had been taken out of the lake....she turned her mind once again to Wild

Flowers. "Can I see your Wild Flower Picture Gallery now?" she asked bravely and hopefully.

"I don't see why not. After all, we can't have the others learning more than you this morning, now, can we" said Lady Windermere, closing the bathroom door.

"Where is the Gallery?" asked Bassy.

"Well," giggled Lady Windermere, "actually, it is just the attic, but I re-named it The Wild Flower Picture Gallery. Picture Gallery sounds more important than attic, don't you agree?"

Bassy was quick to agree with her on that point.

Lady Windermere opened a small door in the wallpaper, near one of the bedroom doors, saying to Bassy as she did so, "of course, I put wallpaper over the door to camouflage it. I attach such importance to this study of Wild Flowers, and have worked for so many years on my collection, I am almost afraid to let people and young Verdi Bears know where the entrance is."

She led the way through the door, and they climbed a small staircase.

At the top was a Magic Room, for as Lady Windermere swished back curtains, patches of beautiful colours and shapes seemed to gleam everywhere!

"This is my Picture Gallery of Wild Flowers!" she said proudly. "My very own Wild Flower Picture Gallery!"

"It is so beautiful" said Bassy, who was feeling rather goose pimply ^{WITH EXCITEMENT} "They are so beautiful, I just feel like crying."

"Save your tears for the day there are just no

wild flowers left in the world Bassy, don't cry while they are still here" smiled Lady Windermere, "Instead, work hard and learn to keep an eye on them."

She handed her a notebook, "Here Bassy, make some notes if you like. I will tell you about my Gallery!"

Bassy opened the notebook, and picked up a pencil from a small table.

"What a good job I had the bath and the tennis pains have gone, now I can actually hold the pencil" she said, laughing happily.

"Well," said Lady Windermere, "Somedays, I arrange the small pictures by the colours of the flowers, all the pink flower pictures together, and all the blue flowers together, all the mauve ones together, all the white ones together, and the Bumble Bees legs colour you like so much!"

"Yellows" said Bassy. "Grasmere told me that bumble bees legs are one of the yellows."

"Quite right" said Lady Windermere. "Yellow legs on bees are because the bee has collected ^{yellow} pollen from the flowers."

"Aren't the bees born with yellow legs?" she asked amazement.

"Oh no dear," said Lady Windermere.

She watched Bassy making notes in her notebook, and when the pencils stopped moving across the page, she continued.

"Now, as I was saying. Sometimes, to make a change from just having the flower pictures in groups of colour, well then, I just re-arrange them by alphabetical order.

Of course, one could argue with that, and say that they should be arranged strictly by season. But that is too, what I would call, technical, and I myself would argue that what with an early spring, and a late autumn, and a summer which never seems to get here just when we need it, one could become quite fed up. Don't you agree?"

The long important sounding speech Lady Windermere had just delivered was rather difficult for Bassy to understand, although she did understand much of it.

She heard Lady Windermere ask her once more, "Don't you agree?"

Bassy thought about the question. Anything which could make Lady Windermere fed up must be wrong, so Bassy quickly did agree with her.

"Myself, I usually find that the colour groupings are the best arrangement of all" said Lady Windermere, and Bassy was prepared to take her word for it.

"It is a very large room" said Bassy, who was wandering about from wall to wall, looking at the small pictures.

"It is a very large collection of flowers" said Lady Windermere proudly.

"I think I will come back to where I started from before, and have a second look" said Bassy.

She laid the note book and pencil on the small table, as she did so, she noticed a large bundle of coloured stringy bits.

"What ever are all these stringy bits?" she asked

"Tangled wool and silks" laughed Lady Windermere. "I

am rather careless as I work at making my flowers!"

"Whatever do you mean by work, I thought these were all real flowers?" said a bewildered Bassy, looking around her.

"Bless you, you are sweet" laughed Lady Windermere. "I have either painted or embroidered these flowers in the small pictures, they aren't real."

"They look beautiful and really real to me" said Bassy.

"Oh Bassy, my work is nowhere as near perfection as you might think" said Lady Windermere. "Nothing can match the perfection of a real honest to goodness wild flower growing free as a bird!"

"What is embroidery?" asked Bassy, looking puzzled.

Lady Windermere took her by the paw, and walked over to a small chest of drawers. The drawers were small and narrow, and she opened them one after the other.

They were filled with skeins of coloured silks, which Bassy admired. "Silks" she repeated, as she wrote the word in her notebook.

"You can also write in your notebook that I have many shades of reds, and of pinks, and of mauves and of yellows, all just waiting to be made into flower petals." she pointed out to Bassy.

Lady Windermere now walked over to a large cupboard in the wall, and opened a door. There were large skeins but this time of wool, as though for knitting with.

"Do you knit jumpers too?" asked Bassy, rather surprised, knowing Verdi Bears didn't need jumpers.

"No, not for jumpers, this is for embroidery too!" was

the answer to that question.

"One day, Bassy, then the winter has set in, and we don't get out as much as we would like, you must all come up here and help me sort out wools and silks, and that large bundle of ^{TANGLED} knotted wool and silk, and we can all have a nice chat" said Lady Windermere, looking at her wrist watch.

Bassy, too, looked at her green wrist watch, and realised it must be nearly time for lunch, and for the others to return.

But she hoped it wasn't time to go, just yet, and she looked around her once more. It was so beautiful up here. She just couldn't bear to go out of this wonderful Wild Flower Picture Gallery.

"Oh Lady Windermere, I wish I could do this sort of clever work. What a wonderful way to keep records of wild flowers. Will you teach me?" she asked, hopefully.

"One day" replied Lady Windermere. "One day, when I think your paws are big enough to hold the needle! Then, Bassy, I will teach you."

Bassy looked at her small green paws, and realised that that special day was quite a long way off.

"In the meantime, while you are growing, you must learn all you can about all there is to do with country things. The wild flowers, and then the trees, and then the grasses and herbs. And of course the Lakes, butterflies, and birds eggs, and birds" said Lady Windermere, preparing to close the curtains, which she informed Bassy, were to keep the sunlight off her precious pictures, and prevent them from fading.

"I've just thought of something dreadful" said Bassy.

"What could be dreadful up here?" asked Lady Windermere sounding puzzled. "There is nothing dreadful up here in my Wild Flower Picture Gallery!"

"No, I just thought of something dreadful" Bassy replied. "Just suppose you had to make big pictures of big trees, what a long time it would take. The pictures would be too tall to come in here!"

"That is a dreadful thought, when I think about it" laughed Lady Windermere. "I think where trees are concerned, we will just have to make do with an embroidery of a leaf of each tree, don't you agree?"

Bassy agreed with her once more. She also noticed that Lady Windermere had a paw on the long knob on the end of the window ^{curtain} cord. Oh dear, was it time to close them?

"Will you show me your very favourite wild flower before you close the curtains please?" she said.

Lady Windermere took her hand from the long knob on the end of the curtain drawing cord. She was smiling.

"Well," she began happily. "You must understand of course I love them all, but, I must confess I have my favourites."

"Favourites?" asked Bassy. "I thought favourite meant one thing only, I didn't know one could have more than one favourite."

Lady Windermere smiled. "Well, Bassy, I am greedy. I always choose myself more than favourite 'ones', I always find myself a few favourites no matter what. Favourite days, favourite colours, favourite flowers, not

just one day, one colour or one flower."

"What a good idea" said Bassy, approvingly.

"For instance, I have three flowers which are among my VERY favourites. Would you like to see them?" she asked Bassy as she walked over to the wall at the far end of the window.

She pointed to a set of very small pictures, each one in a beautiful frame.

"This one here" she said, pointing, "I would call pretty and shy. It is the primrose. It hides itself near to the ground, and is a lovely yellow. The little flower petals always look to me like tiny yellow butterfly wings, don't you agree?"

Bassy looked at the little picture of the primrose. She looked quite carefully and closely at the tiny yellow petals, but couldn't quite see the resemblance to butterfly wings, but of course, she hadn't seen many butterflies yet, she thought, and that was why.

"This second one, I would call tall and elegant. This is the beautiful Bluebell. A generous plant, because it gives us more than one bell, in fact, there are blue bell shapes all the way up to the top of the stem. In fact, they do say one can hear the bells chime if one sits still in a blue bell wood" she explained.

She took the bluebell picture from the wall, and looked down at it lovingly, then handed it to Bassy for her to examine it more closely.

"It is beautiful" said Bassy, "it is the colour of the bonny blue sky."

"Yes, it is beautiful Bassy, and so many happy

memories of my younger days are tied up in these little bluebells."

Bassy looked at Lady Windermere, and wondered what wonderful memories about bluebells would be like, but before she could ask her, Lady Windermere continued talking, taking another small picture off the wall.

"And the third favourite of mine is what I call a brave little flower. It has a Latin name, but my Latin isn't all that good. The other flowers have Latin names too. This is called Galanthus, but instead I call it Gallant."

Bassy looked closely at the embroidered silken flower in its small frame. "Gallant" she said, wondering what the explanation would be.

"I call it Gallant, for you see, it stands along braving all the cold winds and snow, when we are all indoors looking out, and the skies are dark, and most of the earth hidden from view under a white carpet of snow. Well, the snowdrop never lets us down. Up it pops!"

Lady Windermere now replaced the snowdrop picture on the wall, speaking all the while.

"I always look for the snowdrops any day after Christmas Day. Actually, I haven't much time to look for anything flowering anywhere the weeks before Christmas Day, but on Christmas Day, I usually start keeping my eye on things again."

Long speeches made Bassy tired as a rule, and this one was no exception. She yawned.

"Will you tell me when it gets near the time for them, I understand better from voices than from books" she

said.

Then s he suddenly saw another beautiful flower, in a beautiful golden frame, nearby.

"What is this one in the golden frame?" she asked.

"A Cowslip" replied Lady Windermere, "and it is rather hard to find nowadays, I am afraid."

"If it disappeared altogether, would it make you cry?" asked Bassy.

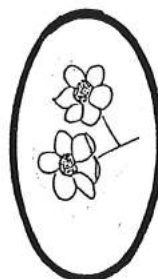
"Yes" sighed Lady Windermere, "yes, I am afraid it would indeed make me cry if I thought there were no more Cowslips in the world."

"Well, then," said Bassy, taking her by the paw, "I will learn as quickly as I can, and keep my eyes on them."

"Now, that is a comfort to me" laughed Lady Windermere as she swished the curtains across, and the flowers were hidden once again in the darkness of the attic. (Beg your pardon, The Wild Flower Picture Gallery!)

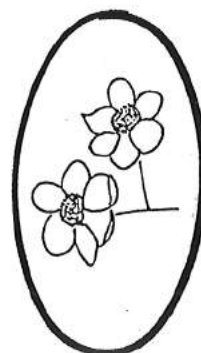
THE PINK WILD ROSE

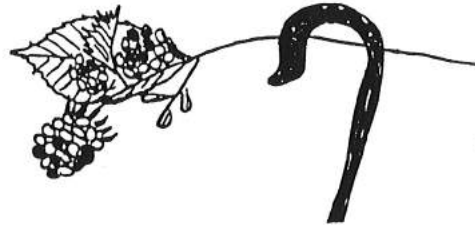
Why do you suppose
This pink Wild Rose
Is so beautiful?



A Wild Rose, beautiful, has to be,
You see,
It isn't specially for you and me!

They grow also to give pleasure
To the animals we treasure.
Wild Creatures, you see,
Love pretty flowers
Just as well as we.





"I always wanted a walking stick with a fish on the handle" said Grasmere, one coldish day, when leaves were turning into a nice orangey colour, and the blackberries were turning blacker by the minute.

Bassy, however, wasn't caring about walking sticks. She was eating brambles, and watching Old Man Coniston.

She was quite happy today, really, as it was a day with orangey coloured handkerchiefs, and there was a Green Guess What yogurt for today, and a guess what yogurt was always exciting, and usually had a red glaze cherry at the bottom of the carton.

Yes, there wasn't much to complain about today, really, unless one of course actually had to PICK the nasty bramble things! They were alright to eat though!

She looked at Grasmere. He was working hard, and didn't seem to be eating any at all. How silly of him. The walking stick he was using to blackberry with had only a plain curved end, but it was having amazing results, really. She could stand and watch

for hours, if she had the chance, she thought.

"Fat lot of good a fish on a handle would do you when you are out brambling" she pointed out.

"You don't understand, I mean a carved one, silly" he said.

"Those sort of things cost money" said Lady Windermere, who never seemed to have any. "See if Santa Claus can oblige!"

There were roars of laughter from Buttermere and Bassy. But Grasmere didn't laugh. "Please don't laugh at me, I mean it, truly. I would love a walking stick with a fish on the handle."

Bassy was at that moment watching Old Man Coniston, who was walking away from them.

"Old Man Coniston doesn't do much work, does he!" she remarked, as she put another bramble into her mouth. She nodded in his direction. "Look, he's sneaking away to somewhere!"

"He has other fish to fry" laughed Lady Windermere, looking across to Grasmere, who was looking rather grumpy. "Cheer up Grasmere. Tell you what, take yourself a sardine out of the sandwiches, and put that on your walking stick."

But Grasmere still wasn't laughing. Instead, he sighed "I want a walking stick like the one Old Man Coniston has, only, I don't want sheep like he has on his walking stick, I want a fish."

"Where is Old Man Coniston going to?" asked Bassy, as both Old Man Coniston and his sheep handled walking stick moved out of sight as they turned a corner.

"He is just going back to the house" replied Lady Windermere. "Poor dear doesn't like picking brambles. Imagine that, not liking to pick brambles!"

Bassy didn't have to imagine at all. She didn't like picking them either. So, how could she persuade Lady Windermere allow her to return to the house too?"

"I seem to be able to eat more brambles than I pick" she said, taking a handful of large brambles from out of Lady Windermere's nearly full basket. "Isn't that a nuisance!"

No one seemed to be taking any notice of her. Instead, they were all picking hundreds of brambles which were hanging from a long stem which Lady Windermere was holding down to picking height, the end of which dangled dangerously above Bassy's beloved hat.

"Don't you think I might damage my good hat on the prickly bits" she asked loudly. "Isn't brambles silly if you are wearing a good hat like mine!"

But no one seemed to be taking one bit of notice of her. But, from under the brim of her hat, she could now see three faces which looked as though they might be wanting to get ready to smile, or even laugh.

So, she pulled down the brim a little lower, and asked in a very loud shrill voice, "don't you three think it extremely cruel that Old Man Coniston has to be all by himself and no one to help him fry his fish?"

To her relief, Lady Windermere laughed good and loud at that, and said, "off you go then Bassy, you have convinced me. Go and help fry the fish!"

Bassy felt a glow of pleasure. She could go and

66
help Old Man Coniston, who looked as though he needed someone to help him sometimes, even to fry fish!

But as she opened the back door, which usually let free the smell of what was cooking, being near the kitchen of course, she couldn't smell fish at all, and what was more, everywhere was clean and tidy, no sign of anyone cooking anything!

Worst of all - there was no sign at all of Old Man Coniston!

She walked over to an armchair near the window, and listened to the silence, and the ticking of the clock, and there was silence, apart from the ticking of the clock, of course, for all of five minutes, and then - there was a sound.....

.....

The sound seemed to be coming from outside! And then it stopped!

"Strange" she thought. It was a new sound, one she hadn't heard before.

But there it was again! And it stopped again!

She walked quietly to the back door, where she heard it yet again.

Yes, it was a squeaky sound. Could it be a baby cat, or even a baby pig?

She walked out of the back door, and towards the garden. Yes, it was from somewhere near her now, and coming from the Garden Shed, if she was not mistaken.

Yes, there was something strange in the Garden Shed!

She walked quickly and quietly to the Garden Shed window, and peeped in.

Through a large cobweb she could just see Old Man Coniston, but, it was what he was kneeling looking at which interested her. It was an old, turned upside down, pram! Yes, a pram!

"Goodness me, what a dreadful squeak" she heard him say, as he put an old battered oil can to the wheels, one after the other. "What a dreadful squeak!"

A shadow seemed to move over the window, he thought, and he paused in his task, then glanced up.

Bother those cobwebs, he thought. He would need to clean the windows, and that would spoil his bird watching once the webs were off, for the birds could be scared at the slightest movement.

But the shed was too dark with them on, and he had important work to do today, that was for sure.

Yes, there were problems all around Old Man Coniston as he struggled to his back paws.

"But just a moment" he thought, "the shadow isn't there now. Whatever is going on?"

He walked to the window, and put his nose to the glass in a space between two cobwebs.

At that precise moment in time, so too did Bassy, but she was on the outside of the Garden Shed! She stood on the wheelbarrow.

They stood face to face.

Old Man Coniston recognised the hat which had been pushed to the back of Bassy's head in her effort to get a better look inside the Shed.

"Upon my word - if it isn't Bassy," he said, "what

a relief - I thought I needed to clean the windows!"

"Can I come in" she asked, "can I keep you company?"

"To be sure you can" he said. "I could do with a spot of company." He opened the door.

As she walked in through the doorway, he said, "I am having trouble with the wheels. I must have forgotten to oil them after I last for collecting firewood!"

Bassy knelt down beside the pram, and held the oil ^{on} can, first one wheel after another whilst Old Man Coniston spun them around.

"This is better fun than frying fish!" she said.

"Undoubtedly!" said Old Man Coniston. "And better than picking brambles too, eh Bassy?"

They both laughed happily as they worked very hard on oiling the wheels, and then washing the paint work on the outside, and the leathery cloth on the inside of this old pram.

It was soon finished.

"And that" said Old Man Coniston, as they both pushed the prams silently and smoothly out of the Garden Shed, and down the path, to the back door of the house, "is a jolly good job well done!"

"And so say all of us!" said a startled looking Buttermere, who opened the back door for them.

"Hey Grasmere, come and look at this old load of old junk. Just come and see what the cat dragged off the compost!" he shouted unkindly.

As Grasmere and Lady Windermere rushed to see what Buttermere was talking about, Bassy couldn't help

feeling sorry for Old Man Coniston, who had been working so hard, and who was now looking decidedly crotchety!

But, to be honest, as she took another look at the pram in strong daylight - she realised that what she and Old Man Coniston had worked so hard and long at cleaning was indeed, little better than a load of old junk!

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"It doesn't do to jump to conclusions" said Lady Windermere, as she quickly arranged a tea tray for Old Man Coniston, who was sulking in the Garden Shed.

"I'm sorry" said Buttermere.

"What might look like a load of old junk to you might not be a load of old junk at all" she went on.

"So what you must do to make amends is take Old Man Coniston something nice on a tray" she said, putting a lid on an enormous teapot. "It never fails. With a bit of luck, he might just tell you about his Chariot!"

Grasmere whispered to Bassy "all this fuss about a shabby old pram! Chariot indeed!"

But Bassy had other things on her mind! She had noticed that Old Man Coniston's Something Nice On A Tray didn't include Green Yogurt, not even a Green Guess What with a red^{CHERRY} cherry in it! Oh no - instead, scones and Strawberry Jam if you please!

Did it in fact pay one to sulk from time to time?

She also wondered, to herself, how anyone could eat all those scones by himself?

Perhaps she might just offer to walk to the Garden Shed with Buttermere, and knock on the door for him, after all, he had to carry the tray, and wouldn't have a paw free.

"I think I will just walk with you, and knock on the door for you" she said, with her eyes firmly focused on the scones and jam.

Grasmere, who had also noticed the strawberry jam, and was beginning to feel left out of things, said "I think I will just come with you too, and open the door for you. All this fuss about a shabby old pram! Whatever next!"

And of course, when Old Man Coniston heard the bold knock on the door, he naturally said "Enter!"

What did surprise him of course, was the size of the tea pot!

He turned to a large brown cupboard, and from a shelf took a large cup with CONISTON printed on it.

He then took another look at the teapot, and then he took three clean, empty, yogurt cartons.

"You'll join me, be my guests, I hope?" he asked, looking at the three anxious faces.

Buttermere saw at once that the sulk was gone, and the crotchiness with it.

"Yes Sireee!" he answered, putting the tray on a bench.

There was a long garden seat in this large Garden Shed, at which Old Man Coniston pointed a paw.

"Be seated he said, as he handed each of them a

yogurt carton of tea, well cooled of course, because yogurt cartons, or tubs, haven't handles.

"Put yourselves some Jam on a scone or two, but leave a strawberry or two in the jampot for me!" he ~~laughed~~.
laughed.

"And for me" said Bassy. "The lumps are the best bits!"

Now of course, they all laughed, and after all, why not, for there is no better place to have afternoon tea than in a good old Garden Shed!

Especially when one couldn't wait to hear all about a Chariot.

"Of course it isn't a Chariot, it is just an old pram" said Old Man Coniston, as he put his empty CONISTON cup on to the tray. "But to me, it is important, being someone who specialises in trees."

Bassy noticed the last of the scones, and jam, had been dealt with, and she felt very warm and happy. And, in the shed, where the sun couldn't show up the shabby parts, the pram began to look more like a Chariot every second.

"Trees and hedges are what I like keeping an eye on best of all" said Old Man Coniston, "and when I think I see a need to plant a few trees, or a few important seeds, I start oiling the wheels on the Chariot, or ^{the} garden wheelbarrow, and I begin sorting out the old yogurt cartons."

Old Man Coniston looked comfortable and happy just sitting on the wicker armchair, but what he was saying seemed like fibs to Bassy. She yawned!

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"I'm bored" s he said, but no one seemed to notice.

Planting trees, why trees were always there, and old yogurt cartons, all fibs, that is what Old Man Coniston was telling.

"I will just take the tray back to the house" she said, as she picked up the now not so attractive looking object. Everything now empty, the jampot, scone plate, milk jug and tea pot. "All the something nice is finished," she said, as she walked out of the shed, and then into the house.

"Did you know Old Man Coniston tells fibs, Lady Windermere?" asked Bassy, as she put the CONISTON cup and the other things into the washing up bowl.

"Really?" said Lady Windermere, as though she didn't believe her.

"Yes" assured Bassy, "he was telling a fib about planting trees, and oiling wheels, and old yogurt cartons, and everyone knows that trees are always there, and yogurt cartons only matter when they are full!"

"How about oiling the wheels?" asked Lady Windermere.

"That part of it is true" s he grudgingly admitted, "I helped him oil wheels."

"Well now, suppose I could prove he was telling the truth about the other bits of information, say, like planting trees?" asked Lady Windermere, as she dried the CONISTON cup carefully.

Bassy thought about the question, and then said, "It would surprise me, but I wish you could prove it, because I don't think grown up Verdis should fib, and

I wouldn't like to think Old Man Coniston is a big fibber!"

"Perish the thought!" said Lady Windermere.

The washing up was now completed, and also the drying up.

"What next?" asked Bassy.

"A walk in the country" answered Lady Windermere.

"Yes, a shortish walk to the Old Meadow, and I will deal with those fibs you were telling me about!"

Bassy smiled, it sounded as though it might be interesting. "Will I need a note book?" she asked.

Lady Windermere smiled, and said, "no dear, you can learn from my voice. That's the way you like best, am I correct?"

Yes, this walk and learning about fibs might turn out to be quite interesting, especially if she didn't need a book to put notes in, thought Bassy to herself.

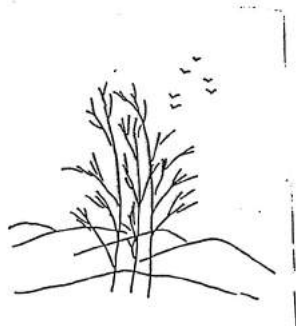
Lady Windermere had a really interesting voice. So too had Old Man Coniston, but she was sure he told fibs!

.....

Bassy and Lady Windermere had completed their shortish walk, and were now standing on the outside of the Old Meadow, looking in.

"Do you see the big chestnut tree?" asked Lady Windermere. "There, at the far end of the Old Meadow."

Bassy climbed on to the stile in order to see more easily. "Yes, I see it." she answered.



"Well, Old Man Coniston will be picking up the chestnuts soon, and bringing them to the house in the Chariot."

"Really?" said Bassy, wondering why.

"He will plant a few in clean yogurt tubs, and he will also plant a lot all over the place. He walks many a mile dropping them into the ground. He uses the point of his walking stick to make the little holes to plant them in."

"Really?" said Bassy, wondering why.

"He will do the same with all kinds of nuts and berries too."

"Really?" said Bassy, wondering why.

"Of course, you must be wondering why, so I will tell you" said the happy Lady Windermere.

Bassy hoped it wasn't going to be a long speech, because that would make her yawn, without a doubt.

"Old Man Coniston is of the opinion, and I must say I agree with him, that there are not nearly enough trees in the world" said Lady Windermere, now looking sad.

She continued. "So when he is out walking, he plants a ^{NUT} nut or a berry from time to time!" And now Lady Windermere was smiling.

"But" said Bassy. "Do you expect me to believe that big trees and hedges can grow from little things?"

"Yes" said Lady Windermere. "Look at knowledge, it starts with just a little. Remember how quickly you learnt about Snowdrops, and Bluebells, and Primroses, not forgetting the little Cowslip!"

"And dandelions, daisies, and buttercups, from Old

Man Coniston when he mows the lawn!"

"Yes" said Lady Windermere, "and of course, he has another interest - SAVING BABY TREES!"

"Now, that does really sound interesting" said Bassy.

"When Old Man Coniston is out walking and keeping an eye on things, he often finds small trees growing in the most inconvenient places, say in the middle of a footpath or lawn, or a crack in a pavement, even, I might add, between the Scribblings front door steps!" went on Lady Windermere.

Bassy was absolutely enthralled, and Lady Windermere was quick to notice.

"What happens next?" asked Bassy.

"Well, Bassy" s he explained. "One way or another, he gets those baby trees out, and plants them into his own garden in the part he calls the nursery, and when he oils the wheels on the Chariot or the garden wheelbarrow, I know it ^{IS} ~~THE~~ time he is putting the rescued baby trees into yoghurt cartons, then into the wheelbarrow or the Chariot, along with ^{tree} seeds he planted in the garden and which have now grown, and others sprouting in cartons from nuts and berries!"

Bassy was now rather confused.

"You mean, he fills the wheelbarrow or the Chariot with little cartons of trees, very little tiny trees?"

"Oh yes," said Lady Windermere. "He has a little spade, and digs a hole, and when he sees a need he plants a baby tree of one kind or another."

"He is clever!" said Bassy. "How good of him to take such good care of things!"

"Of course!" went on Lady Windermere proudly.
"Of course he is clever!"

She was indeed very proud of Old Man Coniston.

"But of course, he has his failures, but, that too can be a blessing in disguise, for if all the seeds he has ever planted and all the acorns and beech nuts he ever planted came up, well, I do believe this whole county would be one large forest! Indeed, he often plants a cluster in a field! Right in the middle! I don't suppose the farmers would be too pleased if everything came up and flourished!"

They both laughed.

"The birds would be pleased though" said Bassy.

"But not the farmers" said Lady Windermere.

"Still," went on Bassy soothingly, "as long as our fields have trees around the edges we will have to think ourselves lucky!"

"Yes indeed" agreed Lady Windermere, "as long as we have fields with trees around the edges, we must think ourselves lucky!"

"I am so pleased to hear about Old Man Coniston's trees, I think I should like to go back to the house and give him another tray with something nice on it!" said Bassy.

"Now, that is a splendid idea!" laughed Lady Windermere. "Let us buzz off this minute!"

As they walked away from where they had been standing talking, Bassy was quite quiet for all of one minute, which surprised Lady Windermere. But Bassy was quiet for one minute, and not a second longer!

"Why do you keep your wicker armchair in the Garden Shed?" she asked.

"For afternoon tea of course," laughed Lady Windermere.

"There wasn't a cup in there with your own special name on it, just one for CONISTON" Bassy went on. "I noticed specially, because I would have liked to drink out of a cup with WINDERMERE on it much better than a yogurt carton."

"I haven't a cup with WINDERMERE on it" she said. "Things like that cost money!"

"We'll have to see if Santa Claus can oblige with a WINDERMERE cup" said Bassy seriously. "If he can manage a walking stick with a fish on it for Grasmere, I can't see why he cannot bring you a cup with your name on it!"

They laughed happily as they walked in through the garden gate, and up the path, which of course made Buttermere say to Grasmere as they worked ever so hard loading the Chariot and the garden wheelbarrow, "Seems ^{SEEMS} to me some female Verdi Bears have good times walking and laughing whilst other Verdis like us two do all the loading!"

But Grasmere didn't seem to mind at all!

Old Man Coniston, however, didn't hear them returning. He hadn't actually noticed them leave in the first place, to be quite truthful, for he was busy planting something or another in his garden.

He became aware of someone watching him, "Come here whoever you are" he said.

He looked up, and noticed the hat. It was Bassy!

"You aren't sulking, are you?" she asked.

"No, I am not sulking" he replied.

"You aren't feeling crotchety either?" she asked.

"No, I am not feeling crotchety either" he replied.

"Can I please ask you something" she said quietly.

"Ask away Bassy" he said, wishing she didn't want to!

"Have you a baby tree to spare, one with leaves on it now and for ever. I can't wait for the spring time."

He looked along his row of rescued trees. "Holly might well fit the bill."

He took his silver coloured spade in one paw, and in a second, a very tiny holly plant was in his other paw.

"Will you plant it where I tell you?" she asked, pulling the brim of her hat down a little more.

"Lead the way" he said, beginning to worry, for he wasn't wanting a long walk with just one tree!

She led him to the hedge through which one could see the Scribblings tennis court.

"The day I counted nests and things I saw legs through there, and white shoes, and tennis. I don't want to see any more tennis, ever again!"

He laughed aloud.

"Can't say I blame you Bassy" he said, as he knelt down, and pushed the silver coloured spade, or trowel, into the earth. She watched him without speaking.

As he firmed the soil around the young stem, he was wondering what she was thinking.

It wasn't usual to have silence when Bassy was standing near.

"Penny for your thoughts" he said, cleaning the trowel on a pawful of grass."

"I am just thinking how glad I am you don't tell fibs!" she declared. "AND, I think one day you should REALLY have a Golden Spade, because I think you do such important work!"

He didn't know what to say to her, so best say naught, he thought. But then words came, but from Bassy.

"Things like Golden Spades cost money, I suppose" she said.

"Very probably" he agreed.

"Still, we will have to see if Santa Claus can oblige. After all, if he is already coming with a walking stick with a fish on it, and a cup with WINDERMERE on it, I can't see why he couldn't find room for a Golden Spade on his sled, don't you agree with me?"

The thought of Santa Claus began to worry Old Man Coniston very much indeed. He had problems enough with Autumn, without thinking that far ahead!

Christmas and snow didn't seem to worry the young at all. Still, he had been young not that long ago himself. He was still a good paw at building a snowman!

But a Golden Spade!

"I wouldn't say too much about Golden Spades, Bassy, I think you will make Santa Claus begin to worry!"

But Bassy had forgotten about spades and baby trees!

"Planting trees makes one very hungry" she said, as she saw Lady Windermere approaching the garden with what

looked like something nice on a tray.

"It does indeed!" said Old Man Coniston, as he saw Lady Windermere open the Garden Shed door.

"Three cheers for Lady Windermere" said Grasmere and Buttermere as they followed her into the Shed.

"And so say all of us" said Old Man Coniston, as he closed the Shed door behind himself and Bassy.

"Go easy on the strawberry jam" said Bassy. "Old Man Coniston and I have been doing all the work, we planted a holly tree, and planting trees makes one hungry!"

"Amen to that" said Old Man Coniston as he took first share of the red jam.

"We could paint the chariot and make it a golden one" said Bassy, "if we had gold paint of course!"

But no one seemed to take any notice of her, for the something nice on a tray seemed to be more important!

As she gazed out of the Garden Shed window, eating a soone with a strawberry on it, she could hear Lady Windermere talking about something called a last picnic out of doors before the cold weather came and the snow came down....."it can be tomorrow if the weather remains fine..." she heard Lady Windermere say.

"I hope it is a fine day tomorrow...." sighed Bassy as she gazed out of the window "my little holly tree is so very small Old Man Coniston, and a nice fine day might just make it grow whilst we have a picnic."

As the Verdi Bears now walked out of the garden, and into the house, Old Man Coniston looked up the garden towards the hedge which now contained a very small holly bush, or tree in the making, AND said to Bassy, "Yes,

and when it grows tall and strong, we will have made a good hedge for nesting birds into an even better one!"

"Can you make me a poem about nests and hedges?" she asked hopefully.....

"Ahem!" said Old Man Coniston, as he unfolded a piece of notepaper. "I alre ady have!" and while Lady Windermere prepared a picnic list, he recited it to ^{THE} three young Verdi Bears

'Twas A GOOD HEDGE FOR NESTING

"I was safe there" said the bird,
With a backward glance,
As she left her empty nest,
Her chicks safely gone!

"'Twas a good hedge for nesting,
Quiet and strong.

My eggs no one bothering at all,
They could hatch undisturbed, chicks have
all safely flown!
Perchance we can return again, and nest in
this place,
By the help of God's grace!

Yes, 'twas a good hedge for nesting,
Quiet and strong!"



CHAPTER 7



Tomorrow, when it came, was beautiful!

"We've been lucky already" said Bassy, as she looked out of the window, and saw the sun shining, "and we haven't even set off to go!"

She was standing near the Chariot, helping Lady Windermere check a list, and lists were long when Lady Windermere wrote them for a picnic!

The Chariot seemed to have too many things packed into it, or so Bassy thought.

"If we pack anything ^{else} into it, the wheels might squeak again" she said, looking out of the window to where Old Man Coniston, Grasmere and Buttermere were standing near the garden gate, waiting impatiently for list checking to end, and the time to Set Off To Go to arrive.

At last, Bassy saw Lady Windermere place a large green travelling rug, folded, over the boxes, bottles and containers, trying to hide them from view.

"Time to go!" she said, as she pushed the Chariot out of the room, and into another, and then out of the

front door, and then out into the sunlight.

"Hurrah!" said Buttermere.

"And about time too!" said Old Man Coniston, who was just beginning to look crotchety.

But, when he saw how high the Chariot was piled with the ingredients for a lovely picnic, some of which were peeping out from corners the golded green rug hadn't quite covered, he began to cheer up - that is - until Bassy wanted to know how far away the Lake was, how long would it take to walk there, how long could they stay there, and could they start the picnic as soon as they got there!

"Wait and see" said Old Man Coniston. "Keep your eyes on things while you are walking, and you will be there before you know it!"

So, she kept her eye on the lane they walked down, and what a long lane it seemed to Bassy, who couldn't wait to get to the Lake!

She also kept an eye on a field which they walked through, which had a footpath alongside the hedge, but it seemed a large field, and a long footpath, to anyone of course who couldn't wait to get to the Lake!

There was a small wooden bridge, made of wood in strange shapes, which they walked across.

"Logs and planks" said Grasmere, not really seeming very interested.

And just when Bassy was beginning to lose interest in bridges, planks, lanes and footpaths, she became aware of a smell of pine trees, and as they turned a corner she saw something, and said aloud - "A Silver Magic

Carpet!" and ran to the waters edge.

They had arrived at the Lake!

But as her paws felt the cold lake water as she stood on the very edge of the lake, all she could say, then of course, was "Brrrrrr. It's very cold!"

She looked at Old Man Coniston, with a question being formed under her hat brim.

"Old Man Coniston, is that all it is" she asked, gazing across the lake. "Is that all a Lake is - a big patch of water?"

He laughed. "I'm afraid so Bassy. A lake is just a big patch of water. But Bassy, isn't it a big beautiful patch of water!"

"Oh yes, it is a big beautiful patch of water!" she laughed as she gazed for the first time on a big and beautiful lake!

To Bassy's delight, Lady Windermere started to unpack the picnic things immediately.

"She doesn't want to waste a minute!" said Bassy, as she and Old Man Coniston stood watching. They could only watch, for Lady Windermere wouldn't allow anyone to help her.

"I know where everything is" she said, "keep away all of you until I say so!"

The green rug was a good big one. The cabbage salad, too, was a good big one, in fact, the picnic was looking better every second.

"I wish she would hurry and say so!" said Gfasmere. "I'm absolutely starving with hunger!"

"Can't wait to try the sandwiches, I have been

experimenting with sandwich fillings. I made absolutely hundreds of fillings and hundreds of sandwiches!" said Buttermere.

Old Man Coniston, who had witnessed the experimental choppings and mashings had already decided not to eat anything which had been one of Buttermere's experiments!

He watched Lady Windermere open her large handbag and bring out a cotton bag with a string around it.

"Aha!" he said. "The cutlery."

Grasmere looked at him and said "Why are we having cutlery today?"

"Well, this is a Special Picnic, the very last one before the snow. So, being special - we can use the cutlery just this once, and as the cutlery is always the last thing to go on the picnic rug, and the last thing to go on the picnic table - according to Lady Windermere's rules-you can expect a COOOEEEE any second now."

"Cooooeee" called Lady Windermere, and they ran to her, the rug, and the picnic table.

Of course, it was a wonderful picnic, they all agreed.

"Even the sandwiches were good, after one scraped out the fillings Buttermere made" said Grasmere, "You certainly are improving Buttermere!" he admitted.

After a while, after Lady Windermere had packed away the empty boxes, and bottles, and paper plates, and wrapped up the good cutlery, they all sat on the rug and looked at the Lake, and at the hills which were near.

"Are Verdi Bears supposed to keep their eyes on

the lakes and the hills?" asked Bassy.

"Yes, indeed they are!" said Old Man Coniston.
"And what do you think of the hills and mountains Bassy?"

"I think the hills are lovely" she answered, looking at them through her binoculars. "I think they are just like big green fields with big green bumps in the middle!"

"Well now, I reckon that to be a fair description" said Old Man Coniston.

"I can see the dark ones a long way off" she said.
"They look like dark coloured buns with white icing on the top, but no cherries!"

"That is snow on the tops" he explained. "They are capped with snow."

"There are dark moving patches on the hillsides" said Grasmere, as he too looked at the hills through his green binoculars. "What are they?"

"The sun is casting shadows as the clouds scurry over it's face" Lady Windermere explained. "See the shadows move over the hillsides Bassy!"

But Bassy wasn't watching the shadows, she had seen something else, more than one something.

"There are tiny human persons walking up there! See them!" She pointed to a green hill.

Lady Windermere looked through her binoculars at the green hill and the tiny people. "Grown up human being climbers and walkers. They look like specks in the distance you see."

"Having their last walk up the fells and climb up

the mountains before the snow, no doubt" Old Man Coniston said.

"Are they keeping their eye on things too?" asked a bewildered Bassy.

"Oh yes, Bassy, indeed they are keeping their eye on things."

"Well that is a big relief" she said. "There is too much to keep an eye on at times, don't you think? I am glad there is someone else to help out."

The wind ruffled the surface of the lake. The wintery sun caught the ripples, and Bassy laughed "It looks as though the lake has gold coins spread all over it!"

"We must have a look at the fish now" said Old Man Coniston, taking Bassy by the paw. "Don't make a lot of noise, and walk with great care, I don't want anyone falling in."

He led the way onto a large flat brown rock, which jutted out into the lake.

They all lay on the flat brown rock, and gazed down into the lake, which at that particular spot was as deep as a garden gate was tall. They could see the pebbles on the lake bottom.

"I can see a big fish" whispered Grasmere.

"Is it like the one you want on a walking stick?" whispered Bassy.

"Yes" he whispered in reply.

They all watched the fish for a few minutes.

Bassy said "fish never seem to stop drinking, do they, and they are not dainty drinkers like a cat who lip laps!"



They all watched the fish who didn't drink lip lap like a cat, until Bassy said "I'm bored with watching silly fish."

Buttermere said "me too!"

So, Lady Windermere took Bassy and Buttermere away from the flat brown rock. They walked back to the green rug on the green grass at the edge of the lake.

"We have about five minutes left before we start our return journey" she said. "Now, as Santa Claus hasn't any idea what you want for Christmas, why don't you both pick a pebble, and wish a wish aloud as you throw it into the lake as far as you can."

"Is it allowed?" asked Bassy. "Throwing pebbles? Asking for presents? Are you sure?"

"Oh yes. Anyone seeing a lake for the very first time has to wish a wish. And after all, what better place than this little lake, and what better time than now!"

Buttermere was already wishing, just in case Lady Windermere remembered it wasn't allowed, or in case she changed her mind!

"I, Buttermere, wish for a big cookery book to see what other people experiment with on the other side of the world and over the sea!" he said, throwing a pebble.

Bassy followed suit. "And I, Bassy, want something nice and jewelly to put around my wrist, as Daisy Chains drop to pieces!" Her pebble obligingly made a big splash, a sure sign of a wish well made.

Lady Windermere smiled.

But, she too threw a pebble. "My wish is to come

here again next year" she said, as her pebble hopped and skipped one-two-three before sinking!

So, Bassy and Buttermere each threw another pebble, and wished the same!

"I know a very good idea" said Bassy. "Let us come here for our first picnic after the snow has gone!"

But not everyone was sounding happy at that precise moment.

"You've scared all the fish away" said Grasmere.

"It was all that shouting and throwing pebbles!"

"Never mind" said Bassy. "Throw a pebble yourself and wish a wish and with a bit of luck, Santa Claus might hear. Lady Windermere has told us all about it!"

"Really?" said Grasmere.

"Yes," assured Bassy. "I have wished for a jewelly bracelet. Buttermere wished for a big cookery book. I have secretly wished for a WINDERMERE cup for Lady Windermere, and a Golden Spade for Old Man Coniston!"

"Really?" said Grasmere, picking up a large pebble.

"And with the echo in the hills, Lady Windermere says he will probably have heard by now!" she added.

Grasmere closed his eyes, wished his wish, and threw!

But he need not have worried, because judging by the harassed expression on Old Man Coniston's face, Santa Claus had received the messages loud and clear!

At least, that is what Lady Windermere thought, and she was so very often right.

"Let's hope there will just be enough in the Just Be Enough Box to help him!" she thought to herself.

So she threw another pebble into the lake,
and wished, silently, just to make sure!

The Verdi Bears all now walked happily home,
leaving behind them echoes in the hills, and some
crumbs for the birds.

Paw writing exercise that evening proved to be
very enjoyable indeed for Bassy, for Old Man Coniston
had written a poem just for her -

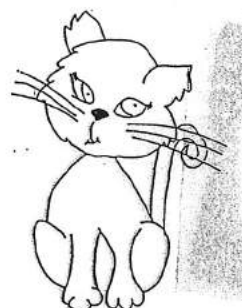
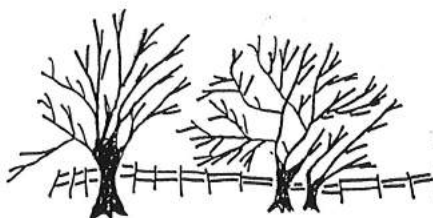
LITTLE CAT

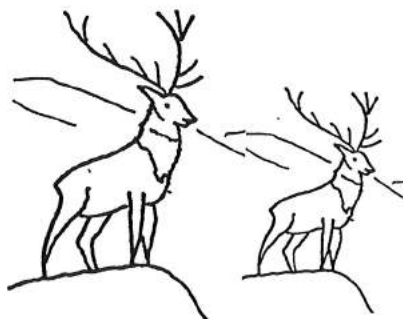
Lip Lap little cat,
I like to see you
Drink like that!

Sweetly Sippen little kitten,
I like to see you
Sip like thitten!

Lippy Lappy little catty,
I like to see you
Drink like thatty!

AHA!





And time passed, and a lot of honey was put on a lot of porridge. There were late lazy mornings, short dark days, and early nights, AND a lot of hot broth.

But, as sure as night follows day, came Christmas Eve.

There was a Christmas tree, of course, and as was the way with Verdi Bears, reminders to be left on the tree, so that Santa Claus could match up the presents he carried with the correct house as he travelled.

Each of the five Verdi Bears had to leave a reminder of their particular hoped for gift, just in case he mixed up the gift labels, and wasn't sure.

So, on the tree on Christmas Eve, Bassy tied a bracelet made of rolled up silver paper.

Grasmere tied a tin of sardines in place, with his name printed on it.

Lady Windermere tied a yogurt pot, empty of course, on to the tree, not forgetting to write WINDERMERE on it.

A label from a soup tin was tied on by Buttermere.

And last, but not least, Bassy tied on an old sugar spoon for Old Man Coniston, who said he couldn't be bothered!

The young Verdi Bears were up good and early next morning, it being Christmas Day, and found to their delight that Santa Claus had visited them whilst they had slept, for the reminders had disappeared, and around the Christmas tree were five presents, neatly wrapped.

In place of the sardines - a walking stick with a beautiful fish on the handle, for Grasmere, of course.

In place of the empty yogurt carton - a brown cup with WINDERMERE on it.

Buttermere had a big cookery book in exchange for his soup label.

Old Man Coniston - he had his Golden Spade of course in place of the spoon.

Bassy? Ah, let's not forget Bassy! She of course had a silvery bracelet with a green jewel in it in exchange for her silver paper.

And before they knew it, what with the excitement of the presents, and the Christmas Dinner, and a pudding, the time Lady Windermere loved best arrived, and that time was Christmas Day, around about tea time.

And around about tea time, Lady Windermere just happened to look out of the window.....

The snow was beginning to fall. Nice to have a white Christmas Day after all, thought Lady Windermere. A nice quiet dark blue velvet evening with a white carpet, she smiled.

And after the snow thawed, it would mean the

green tips of the snowdrops would follow. Yes, after the snow flakes - the snowdrops.

Old Man Coniston was polishing the Golden Spade. He looked across to her and smiled.

"Beautiful isn't it. You don't see workmanship like this to-day, do you. Pity," he said, looking lovingly at his Victorian Coal Shovel which had a long twisted handle, just like a stick of barley sugar.

She could see the reflected glow of the fire on the polished brass coal shovel. It may only be brass, but it was as precious as gold to Old Man Coniston, she thought to herself. She was glad he was so happy.

She looked at the coal fire which had been reflected on the golden shovel. It was a nice red fire for toast, she thought. She loved warm buttery toast.

Lady Windermere herself was holding a small brown Windermere cup in her paws. She didn't want to be parted from it for one second!

Would she put snowdrops in it one day, she wondered? Or should she drink out of it? The brown earthenware cup with its coat of cream around the outside as decoration looked so pretty, like a chocolate cup!

Perhaps she should keep the cup as her cocoa drink cup, or perhaps coffee?

She was sure it was one of the nicest Christmas presents she had ever received. Oh, it had been a lovely Christmas Day.

Old Man Coniston smiled as he polished his brass shovel. Poor little Bassy, she thought it was gold. But Bassy could see gold in everything, and this brass

shovel was as precious as gold to him.

He smiled with happiness as he gazed out of the window.

Snowing! It would mean a snowman being built out there on the front lawn. Then the search for a scarf and an old pipe, and an old hat. Something nice to look forward to tomorrow.

Buttermere interested him greatly. Imagine a Verdi Bear wanting a Recipe Book with the cookery of many Nations in it! An interesting Verdi Bear was Buttermere, who already liked to carve wood, and also experiment with growing things and cooking, and who seemed to want to know about Prehistoric times and animals!

Yes, an interesting Verdi Bear was Buttermere, who was quite unpredictable.

As he looked in Buttermere's direction, he looked up from his old recipe book.

He smiled at Old Man Coniston as he met his gaze. "Nice big old book isn't it, nearly antique. You don't see books like this every day, isn't it a pity Christmas Day couldn't come, say, twice in a year!" he said, sliding another bookmark into the book.

Old Man Coniston laughed, what an idea! Twice Christmas indeed!

"Old books have a nice musty smell, interesting aren't they" he said, looking at Buttermere, and wondering that sort of cookery experiments he would be planning. Nothing ever worked for him, poor little Verdi, but it didn't deter him in the slightest. If

anything, it made him work all the harder!

Buttermere smiled as he read his Recipe book. Snowing outside, he thought, might be a good reason to read recipes from cold countries. But perhaps a recipe from a hot country would take his mind off the cold weather.

He looked across at Grasmere, who met his gaze.

Grasmere looked so happy as he polished the fish which was on the top of his walking stick. "Isn't this a truly wonderful walking stick. See the colourings on the trout. Can't see why people have to eat trout, they are sheer poetry!"

Buttermere put yet another bookmark in between more pages. Enough for today, too many bookmarks already! Must have some hot toast, and one didn't need a recipe for hot toast!

Grasmere glanced towards the window, at the falling snow.

Tomorrow, he would go out onto the front lawn, and take a spoonful of clean snow, and put some on the plate of his microscope. He was interested in shapes, and had read somewhere that snowflakes have beautiful patterns.

Studying was such fun! He did so enjoy studying!

He looked across at Bassy, who was polishing the green jewel in her bracelet.

Poor little Bassy. She didn't like studying at all!

She could never remember the Latin names for the plants, or distinguish all the many colours for that matter. But he would always help her, he had told her a million times or more.

As Bassy looked away from the green jewel in her bracelet, she caught Grasmere's gaze, and smiled at him. She was feeling very happy today, wearing her new bracelet, and as Grasmere returned her smile, he felt sorry for her.

Imagine any Verdi being so pleased with an old tin bracelet with a big green glass jewel in it!

But Bassy turned the bracelet this way and that, catching the reflection of the fire in the green jewel. Probably green glass, but she could pretend it was an emerald as big as a gooseberry! She was good at pretending.

Oh, it had been such a wonderful Christmas Day, and tomorrow would be even better, and if it wasn't, well, she could always pretend.

She gazed around the room. Everyone busy looking at their 'special' present for Christmas.

Grasmere polishing an old cane! A sort of stick with a trout carved on the handle.

And Old Man Coniston, polishing the Golden Spade. She knew of course it was only brass, but she wanted him to think it was gold! He had polished it for hours!

Buttermere too, had spent absolutely ages cutting up pieces of paper to make ^{book}marks for a silly old cookbook!

"How boring their presents are" she thought, "but jewellery is so exciting." Then she laughed as she saw Lady Windermere polish her brown cup with her name on it for the millionth time with her Christmas Day handkerchief - the red one.

Imagine that, an old brown cup with WINDERMERE

written on it had made her look so happy. Bassy wondered why, and came to the conclusion it must be a Magic Cup! What else!

"Time for tea" said Lady Windermere. "I do so enjoy Christmas Day tea."

"I think we are all so very lucky" she said, as she closed the gold velvet curtains. Then she said to herself "yes, the snow is falling heavily now, just the thing to make Christmas complete", and of course, the snowdrops would soon be blooming!

Yes, the snowdrops would soon be blooming, oh it had been a very happy Christmas after all, and to make it even happier, Old Man Coniston now began to read his special Christmas poem, penned within the last half hour!

TWICE CHRISTMAS!

If Christmas came twice in a year,
I think twould be a good idea!

But Santa Claus would not agree,
And surely say - "Oh deary me,

Twice on a year would ruin my sled,
And soon wear out my robes of red!

Let's just keep Christmas ONCE a year,
And for goodness sake, be of good cheer!

Allow my sled rest and repair,
And my lovely little deer to grow new warm fur!

For a SECOND visit from me - never yearn!
For, in just 365 days from now -

I SHALL RETURN! "

