



The Bear and the Wildcat - Kazumi Yumoto

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Coping with the loss of someone special can be difficult for children. It's often a new experience and brings unfamiliar emotions. Sometimes a book can help. *The Bear and the Wildcat* offers a gentle wisdom about the grieving process.

Bear is devastated when his best friend, little bird, dies suddenly. Upset by the shock, Bear finds it difficult to part with little bird's body. He makes a small box, stains it with berry juice and lines it with petals.

He carries the box with him everywhere and shows it to other animals. They try to help Bear to forget little bird but Bear is unable to let go of his friend. He shuts himself away with his unhappiness. One morning, the sun draws him outside and he goes into the forest with little bird in the box. He meets a wildcat who has an oddly shaped case. Bear is curious as to what is inside. They agree to show each other what they carry. Wildcat is impressed by the box Bear has made for little bird. She opens the case and takes out a violin.

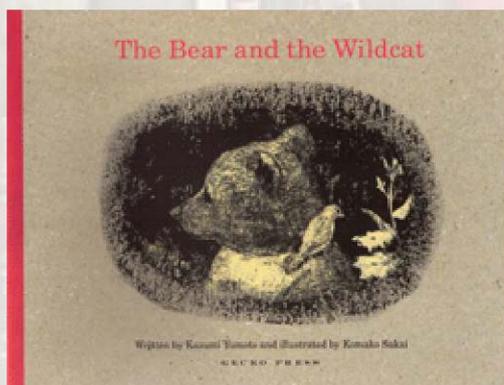
"Let me play a song for you and your little friend," she says.

The wildcat's kindness and beautiful music release the grief that Bear has been holding onto. He remembers the special times he shared with little bird and knows he will always treasure the memory of their friendship. With the wildcat's help, he finds a sunny spot in the forest and lays little bird to rest.

The illustrations have a timeless feel in keeping with the natural rhythm of life. Sombre black and grey tones reflect Bear's sorrow. Later, as his sadness eases, some colour is added and the mood lifts. The final illustration celebrates a new beginning.

A thoughtful, compassionate story that offers many opportunities for discussion.

Reviewed by children's book author, Jean Bennett.



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