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Ririro

IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

Ririro

Bambi (21/25)

One morning Bambi came to grief.

The pale gray dawn was just creeping through the forest. A milky-white mist was rising from the meadow and the stillness that precedes the coming of light was everywhere. The crows were not awake yet, nor the magpies. The jays were asleep.

Bambi had met Faline the night before. She looked sadly at him and was very shy.

"I'm so much alone now," she said gently.

"I'm alone too," Bambi answered with some hesitation.

"Why don't you stay with me any more?" Faline asked sorrowfully, and it hurt him to see the gay and lively Faline so serious and downcast.

"I want to be alone," he replied. And gently as he tried to say it, it sounded hard. He felt it himself.

Faline looked at him and asked softly, "Do you love me still?"

"I don't know," Bambi answered in the same tone.

She walked silently away from him, leaving him alone. He stood under the great oak at the meadow's edge and peered out cautiously, drinking in the pure and odorless morning air. It was moist and fresh from the earth, the dew, the grass and the wet woods. Bambi breathed in great gulps of it. All at once his spirit felt

freer than for a long time. He walked happily onto the mist-covered meadow.

Then a sound like thunder crashed.

Bambi felt a fearful blow that made him stagger.

Mad with terror, he sprang back into the thicket and kept running. He did not understand what had

happened. He could not grasp a single idea. He could

only keep running on and on. Fear gripped his heart so that his breath failed as he rushed blindly on. Then a

killing pain shot through him, so that he felt that he could not bear it. He felt something hot running over his

left shoulder. It was like a thin, burning thread coming from where the pain shot through him. Bambi had to

stop running. He was forced to walk slower. Then he saw that he was limping. He sank down.

It was comfortable just to lie there and rest.

"Up, Bambi! Get up!" the old stag was standing beside him, and nudging his shoulder gently.

Bambi wanted to answer, "I can't," but the old stag

repeated, "Up! Up!" And there was such compulsion in his voice and such tenderness that Bambi kept silent.

Even the pain that shot through him stopped for a minute.

Then the old stag said hurriedly and anxiously, "Get up!

You must get away, my son." My son! The words seemed to have escaped him. In a flash Bambi was on his feet.

"Good," said the old stag, breathing deeply and speaking emphatically, "come with me now and keep close beside

me."

He walked swiftly ahead. Bambi followed him but he felt a burning desire to let himself drop to the ground, to lie still and rest.

The old stag seemed to guess it and talked to him without stopping. "Now you'll have to bear every pain. You can't think of lying down now. You mustn't think of it even for a moment. That's enough to tire you in itself. You must save yourself, do you understand me, Bambi? Save yourself. Or else you are lost. Just remember that He is behind you, do you understand, Bambi? And He will kill you without mercy. Come on. Keep close to me. You'll soon be all right. You must be all right."

Bambi had no strength left to think with. The pain shot through him at every step he took. It took away his breath and his consciousness. The hot trickle, burning his shoulder, seared him like some deep heartfelt trouble.

The old stag made a wide circle. It took a long time. Through his veil of pain and weakness, Bambi was amazed to see that they were passing the great oak again.

The old stag stopped and snuffed the ground. "He's still here," he whispered. "It's He. And that's His dog. Come along. Faster!" They ran.

Suddenly the old stag stopped again. "Look," he said, "that's where you lay on the ground."

Bambi saw the crushed grasses where a wide pool of his own blood was soaking into the earth.

The old stag snuffed warily around the spot. "They were here, He and His dog," he said. "Come along!" He went ahead slowly, snuffing again and again.

Bambi saw the red drops gleaming on the leaves of the bushes and the grass stems. "We passed here before," he thought. But he couldn't speak.

"Aha!" said the old stag and seemed almost joyful, "we're behind them now."

He continued for a while on the same path. Then he doubled unexpectedly and began a new circle. Bambi staggered after him. They came to the oak again but on the opposite side. For the second time they passed the place where Bambi had fallen down. Then the old stag went in still another direction.

"Eat that," he commanded suddenly, stopping and pushing aside the grasses. He pointed to a pair of short dark-green leaves growing close together near the ground.

Bambi obeyed. They tasted terribly bitter and smelt sickeningly.

"How do you feel now?" the stag asked after a while.

"Better," Bambi answered quickly. He was suddenly able to speak again. His senses had cleared and his fatigue grew less.

"Let's move on again," the old stag commanded after another pause. After Bambi had been following him for a long time he said, "At last!" They stopped.

"The bleeding has stopped," said the old stag, "the blood's stopped flowing from your wound. It isn't emptying your veins now. And it can't betray you any

more either. It can't show Him and His dog where to find you and kill you."

The old stag looked worried and tired but his voice sounded joyful. "Come along," he went on, "now you can rest."

They reached a wide ditch which Bambi had never crossed. The old stag climbed down and Bambi tried to follow him. But it cost him a great effort to climb the steep slope on the farther side. The pain began to shoot violently through him again. He stumbled, regained his feet, and stumbled again, breathing hard.

"I can't help you," said the old stag, "you'll have to get up yourself." Bambi reached the top. He felt the hot trickle on his shoulder again. He felt his strength ebbing for the second time.

"You're bleeding again," said the old stag, "I thought you would. But it's only a little," he added in a whisper, "and it doesn't make any difference now."

They walked very slowly through a grove of lofty beeches. The ground was soft and level. They walked easily on it. Bambi felt a longing to lie down there, to stretch out and never move his limbs again. He couldn't go any further. His head ached. There was a humming in his ears. His nerves were quivering, and fever began to rack him. There was a darkness before his eyes. He felt nothing but a desire for rest and a detached amazement at finding his life so changed and shattered. He remembered how he had walked whole and uninjured through the woods that morning. It was

barely an hour ago, and it seemed to him like some memory out of a distant, long-vanished past.

They passed through a scrub-oak and dogwood thicket. A huge, hollow beech trunk, thickly entangled with the bushes, lay right in front of them, barring the way.

"Here we are," Bambi heard the old stag saying. He walked along the beech trunk and Bambi walked beside him. He nearly fell into a hollow that lay in front of him.

"Here it is," said the old stag at the moment, "you can lie down here."

Bambi sank down and did not move again.

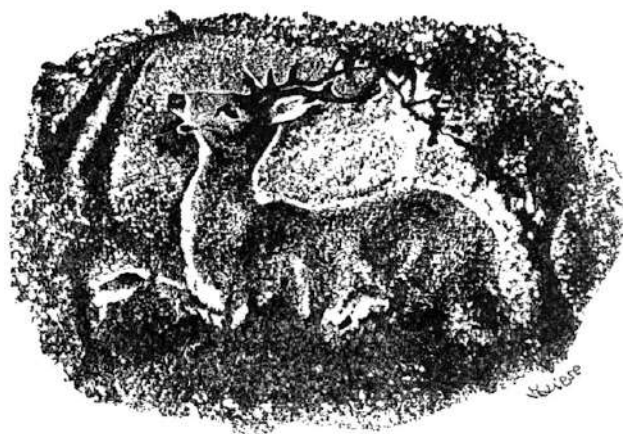
The hollow was still deeper under the beech trunk and formed a little chamber. The bushes closed thickly across the top so that whoever was within lay hidden.

"You'll be safe here," said the old stag.

Days passed.

Bambi lay on the warm earth with the mouldering bark of the fallen tree above him. He felt his pain intensify and then grow less and less until it died away more and more gently.

Sometimes he would creep out and stand swaying weakly on his unsteady legs. He would take a few steps to look for food. He ate plants now that he had never noticed before. Now they appealed to his



taste and attracted him by their strange, enticing acrid smell. Everything that he had disdained before and would spit out if it got accidentally into his mouth, seemed appetizing to him. He still disliked many of the little leaves and short, coarse shoots, but he ate them anyway, as though he were compelled to, and his wound healed faster. He felt his strength returning.

He was cured, but he didn't leave the hollow yet. He walked around a little at night, but lay quietly on his bed by day. Not until the fever had entirely left his body did Bambi begin to think over all that had happened to him. Then a great terror awoke in him, and a profound tremor passed through his heart. He could not shake himself free of it. He could not get up and run about as before. He lay still and troubled. He felt terrified, ashamed, amazed and troubled by turns. Sometimes he was full of despair, at others of joy. The old stag was always with him. At first he stayed day and night at Bambi's side. Then he left him alone at times, especially when he saw Bambi deep in thought. But he always kept close at hand.

One night there was thunder and lightning and a downpour of rain, although the sky was clear and the setting sun was streaming down. The blackbirds sang loudly in all the neighboring tree-tops, the finches warbled, the tit-mice chirped in the bushes. Among the grasses or from under the bushes, the metallic, throaty cackling of the pheasants sounded at intervals. The woodpecker laughed exultantly and the doves cooed their fervid love.

Bambi crept out of the hollow. Life was beautiful. The old stag was standing there as though he expected Bambi. They sauntered on together. But Bambi did not return to the hollow or the old stag again.