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Ririro

IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

Ririro

Bambi (5/25)

Time passed, and Bambi had many adventures and went through many experiences. Every day brought something new. Sometimes he felt quite giddy. He had so incredibly much to learn.

He could listen now, not merely hear, when things happened so close that they struck the ear of their own accord. No, there was really no art in that. He could really listen intelligently now to everything that stirred, no matter how softly. He heard even the tiniest whisper that the wind brought by. For instance, he knew that a pheasant was running through the next bushes. He recognized clearly the soft quick tread that was always stopping. He knew by ear the sound the field mice make when they run to and fro on their little paths. And the patter of the moles when they are in a good humor and chase one another around the elder bushes so that there is just the slightest rustling. He heard the shrill clear call of the falcon, and he knew from its altered, angry tones when a hawk or an eagle approached. The falcon was angry because she was afraid her field would be taken from her. He knew the beat of the wood-doves' wings, the beautiful, distant, soaring cries of ducks, and many other things besides. He knew how to snuff the air now, too. Soon he would do it as well as his mother. He could breathe in the air

and at the same time analyze it with his senses. "That's clover and meadow grass," he would think when the wind blew off the fields. "And Friend Hare is out there, too. I can smell him plainly."

Again he would notice through the smell of leaves and earth, wild leek and wood mustard, that the ferret was passing by. He could tell by putting his nose to the ground and snuffing deeply that the fox was afoot. Or he would know that one of his family was somewhere nearby. It might be Aunt Ena and the children.

By now he was good friends with the night and no longer wanted to run about so much in broad daylight. He was quite willing to lie all day long in the shade of the leafy glade with his mother. He would listen to the air sizzling in the heat and then fall asleep.

From time to time, he would wake up, listen and snuff the air to find out how things stood. Everything was as it should be. Only the tit-mice were chattering a little to each other, the midges who were hardly ever still, hummed, while the wood-doves never ceased declaiming their ecstatic tenderness. What concern was it of his? He would drop off to sleep again.

He liked the night very much now. Everything was alive, everything was in motion. Of course, he had to be cautious at night too, but still he could be less careful.

And he could go wherever he wanted to. And everywhere he went he met acquaintances. They too were always less nervous than in the daytime.

At night the woods were solemn and still. There were only a few voices. They sounded loud in the stillness,

and they had a different ring from daytime voices, and left a deeper impression.

Bambi liked to see the owl. She had such a wonderful flight, perfectly light and perfectly noiseless. She made as little sound as a butterfly, and yet she was so dreadfully big. She had such striking features, too, so pronounced and so deeply thoughtful. And such wonderful eyes! Bambi admired her firm, quietly courageous glance. He liked to listen when she talked to his mother or to anybody else. He would stand a little to one side, for he was somewhat afraid of the masterful glance that he admired so much. He did not understand most of the clever things she said, but he knew they were clever, and they pleased him and filled him with respect for the owl.

Then the owl would begin to hoot. "Hoah!—Ha!—Ha!—Haa!—ah!" she would cry. It sounded different from the thrushes' song, or the yellow-birds', different from the friendly notes of the cuckoo, but Bambi loved the owl's cry, for he felt its mysterious earnestness, its unutterable wisdom and strange melancholy.

Then there was the screech-owl, a charming little fellow, lively and gay with no end to his inquisitiveness. He was bent on attracting attention. "Oi, yeek! Oi, yeek!" he would call in a terrible, high-pitched, piercing voice. It sounded as if he were on the point of death. But he was really in a beaming good humor and was hilariously happy whenever he frightened anybody. "Oi, yeek!" he would cry so dreadfully loud that the forests heard it for a mile around. But afterwards he would laugh with

a soft chuckle, though you could only hear it if you stood close by.

Bambi discovered that the screech-owl was delighted whenever he frightened anyone, or when anybody thought that something dreadful had happened to him. After that, whenever Bambi met him, he never failed to rush up and ask, "What has happened to you?" or to say with a sigh, "O, how you frightened me just now!" Then the owl would be delighted.

"O, yes," he would say, laughing, "it sounds pretty gruesome." He would puff up his feathers into a grayish-white ball and look extremely handsome.

There were storms, too, once or twice, both in the daytime and at night. The first was in the daytime and Bambi felt himself grow terrified as it became darker and darker in his glade. It seemed to him as if night had covered the sky at mid-day. When the raging storm broke through the woods so that the trees began to groan aloud, Bambi trembled with terror. And when the lightning flashed and the thunder growled, Bambi was numb with fear and thought the end of the world had come. He ran behind his mother, who had sprung up somewhat disturbed and was walking back and forth in the thicket. He could not think about nor understand anything. The rain fell in raging torrents. Everyone had run to shelter. The woods were empty. But there was no escaping the rain. The pouring water penetrated even the thickest parts of the bushes. Presently the lightning stopped, and the fiery rays ceased to flicker through the tree-tops. The thunder rolled away. Bambi

could hear it in the distance, and soon it stopped altogether. The rain beat more gently. It pattered evenly and steadily around him for another hour. The forest stood breathing deeply in the calm and let the water drain off. No one was afraid to come out any more. That feeling had passed. The rain had washed it away.

Never before had Bambi and his mother gone to the meadow as early as on that evening. It was not even dusk yet. The sun was still high in the sky, the air was extremely fresh, and smelt sweeter than usual, and the woods rang with a thousand voices, for everyone had crept out of his shelter and was running excitedly, telling what had just happened.

Before they went on to the meadow, they passed the great oak that stood near the forest's edge, close to their trail. They always had to pass that beautiful big tree when they went to the meadow.

This time the squirrel was sitting on a branch and greeted them. Bambi was good friends with the squirrel. The first time he met him he took him for a very small deer because of the squirrel's red coat and stared at him in surprise. But Bambi had been very childish at that time and had known nothing at all.

The squirrel pleased him greatly from the first. He was so thoroughly civil, and talkative. And Bambi loved to see how wonderfully he could turn, and climb, and leap, and balance himself. In the middle of a conversation the squirrel would run up and down the smooth tree trunk as though there was nothing to it. Or he would sit upright on a swaying branch, balance himself

comfortably with his bushy tail, that stuck up so gracefully behind him, display his white chest, hold his little forepaws elegantly in front of him, nod his head this way and that, laugh with his jolly eyes, and, in a twinkling, say a lot of comical and interesting things. Then he would come down again, so swiftly and with such leaps, that you expected him to tumble on his head.

He twitched his long tail violently and called to them from overhead, "Good day! Good day! It's so nice of you to come over." Bambi and his mother stopped.

The squirrel ran down the smooth trunk. "Well," he chattered, "did you get through it all right? Of course, I see that everything is first rate. That's the main thing." He ran up the trunk again like lightning and said, "It's too wet for me down there. Wait, I'm going to look for a better place. I hope you don't mind. Thanks, I knew you wouldn't. And we can talk just as well from here." He ran back and forth along a straight limb. "It was a bad business," he said, "a monstrous uproar! You wouldn't believe how scared I was. I hunched myself up as still as a mouse in the corner and hardly dared move. That's the worst of it, having to sit there and not move. And all the time you're hoping nothing will happen. But my tree is wonderful in such cases. There's no denying it, my tree is wonderful! I'll say that for it. I'm satisfied with it. As long as I've had it, I've never wanted any other. But when it cuts loose the way it did to-day you're sure to get frightened no matter where you are."

The squirrel sat up, balancing himself with his handsome upright tail. He displayed his white chest and pressed both forepaws protestingly against his heart. You believed without his adding anything that he had been excited.



"We're going to the meadow now to dry ourselves off in the sun," Bambi's mother said.

"That's a good idea," cried the squirrel,

"you're really so clever. I'm always saying how clever you are." With a bound he sprang onto a higher branch.

"You couldn't do anything better than go to the meadow now," he called down. Then he swung with light bounds back and forth through the tree-top. "I'm going up where I can get the sunlight," he chattered merrily, "I'm all soaked through. I'm going all the way up." He didn't care whether they were still listening to him or not.

The meadow was full of life. Friend Hare was there and had brought along his family. Aunt Ena was there with her children and a few acquaintances. That day Bambi saw the fathers again. They came slowly out of the forest from opposite directions. There was a third stag too. Each walked slowly in his track, back and forth, along the meadow. They paid no attention to anyone

and did not even talk to one another. Bambi looked at them frequently. He was respectful, but full of curiosity.

Then he talked to Faline and Gobo and a few other children. He wanted to play a while. All agreed and they began running around in a circle. Faline was the gayest of all. She was so fresh and nimble and brimming over with bright ideas. But Gobo was soon tired. He had been terribly frightened by the storm. His heart had hammered loudly and was still pounding. There was something very weak about Gobo, but Bambi liked him because he was so good and willing and always a little sad without letting you know it.

Time passed and Bambi was learning how good the meadow grass tasted, how tender and sweet the leaf buds and the clover were. When he nestled against his mother for comfort it often happened that she pushed him away.

"You aren't a little baby any more," she would say. Sometimes she even said abruptly, "Go away and let me be." It even happened sometimes that his mother got up in the little forest glade, got up in the middle of the day, and went off without noticing whether Bambi was following her or not. At times it seemed, when they were wandering down the familiar paths, as if his mother did not want to notice whether Bambi was behind her or was trailing after.

One day his mother was gone. Bambi did not know how such a thing could be possible, he could not figure it

out. But his mother was gone and for the first time Bambi was left alone.

He wandered about, he was troubled, he grew worried and anxious and began to want her terribly. He stood quite sadly, calling her. Nobody answered and nobody came.

He listened and snuffed the air. He could not smell anything. He called again. Softly, pathetically, tearfully, he called "Mother, Mother!" In vain.

Then despair seized him, he could not stand it and started to walk.

He wandered down the trails he knew, stopping and calling. He wandered farther and farther with hesitating steps, frightened and helpless. He was very downcast.

He went on and on and came to trails where he had never been before. He came to places that were strange to him. He no longer knew where he was going. Then he heard two childish voices like his own, calling, "Mother! Mother!" He stood still and listened. Surely that was Gobo and Faline. It must be they.

He ran quickly towards the voices and soon he saw their little red jackets showing through the leaves. Gobo and Faline were standing side by side under a dog-wood tree and calling mournfully, "Mother, Mother!" They were overjoyed when they heard the rustling in the bushes. But they were disappointed when they saw Bambi. They were a little consoled that he was there, however. And Bambi was glad not to be all alone any more.

"My mother is gone," Bambi said.

"Ours is gone too," Gobo answered plaintively.

They looked at one another and were quite despondent.

"Where can they be?" asked Bambi. He was almost sobbing.

"I don't know," sighed Gobo. His heart was pounding and he felt miserable.

Suddenly Faline said, "I think they may be with our fathers."

Gobo and Bambi looked at her surprised. They were filled with awe. "You mean that they're visiting our fathers?" asked Bambi and trembled. Faline trembled too, but she made a wise face. She acted like a person who knows more than she will let on. Of course she knew nothing, she could not even guess where her idea came from. But when Gobo repeated, "Do you really think so?" she put on a meaningful air and answered mysteriously, "Yes, I think so."

Anyway it was a suggestion that needed to be thought about. But in spite of that Bambi felt no easier. He couldn't even think about it, he was too troubled and too sad.

He went off. He wouldn't stay in one place. Faline and Gobo went along with him for a little way. All three were calling, "Mother, Mother!" Then Gobo and Faline stopped, they did not dare go any farther. Faline said, "Why should we? Mother knows where we are. Let's stay here so she can find us when she comes back."

Bambi went on alone. He wandered through a thicket to a little clearing. In the middle of the clearing Bambi

stopped short. He suddenly felt as if he were rooted to the ground and could not move.

On the edge of the clearing, by a tall hazel bush, a creature was standing. Bambi had never seen such a creature before. At the same time the air brought him a scent such as he had never smelled in his life. It was a strange smell, heavy and acrid. It excited him to the point of madness.

Bambi stared at the creature. It stood remarkably erect. It was extremely thin and had a pale face; entirely bare around the nose and the eyes. A kind of dread emanated from that face, a cold terror. That face had a tremendous power over him. It was unbearably painful to look at that face and yet Bambi stood staring fixedly at it.

For a long time the creature stood without moving. Then it stretched out a leg from high up near its face. Bambi had not even noticed that there was one there. But as that terrible leg was reaching out into the air Bambi was swept away by the mere gesture. In a flash he was back into the thicket he came from, and was running away.

In a twinkling his mother was with him again, too. She bounded beside him over shrubs and bushes. They ran side by side as fast as they could. His mother was in the lead. She knew the way and Bambi followed. They ran till they came to their glade.

"Did you see Him?" asked the mother softly.

Bambi could not answer, he had no breath left. He only nodded.

“That was He,” said the mother.
And they both shuddered.