



*Eine Lebensgeschichte
aus dem Walde
von*

Felix Salten

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Bambi

by Felix Salten

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CHAPTER 1

It was in a space in a thicket that he came into the world, in one of those little, hidden places in the wood which seem to be open on every side but which in fact are completely surrounded by foliage. That is why there was so little room there, but just enough for him and his mother.

He stood up, he staggered on his thin legs as he wondered what was happening, looked out with eyes which were dull, wondered what was happening but saw nothing, dropped his head, shuddered severely, and was quite numb.

“What a beautiful child!” declared the magpie.

She had rushed to the place, drawn by the breathy groans she heard forced from Bambi’s mother by her pain. Now the magpie sat on a branch nearby. “What a beautiful child!” she exclaimed again. No-one answered her and she continued speaking excitedly. “And he can already stand up and walk. That’s amazing! That’s so interesting! I’ve never seen anything like it in me life. Well, I’m still young of course, it’s only a year since I left the nest, but I expect you know that. But I think it’s wonderful. A child like this ... he’s only been born a second and he can already stand. I think it’s very noble of him. And most of all, I find that everything done by you deer is very noble. Can he already run too?”

“Of course,” answered Bambi’s mother gently. “But you’ll have to excuse me, I’m not really in a good condition to chat with you. There’s a lot that I’ve got to do ... and besides, I’m feeling quite tired.”

“Oh, don’t let me disturb you,” said the magpie, “I’m in a bit of a rush today, too! But it’s not every day that you see something like this. I

ask you, think of how awkward it is for us in these things, and how much hard work! The children just can't do anything when they first hatch from the egg, they just lie there in the nest quite helpless, and need to be looked after, they always need to be looked after I tell you, I'm sure you've got no idea what it's like. It's so much hard work just to keep 'em fed, and they need to be protected, it's so worrying! I ask you, just think how strenuous all that is, getting food for the children and having to watch over them at the same time so that nothing happens to 'em; if you're not there they can do nothing for themselves. Am I not right? And you have to wait so long before they start to move, so long before they get their first feathers and start to look a bit decent!"

"Please forgive me," Bambi's mother said, "I wasn't really listening."

The magpie flew away. "Stupid person," she thought to herself, "noble, but stupid!"

Bambi's mother barely noticed, and continued vigorously washing her newborn. She washed it with her tongue and so performed several tasks at once, care for his body, a warming massage and a display of her affection.

The little one staggered a little under the weight of the stroking and pushing that gently touched him all over but he remained still. His red coat, which was still a little unkempt, had a sprinkling of white on it, his face, that of a child, still looked uncomprehending, almost as if he were in a deep sleep.

All around them grew hazel bushes, dogwoods, blackthorn bushes and young elder trees. Lofty maples, beech trees and oaks created a green roof over the thicket and from the firm, dark brown ground there sprouted ferns and wild peas and sage. Down close to the ground were the leaves, close together, of violets which were already in bloom and the leaves of strawberries which were just beginning to bloom. The light of the morning sun pierced its way through the thick foliage like a web of gold. The whole forest was alive with the sounds of countless voices which pierced through the trees with an air of gay

excitement. The golden oriole performed a ceaseless song of joy, the doves never stopped cooing, the blackbirds whistled, the finches flapped their wings, the tits chirruped. The quarrelsome screech of the jay penetrated through all this, and the joking laughter of the blue magpie, the bursting, metallic cook-cook of the pheasants. From time to time the harsh short celebrations of a woodpecker would pierce through all the other voices. The shrill, bright call of a falcon would penetrate across the forest canopy and the choir of crows never stopped ringing out their raucous call.

The little one understood not a one of these many songs and calls, not a word of their conversations. He was still too young to listen to them. He also paid no attention to any of the many smells that the forest breathed. He heard only the gentle rustling that ran over his coat as it was washed, warmed and kissed, and he smelt only the body of his mother, close by. He nuzzled close to this body with the lovely smell, and hungrily he searched around it and found the source of life.

As he drank his mother continued to pet him. "Bambi," she whispered.

Every few moments she would lift her head, listen, and draw the wind in.

Then she kissed her child again, reassured and happy. "Bambi," she repeated, "my little Bambi."

CHAPTER 2

Now, in the early summer, the trees stood still under the blue sky, they held their arms out wide and received the power of the sun as it streamed down on them. The bushes in the thicket were coming into bloom with stars of white or red or yellow. On many of them the buds of fruit were beginning to be seen again, countless many of them were sitting on the fine tips of the branches, tender and firm and resolute they looked like little clenched fists. The colourful stars of many different flowers came up out of the ground so that the earth, in the subdued light of the forest, was a spray of silent but vigorous and gay colours. Everywhere there was the smell of the fresh foliage, of flowers, of the soil and of green wood. When morning broke, and when the sun went down, the whole wood was alive with a thousand voices, and all day from morning to evening the bees sang, the wasps buzzed, and the bumble-bees buzzed even louder through the fragrant stillness.

That is what the days were like when Bambi experienced his earliest childhood.

He followed his mother onto a narrow strip that led between the bushes. It was so pleasant to walk here! The dense foliage stroked his sides gently, and bent slightly to the side. Everywhere you looked the path seemed to be blocked and locked, but it was possible to go forward in the greatest comfort. There were routes like this in the woods, they formed a network going all through the forest. Bambi's mother knew them all, and whenever he stood in front of what seemed to him like an impenetrable green wall she would immediately seek out the place where the path began.

Bambi asked her questions. He was very fond of asking his mother questions. For him, it was the nicest thing in the world to keep asking her questions and to listen to whatever answer she gave. Bambi was

not at all surprised that he always thought of one question after another to ask her. It seemed entirely natural to him; it was such a delight for him. It was also a delight to wait, curious, until the answer came, and whatever the answer was he was always satisfied with it. There were times, of course, when he did not understand the answer he was given but that was nice too because he could always ask more questions whenever he wanted to. Sometimes he stopped asking questions and that was nice too because then he was busy trying to understand what he had been told and would work it out in his own way. He often felt certain that his mother had not given him a complete answer, that she deliberately avoided saying everything she knew. And that was very nice, as it left behind a certain kind of curiosity still in him, a feeling of something mysterious and pleasing that ran through him, an expectation that made him uneasy but cheerful.

Now he asked, "Who owns this path, mother?"

His mother answered, "We do."

Bambi continued asking. "You and me?"

"Yes."

"Both of us?"

"Yes."

"Just you and me?"

"No," said his mother, "we deer own it ..."

"What's a deer?" asked Bambi with a laugh.

His mother looked at him and laughed too. "You're a deer, and I'm a deer. That's what deer are. Do you understand now?"

Bambi jumped into the air with laughter. "Yes, I understand. I'm a little deer and you're a big deer. That's right, isn't it."

His mother nodded. "There, you see now."

Bambi became serious again. "Are we the only ones, or are there other deer?"

"Certainly," said his mother. "There are lots of them."

"Where are they?" Bambi exclaimed.

"They're here, they're all around us."

"But ... I can't see them."

"You'll see them soon enough."

"When?" Bambi's curiosity was so strong that he stopped walking."

"Soon." His mother walked calmly on.

Bambi followed her. He said nothing, for he was trying to work out what she could have meant by "soon." He reached the conclusion that "soon" was certainly not the same as "very soon." But he was not able to decide when it was that this "soon" would stop being "soon" and start to be "a long time yet." Suddenly he asked, "Who was it who made this path?"

"We did," his mother replied.

Bambi was astonished. "We did? You and me?"

His mother said, "Well, yes, ... we deer made it."

"What deer?" Bambi asked.

"All of us," was his mother's curt reply.

They walked on. Bambi had had enough of it and wanted to jump off away from the path, but he was a good child and stayed with his mother. Ahead of them there was a rustling noise, coming from

somewhere close to the ground. There was something moving vigorously, something concealed under the ferns and wild lettuce. A little voice, as thin as a thread, let out a pitiful whistle, and then it was quiet. Only the leaves and the blades of grass quivered to show where it was that something had happened. A polecat had caught a mouse. Then he dashed past them, crouched down to one side and set to on his meal.

“What was that?” asked Bambi excitedly.

“Nothing,” his mother reassured him.

“But...” Bambi stuttered, “but ... I saw it.”

“Well, yes,” his mother said, “but don’t be frightened. A polecat killed a mouse.”

But Bambi was terribly frightened. His heart was squeezed within a great, but unfamiliar, horror. It was a long time before he could speak again. Then he asked, “Why did he kill the mouse?”

“Because ...” His mother hesitated. Then she said, “Let’s go a bit faster, shall we?” as if she had suddenly thought of something else and forgotten about the question. She began to trot. Bambi hopped along after her.

A long pause went by and they had stopped walking so fast. Finally Bambi, feeling rather anxious, asked, “Will we ever kill a mouse?”

“No,” his mother answered.

“Never?” asked Bambi.

“No, never,” came her reply.

“Why not?” asked Bambi with some relief.

“Because we never kill anyone,” his mother told him simply.

Bambi became cheerful again.

There was a young ash tree next to their path from which a loud screeching could be heard. His mother paid no attention to it and carried on walking. But Bambi was curious and stopped. High in the tree's branches there were two jays squabbling over a nest they had just plundered.

"You get out of it, you lout!"

"Don't get excited, you fool," the other answered. "I'm not afraid of you."

"Go and get your own nests, you thief!" yelled the first. "I'll punch your face in." He was beside himself. "You're just vile," he snapped. "Just vile!"

The other bird had noticed Bambi. He flapped a few twigs down and snarled, "What are you looking at, brat? Get lost!"

Bambi felt intimidated and jumped away from them. Once he had reached his mother he continued walking behind her along the path, obedient and startled. He thought she had not noticed he had stayed behind.

After a while he asked her, "Mother, what does 'vile' mean?"

His mother said, "I don't know."

Bambi thought about it. And then he began again. "Mother, why were those two being so nasty to each other?"

His mother answered, "They were quarrelling about getting the food."

Bambi asked, "Will we ever quarrel about food like that?"

"No," his mother said.

"Why not," Bambi asked.

His mother replied, "There's plenty of food for all of us."

There was something else that Bambi wanted to know. "Mother ...?"

"What is it?"

"Will we ever be nasty to each other too?"

"No, my child," said his mother. "We don't do that sort of thing."

They carried on walking. Suddenly they saw light ahead of them, very bright light. The green confusion of bushes and shrubs came to an end, their path was at its end. Just a few steps further and they came out into the brightly lit free space that opened up ahead of them. Bambi wanted to jump forward, but his mother just stood where she was.

"What's that?" he exclaimed, impatient and quite enchanted.

"The meadow," his mother answered.

"What's that, the meadow?" Bambi insisted.

His mother gave him a curt reply. "You'll see that for yourself soon enough." She had become serious and attentive. She stood there without moving, her head held up high, listening tensely, testing the wind with deep breaths, and she looked almost severe.

"Yes, everything's alright," she finally said, "we can go on out there." Bambi was about to jump ahead but she blocked his way. "No, you wait until I call you." Bambi did as he was told and immediately stood still. "Well done, Bambi," his mother praised him. "Now, listen carefully to what I say." Bambi listened carefully as his mother spoke and saw how agitated she was, he became very tense himself. "Going out onto the meadow is not as simple as it seems," his mother continued, "it's difficult and it's dangerous. Don't ask me why. You'll learn that later on. For now, just do exactly what I tell you. Will you do that?"

“Yes,” Bambi promised.

“Good. So I’ll go out there first by myself. You stay here and wait. And don’t take your eyes off me. Keep me in sight and don’t look away, not for a second. If you see me start to run back here, then turn round and run away as fast as you can. I’ll soon catch up with you.” She became silent and seemed to be thinking, then, with much emphasis, she went on. “Whatever happens, run, run, run as fast as you can. Run ... even if something happens ... even if you see ... if you see me fall to the ground ... don’t pay any attention to me, understand? ... Whatever you see or hear ... just keep going, without delay and as fast as you can ...! Do you promise me that?”

“Yes,” said Bambi quietly.

“But if I call you,” his mother continued, “you can come. You come and play on the meadow. It’s nice out there, you’ll like it. Only ... this is something else you have to promise me ... if I call you, you must be at my side straight away. Whatever the circumstances! Do you hear?”

“Yes,” said Bambi, even quieter. His mother was being so serious.

She continued speaking. “Out there ... if I call you ... there’s to be no running about and no questions, you’re to run behind me like the wind! Don’t forget. No thinking about it, no hesitating ... if I start to run it means you get up immediately and get out of there, and you don’t stop till we’re back here in the woods. You won’t forget that, will you!”

“No,” said Bambi, feeling rather anxious.

“Alright, now I’ll go,” his mother told him, and seemed somewhat calmer.

She stepped out onto the meadow. Bambi, who did not take his eyes off her, saw how she went forward with slow and high steps. He stood there full of anticipation, full of fear and curiosity. He saw how

his mother listened on every side, he saw her when something startled her and felt startled himself, ready to jump back into the thicket. Then his mother became calm once more and after a minute had passed she became cheerful. She lowered her neck, stretched it out far in front of her, looked contentedly back at Bambi and called, "Come on then!"

Bambi jumped forward. He was gripped with an enormous joy that was so magically strong that he forgot about the anxiety he had felt just before. All he had been able to see while he was in the thicket was the green treetops above him, and he saw the few scraps of blue above them only in short, rare glimpses. Now he could see the whole of the sky, high and wide and blue, and that made him glad, although he did not know why. Among the trees, all he had seen of the sun had been single, broad rays, or the gentle scattering of golden light that played between the branches. Now he suddenly found himself standing in a hot and dazzling power that forced itself on him, he stood within this copious blessing of warmth that closed his eyes and opened his heart. Bambi was exhilarated; he was completely beside himself, it was simply wonderful. He spontaneously jumped into the air, three times, four times, five times on the spot where stood. He could not help himself; he had to do it. Something yanked him up and made him jump. His young limbs had such powerful spring in them, the air went so deep and easily into his lungs that he drank it in, drank in all the fragrances of the meadow with so much overpowering cheer that he simply had to jump. Bambi was a child. If he had been a human child he would have shouted with joy. But he was a young deer, and deer cannot shout, or at least not in the same way as human children do. So he rejoiced in his own way. With his legs, with his whole body that threw him into the air. His mother stood nearby and was glad to watch him. She watched him going crazy. She saw him as he threw himself up high, dropped clumsily back down on the same spot, stared ahead in confusion and exhilaration, and then, in the next moment, threw himself back into the air over and over again. She understood that Bambi had only ever seen the narrow deer paths in the woods, in the few days of his existence had only ever become used to the narrowness of the

thicket, and that he therefore did not move from the spot where he stood because he still did not understand that he was free to run around the whole of the meadow. She stretched out her forelegs and lowered herself onto them, gave a little laugh to Bambi, and she was suddenly away, rushing round in circles so that the tall grass swished loudly. Bambi was startled and remained motionless. Was that meant to mean he should go back into the woods? Don't bother about me, his mother had said, whatever you see, whatever you hear, just get away, get away as fast as you can! He wanted to turn round and run away as he had been told. Then his mother suddenly came galloping towards him making a wonderful noise. She came to within two steps from him, lowered her body as she had done the first time, laughed to him and called, "Try and catch me!," and rushed away from him. Bambi was astonished. What was all this supposed to mean? What had come over his mother all of a sudden? But then she was coming back again at such enormous speed it enough to make you dizzy. She poked him in the side with her nose and quickly said, "Try and catch me!," and rushed away. Bambi stumbled after her. A few steps. But those steps soon became little jumps. They carried him, he thought he was flying; they carried him by themselves. There was space under his steps, space under his jumps, space, space. Bambi was beside himself. The grass made a glorious sound in his ears. It was deliciously soft, as tender as silk as he skimmed across it. His mother stood still for a while as she caught her breath. She only moved in the direction of Bambi as he rushed by. Bambi flew like the wind.

Suddenly it stopped. Bambi stopped running and went over to his mother in an elegant, high stepping trot, where he looked happily into her face. Then they walked along contentedly beside each other. Since he had come out here into the open Bambi had seen the sky, the sun and the wide stretch of green only with his body, only with a blinkered, drunken glance at the sky, with the cosy feeling of the warmth on his back and the invigorating feel of the sun that made him take ever deeper breaths. Now, for the first time, he began to enjoy the glory of the meadow with his eyes which surprised him with new wonders with every step he took. There were no scraps of bare

earth that could be seen as there were among the trees. Here every spot was covered in dense grass, every blade cuddling close with others which swelled up in abundant glory, leant gently to one side under each step and immediately sprang back upright with no sense of insult. The broad green plain was starry with white daisies, with violets, with the thick red heads of the clover as it began to blossom, and with the shining majesty of the golden flowers held up high by the dandelions.

“Look, mother,” called Bambi, “there’s a flower flying away.”

“That’s not a flower,” his mother said. “That’s a butterfly.”

Bambi was delighted and watched the butterfly as it very gently freed itself from a stalk of grass and, in tumbling flight, floated away. Now Bambi saw that there were many such butterflies flying in the air over the meadow, they seemed to be in a hurry but they were slow, they tumbled up and down in a game that enchanted him. They really did look like flowers moving about, gay flowers that did not want to just keep still on their stalks and had got up to have a little dance. Or like flowers that had come down with the sun, still had not found a place for themselves and were carefully looking round for one, they would sink down and disappear as if they had already found a place but then they would fly straight up again, just a little way at first, and then higher in order to carry on with their search, always seeking because the best places were already occupied.

Bambi looked at all of them. He would have so liked to see one of them close up, would have so liked to examine just one of them, but he was not able to. They never stopped flitting about between each other. It made him quite dizzy.

When he once again looked down at the ground everything he saw brought him a thousand delights, nimble, living things that flew up when he stepped near them. All around him there was something jumping and sprinkling into the air, something that became visible in a tumultuous swarm and, the next second sank back into the green ground it had come from.

“What’s that, mother?” he asked.

“That’s the little ones,” she answered.

“Look,” called Bambi, “there’s a piece of grass that’s jumping up ... it’s jumping up so high!”

“That isn’t grass,” his mother explained, “that’s a nice grasshopper.”

“Why does it jump like that?” asked Bambi.

“Because we’re moving about,” his mother answered, “it’s frightened.”

“Oh!” Bambi went over to the grasshopper, which was sitting right in the white dish of a daisy.

“Oh,” said Bambi politely, “you don’t need to be frightened, we certainly won’t do anything to you.”

“I’m not frightened,” the grasshopper retorted in a rasping voice. “I was just a bit startled at first, as I was speaking to my wife.”

“Please excuse us for disturbing you,” said Bambi modestly.

“That doesn’t matter,” the grasshopper rasped. “As it’s you it doesn’t matter. But you never know who might be coming, and you have to watch out for yourself.”

“I haven’t been out here on the meadow before,” Bambi told him. “My mother ...”

The grasshopper stood there with his head lowered in a way that made him look very cross, his face looked serious and he grumbled, “I’m not interested in that. I haven’t got the time to be here chatting with you, I’ve got to go and find my wife. Hop!” And he was gone.

“Hop,” said Bambi, rather puzzled and astonished at the height of the leap the grasshopper had made as he disappeared.

Bambi ran to his mother. "Listen ... I've just been talking with him!"

"With who?" his mother asked.

"Well, with the grasshopper," Bambi explained, "I was talking with him. He was so friendly to me. And I liked him so much. He's so green, it's wonderful, and on his back you can see right through him, there aren't any leaves like that, not even the finest leaf."

"That was his wings."

"Was it?" Bambi continued speaking. "And he's got such a serious face, as if he were thinking hard about something. But he was friendly to me anyway. And he can jump so high! That must be awfully hard. "Hop!! he said, and he jumped so high that I couldn't see him any more.

They walked on. Bambi was very excited about his conversation with the grasshopper, and he was a little tired as it was the first time he had talked with a stranger. He was hungry, and pressed close to his mother so that he could refresh himself.

Then, when he was once more standing there for a while, just staring ahead of him in the sweet, little inebriation that always enveloped him when he had drunk all he had wanted from his mother, he saw a whitish flower down in the tangle of grass stems. It moved. Bambi looked closer. No, that was not a flower, it was a butterfly. Bambi crept closer.

The butterfly was hanging listlessly from a stem of grass, and gently moved his wings about.

"Please, stay where you are," Bambi called to him.

"Why should I stay where I am? I am a butterfly, after all," he asked in astonishment.

“Oh, please stay where you are, just for a little while,” Bambi begged him, “I’ve been wanting to see you close up for so long now. Please be so kind.”

“Alright then,” said the little white butterfly, “but not for too long.”

Bambi stood in front of him. “You’re so beautiful,” he said in enchantment, “so beautiful! Like a flower!”

“What?” The butterfly clapped his wings. “Like a flower? Well, everyone I know agrees that we’re much more beautiful than flowers.”

Bambi was confused at that. “Y..yes, certainly,” he stuttered, “much more beautiful ... please forgive me ... I just wanted to say ...”

“I don’t really care what you wanted to say,” the butterfly retorted. He started to show off by curving his narrow body and playing idly with his sensitive antennae.

Bambi was enthralled and continued to watch him. “You’re so elegant,” he said, “so fine and so elegant! And those white wings of yours, they’re so majestic!”

The butterfly lay his wings wide open, then he put them together above him where they looked like the taut sail of a yacht.

“Oh,” Bambi exclaimed, “now I understand how you’re more beautiful than the flowers. And you can fly as well, flowers can’t do that. They have to stay where they’re growing, that’s how.”

The butterfly raised himself up. “That’s enough now,” he said. “I can fly!” And he lifted himself into the air with such ease that it could not be seen and it could not be understood. His white wings moved gently and full of grace, and he was already drifting there in the air and the sunshine. “It was only for your sake that I remained sitting there for so long,” he said, and he jiggled up and down in front of Bambi, “but now, I will fly away.”

That was the meadow.

CHAPTER 3

Deep in among the trees was a place that belonged to Bambi's mother. It lay only a few steps from the narrow path used by the deer as they made their way through the wood but it was nearly impossible to find for anyone who did not know where the little gap through the dense bushes was.

It was only a narrow space, so narrow that it only just had room for Bambi and his mother to fit in, and it was so low that when Bambi's mother stood up her head would be in among the twigs and branches. Hazel bushes, gorse and dogwood all grew here tangled in among each other and the little sunlight that came down through the forest canopy would be caught by them so that it never reached as far as the ground. This was the room where Bambi came into the world and this was where he and his mother made their home.

Now, his mother lay asleep, pressed down on the ground. Bambi had slept a little too, but now he had become quite lively. He stood up and looked around.

Here, deep in the woods, it was shadowy, it was almost dark. The wood could be heard gently rustling and sighing. Here and there the tits chirruped, here and there was the bright laughter of a woodpecker or the cheerless bark of a crow. All else, near and far, was quiet. Only the air became warm in the heat of midday, and even that could be heard if you listened carefully. Here in the woods it was humid and sweltering.

Bambi looked down at his mother. "Are you asleep?"

No, his mother was not sleeping. She had woken up straight away when Bambi had stood up.

“What are we going to do now?” Bambi asked.

“Nothing,” his mother answered. “We’re going to stay where we are. Just lie down, like a good child, and go to sleep.”

But Bambi did not feel like sleeping. “Come on,” he begged. “Let’s go onto the meadow.”

His mother raised her head. “To the meadow? Now ... to the meadow ...?” She sounded so astonished and so full of alarm that Bambi became quite frightened.

“Can’t we go to the meadow now, then?” he asked shyly.

“No,” came his mother’s answer, and it sounded quite conclusive. “No, that isn’t possible right now.”

“Why not?” asked Bambi as he became aware that there was something very strange going on here. He became more afraid, but at the same time he felt the urge to learn about everything. “Why can’t we go onto the meadow now?”

“You’ll learn about all that later, when you’re a bit older ...,” his mother reassured him.

Bambi was insistent. “Why won’t you tell me now?”

“Later,” his mother repeated. “You’re still just a little child,” she continued gently, “and you don’t talk about things like this with little children.” She had become very serious. “Now ... on the meadow ... I just don’t want to think of it. In broad daylight ...!”

“But when we went on the meadow,” Bambi objected, “it was broad daylight then, too.”

“That was different,” his mother explained, “that was early in the morning.”

“Can you only go there early in the morning then?” Bambi had become too inquisitive.

His mother remained patient. “Only early in the morning or late in the evening ... or at night ...”

“And not in the daytime? Never ...?”

His mother hesitated. “Yes,” she said at last, “sometimes ... there are some of us who go out there in the daytime too, sometimes. But that’s under special conditions, ... I can’t really explain it to you, ... you’re still too little, ... some go out there, but then they put themselves in great danger ...”

“What is it that’s dangerous for them?” By now, Bambi was very excited.

But his mother did not want to explain it straight away. “They are in danger ... listen, my child, these are things that you won’t be able to grasp yet.

Bambi thought he would be able to understand anything, but he could not understand why his mother did not want to give him more details. But he said nothing.

“This is the way we have to live,” his mother went on, “all of us. Even if we love the daytime ... and children are especially fond of the daytime ... we have to live like this, we just have to accept it. We can only move about from the evening until the morning. Can you understand that?”

“Yes.”

“Now, my child, that’s why we have to stay here, where we are now. This is where we’re safe. That’s all there is to it! So now, lie down again and go to sleep.”

But Bambi did not want to lie down again. "What makes us safe where we are now?" he asked.

"Because all the bushes are watching over us, because the twigs on the bushes rustle, because the rough brushwood on the ground cracks and gives us warning, because the dead leaves from last year lie on the ground and rustle to give us a sign, ... because the jays are there, the magpies too, they keep watch over us, and that's how we know there's somebody coming a long time before they reach us ..."

"What's that," Bambi enquired, "the dead leaves from last year?"

"Come and sit beside me," said his mother. "I'll tell you all about it." Bambi gladly went and sat beside her and snuggled in close while she explained to him that the trees do not stay green all the time, that the sunshine and the lovely warmth go away. Then it gets cold, the leaves turn yellow because of the frost, they go brown and red and, one by one, they fall off the trees so that they and the bushes reach their naked branches to the sky and look completely forlorn. But the dead leaves lie on the ground, and when they're disturbed by somebody's foot they rustle: There's someone coming! Oh they're very good, these dead leaves from last year. They do us a good service by being so eager and by keeping watch the way they do. And now, in the middle of summer, there are still lots of them hidden under the things growing on the ground and they warn about any danger long before it gets near.

Bambi pressed close against his mother. He forgot all about the meadow. It was so cosy to sit here and listen to what his mother told him.

Then, when his mother stopped speaking, he thought about what she had said. He thought it was very nice of the good, old leaves to watch over them so carefully even though they were dead and had been frozen and had gone through so many things already. He tried to think what that danger, that his mother kept talking about, could

actually be. But all that thinking tired him out; it was all quiet around him, all you could hear was the heat of the air. And he went to sleep.

CHAPTER 4

One evening, when he went back out onto the meadow with his mother, he thought he knew by now about everything that could be seen or heard there. But it turned out that he still did know as much as he had thought.

At first, everything was the same as his first time there. His mother allowed Bambi to play tag with him. He ran round in circles, and the wide open space, the lofty sky and the freedom of the air were all so exhilarating that he rushed about with joy. After a time he noticed that his mother was standing still. He stopped suddenly as he was turning, so suddenly that his four legs were spread wide apart. He jumped high into the air so that his sudden halt would be more dignified, and now he was standing properly. His mother, a little way away seemed to be talking with someone but he could not make out, in the long grass, who that could be. Curious, Bambi went closer. There, in the tangle of grass stems close in to his mother, there were two long ears twitching. They were greyish-brown, and the black stripes on them made them quite pretty. Bambi hesitated, but his mother said to him, "Come here Bambi, this is our friend, the hare. Come on then, let him see you."

Bambi went up to her straight away. There sat the hare, and very honest he looked. His long ears rose in powerful grandeur high above his head, and then they fell back down and hung limply as if they had been suddenly transformed into something weak. When Bambi saw the hare's whiskers, which extended stiff and straight all around his mouth, he began to think about them. But he noticed that the hare had a very gently face, all his features seemed to indicate a good nature, and his big round eyes looked modestly out at the world. He really did look like a friend, this hare. The thoughts that had flickered through Bambi's head disappeared immediately.

Remarkably enough, and just as quickly, he even lost all the respect that he had felt at first.

“Good evening, young sir,” said the hare with carefully chosen politeness.

Bambi merely nodded “Good evening” back to him. He did not know why, but all he did was nod. Very friendly, very nicely, though perhaps a little condescending. There was no other way he could do it. Perhaps it was something he was born with.

“What a handsome young prince!” said the hare to Bambi’s mother. He looked at Bambi carefully as he raised one of his ears high into the air, and then, soon after, the other ear, and then, soon after again, both of them, and sometimes he would let them drop suddenly and hang limply. Bambi did not like this. This gesture seemed to be saying, ‘No, not worth it’.

The hare continued gently to examine Bambi with his big, round eyes. His nose and his mouth, surrounded by its magnificent whiskers, were in continual movement, like the way someone’s nose and lips will twitch when he is trying hard not to sneeze. Bambi could not help laughing, and the hare immediately and with good will joined in with the laughter, only his eyes became more thoughtful. “I congratulate you,” he said to Bambi’s mother, “I sincerely congratulate you on having a son like this. Yes, yes, yes ... he will be a majestic prince one day ... yes, yes, yes, you can see that at first glance.”

He raised himself upright, and now sat erect on his back legs, which astonished Bambi immensely. After he had had a good look all around, his ears erect and his nose moving vigorously, he sat politely back down on all fours. “Please give my regards to the honourable gentlemen,” he said. “I have many different things to do this evening. Please give them my humble regards.” He turned around and hopped away, his ears pressed down on his shoulders.

“Goodbye,” called Bambi to him as he went.

His mother smiled: "He is a good hare, so simple and so modest. It is not easy for him in this world either." There was sympathy in her words.

Bambi walked around a little, allowing his mother to eat her food. He hoped he would come across them who he had met earlier, and would also have liked to make some new acquaintances. It was not entirely clear to him what he was missing, but he always felt he was waiting for something. Suddenly he heard a gentle rustling from far across the meadow, and felt slight, rapid knocking in the ground. He looked up. Over where the woods began there was something that flitted through the grass. There was a ... no ... there were two of them! Bambi glanced at his mother, but she did not seem to be worried about anything and had her head deep in the grass. But at the other side of the meadow there was something rushing round in circles, just as he had been doing himself earlier on. Bambi was so astonished that he leapt backwards, as if he meant to run away. His mother noticed him and raised her head.

"What's the matter?" she called.

But Bambi was speechless, he could find no words and merely stammered, "Th .. there..."

His mother looked in that direction. "Oh, I see," she said. "That's my cousin and you're right, she has a little child too, ... no, she has two." His mother had spoken cheerfully, but now she became serious: "No ... Ena with two children .. really, she has two ..."

Bambi stood and stared. Over there he could now see a figure, a figure that looked just like his mother. He had not noticed her before. Now he could see two things that continued moving in circles in the grass, but only their red backs could be seen, thin red stripes.

"Come on," said his mother. "Let's go over to them. You'll have some company there."

Bambi wanted to run there, but his mother only walked slowly, looking all around her with each step, so Bambi held himself back. He was very excited though, and very impatient.

His mother continued speaking. "I thought we'd come across Ena again some time. Now, where's she hiding? I knew she had a child too. That was easy to guess, but two children ..."

They had long been spotted by the others, who now were coming towards them. Bambi had to say hello to his aunt, but he had eyes only for her children.

His aunt was very friendly. "Yes," she said to him. "Now, that's Gobo and that's Faline. You can all play together any time you like."

The children stood stiffly, without moving, and stared at each other. Gobo close beside Faline and Bambi in front of them. None of them moved. They stood and gaped.

"Go on then," said Bambi's mother, "you'll soon all be friends!"

"What a nice-looking child," Ena responded. "Really, very nice indeed. So strong, and with such good posture."

"Yes, it's alright," his mother said modestly. "We have to be satisfied with that. But Ena, you've got two children!"

"Yes, that's what happens now and again," Ena explained. "But you do know, my dear, I've had many children before."

"Bambi is my first," said his mother.

"Well, you see," Ena reassured her, "it might be different for you too the next time."

The children were still standing there and watching each other. None of them said a word. Faline suddenly jumped and dashed away. The whole thing had become too boring for her.

In an instant, Bambi ran after her, and Gobo did the same. They rushed around in semi-circles, they turned round as quick as a flash, they tumbled over each other, they chased each other up and down. It was wonderful fun. When they suddenly stopped, a little short of breath, they were all good friends with each other. They began to talk.

Bambi told them about how he had spoken with the good little grasshopper and the whiting.

“Have you been talking with the shiny beetle too?” asked Faline.”

No, Bambi had never spoken with the shiny beetle. He did not know him at all, he did not know who it might be.

“I often talk with him,” Faline explained, slightly boastfully.

“I was told off by the jay,” said Bambi.

“Really?” asked Gobo in amazement. “The jay was as cheeky with you as that?” Gobo was often in amazement at things, and he was exceptionally modest. “Then,” he added, “the hedgehog pricked me in the nose.” But he only mentioned that in passing, as it were.

“Who is the hedgehog?” Bambi asked cheerfully. It felt so wonderful to be standing there, to have friends and to be hearing so many exciting things.

“The hedgehog is a terrible creature,” exclaimed Faline. “Covered in big spikes all over his body ... and he’s very spiteful too!”

“Do you really think he’s spiteful?” asked Gobo. “He never does any harm to anyone.”

“What?” retorted Faline quickly. “Didn’t he prick you in the nose then?”

“Oh, that was only because I wanted to talk to him,” Gobo objected, “and it was only a little prick. It didn’t hurt very much.”

Bambi went closer to Gobo. “Why did he not want you to talk to him then?”

“He never wants to talk to anyone,” Faline put in. “As soon as anyone gets near him he rolls up into a ball with his spikes sticking out in every direction. Our mother tells us he’s one of those people who don’t want to have anything to do with the world.”

“Perhaps he’s just afraid,” thought Gobo.

But Faline understood it better. “Mother says you shouldn’t have anything to do with people like that.”

Bambi suddenly asked Gobo. “Do you know what it is ... this danger?”

Now the other two also became serious, and the three of them put their heads together. Gobo thought about it. He made a real effort to work it out as he could see that Bambi was very curious about the answer. “The danger ...” he whispered, “the danger ... that’s something very bad ...”

“Yes,” Bambi insisted, “yes, something very bad ... but what?”

All three of them shuddered at the horror of it.

Faline suddenly called out loudly and gaily, “The danger is ... when you have to run away from it.” She jumped away, she didn’t want to stay there and feel afraid. Bambi and Gobo jumped straight after her. They started to play again and tumbled about in the green and rustling silk of the meadow where they soon forgot about that serious question. After a while they stopped and stood close to each other as they had before and began to chat. They looked over to their mothers. They too were happily close to each other, eating a little and holding a gentle conversation.

Auntie Ena lifted her head and called over to her children. “Gobo! Faline! We’ve got to go soon ...”

And Bambi's mother warned him too. "Come on Bambi, it's time to go."

"Oh not yet," Faline begged crossly. "Just a little bit longer!"

Bambi begged too, "Oh please, let's stay longer, it's so nice here!"

And Gobo quietly repeated what they had said, "It's so nice here ...Just a little bit longer!"

The three of them spoke at the same time.

Ena looked at Bambi's mother. "There, what did I tell you? They've already become inseparable."

Then something else happened, and it was something much bigger than all the other things that Bambi had experienced that day.

A thumping and a stamping coming out of the woods could be felt all through ground. Branches of trees cracked, twigs rustled, and before anyone could even prick up his ears it broke its way out of the thicket. One of them with a rustling and a banging, the other in a great rush behind him. They ran forward like a storm wind, completed a broad arch across the meadow, disappeared back into the woods where they could be heard galloping, they hurtled once more out of the thicket and then they suddenly stopped and stood quietly, twenty paces apart from each other.

Bambi looked at them and did not move. They looked a little like his mother and Auntie Ena. But on their heads there was a glittering crown of antlers made of brown pearls and bright white prongs. Bambi could not move; he looked at one, and then at the other. One of them was smaller than the other, and his crown was less developed too. But the other had a beauty that gave him an air of authority. He held his head high, and his crown was even higher. It sparkled from the darkness into the light, it was adorned with the majesty of many black and brown pearls, and the long, white tips glittered.

“Oh!” exclaimed Faline in amazement. Gobo repeated her quietly. Bambi, though, said nothing at all. He was captivated and silent.

The two of them now began to move, getting further apart from each other as they went, each of them to a different side of the meadow and there they went slowly back into the woods. The majestic figure came up quite close to the children, Bambi’s mother and Auntie Ena. His step showed a quiet glory, he held his noble head up high like a king and dignified no-one with as much as a glance. The children did not dare to breathe until he had disappeared back into the thicket. They looked around, trying to see him, but just at that moment the green doors of the wood closed behind him.

Faline was the first to break the silence. “Who was that?” she exclaimed. But her little, arrogant voice had a quake in it.

In a voice that could hardly be heard, Gobo repeated her: “Who was that?”

Bambi was silent.

Auntie Ena said joyfully, “Those were your fathers.”

Nothing else was said, and the group moved apart.

Auntie Ena went with her children into the nearest patch of undergrowth. That was the way they always went. Bambi and his mother had to go right across the meadow to the oak tree to get to the route they usually took. For a long time he remained silent until finally he asked, “Did they not see us?”

His mother understood what he meant, and replied, “Of course they saw us. They see everything.”

Bambi felt shy, and did not dare to ask any more questions, but the wish to do so overcame his shyness. “Why ...” he began, and then he was silent again.

His mother helped him. “What is it you want to say, my child?”

“Why didn’t they stay with us?”

“They don’t stay with us,” his mother answered, “only now and then ...”

“Why didn’t they speak to us?”

His mother said, “They don’t speak to us any more ... only, now and then ... We have to wait till they come, and then we have to wait till they talk to us ... if they want to.”

Bambi became cross and asked, “Will my father speak to me?”

“Of course he will, my child,” his mother promised him, “when you’re grown up he’ll speak to you and sometimes he’ll let you be with him.”

In silence, Bambi went closer to his mother, his mind filled with thoughts about the appearance of his father. “He’s so beautiful!” he thought, and then again, “so beautiful!”

His mother seemed able to read his mind, and she said, “If you’re still alive, my child, if you’re clever and avoid danger, you’ll be as strong and as beautiful as your father, and you’ll carry a crown on your head, just like his.

Bambi took a deep breath. His heart became big with happiness and anticipation.

CHAPTER 5

Time went by and Bambi went through many new experiences. It sometimes even made him dizzy having so many things to learn.

Now he knows how to listen. Not just hear what is happening nearby, so close that it forces itself into your ears. No, there is certainly no art in that. Now he can listen properly and with understanding to anything that happens however gently it moves, he can listen to every fine rustling that the wind brings in. He knows, for instance, when there is a pheasant running through the undergrowth; he recognizes quite exactly that gentle scurrying that continually stops and then starts again. He can even recognize the mice in the woods from the sound they make as they run to and fro, from the little journeys they make. Then there are the moles who rush round in circles making a rustling noise under the elder bushes when they're in a good mood. He knows the brash, clear call of the falcons and listens to it as it changes to an angry tone when a hawk or an eagle comes close; that makes them cross because they fear their territory might be taken from them. He knows the sound of the woodland pigeons as they flap their wings, the lovely, distant swish of the ducks as they flap their wings, and many other sounds.

He is slowly learning to understand things by his sense of smell. He will soon understand them as well as his mother. He can understand what he is smelling as soon as he draws in a breath. Oh, that's clover and that's rowan, he thinks when the wind is blowing in from the meadow, and he can smell when his friend, the hare, is outdoors; I can tell that very well. Also, in among all the smells of leaves, soil, herbs and wild onions, he can tell when the polecat is going past, by putting his nose to the ground and testing it thoroughly he can tell that the fox has been there, he might notice that somewhere nearby there are his relatives, Auntie Ena with the children.

He is now completely at ease with the night and he no longer feels such a great longing to go and run about in the light of the day. Now, he is happy to spend his days lying in the little, shady space in the undergrowth with his mother. He hears the heat of the air, and he sleeps. Now and then he wakes up and listens and smells, which is the proper thing to do. Everything is as it should be. There are only the little tits who would sometimes chatter with each other, the midges in the grass – who are almost never able to stay quiet-talk among themselves, and the wood pigeons never stop proclaiming their gentleness, and do so with enthusiasm. What does all that matter to Bambi? He goes back to sleep.

Now he is very fond of the night. Everything is gay, everything is moving. You also, of course, have to be careful in the night time, but you have less to worry about and you can go anywhere you want to. And everywhere you go you come across people you know, and they too will be more carefree than they are at other times. In the night the forest is solemn and silent. There are voices to be heard but just a few of them and in all this stillness they seem loud, and they sound different from the daytime voices and they have more effect. Bambi enjoyed hearing the owl. She is so dignified as she flies, perfectly silent, perfectly effortless. A butterfly is quiet just because of her size, but the owl is so immense. And her face is so imposing, so determined, full of so much thought, her eyes are so majestic. Bambi admires her firm gaze with its quiet courage. He enjoys listening when she talked with his mother one time, or with anyone else. He stands slightly to one side, a little afraid of that imperious gaze he admires so much, he does not understand much of the clever things she says, but he does know that they are clever, and that enchants him, fills him with admiration for the owl. The owl begins her song. Haa-ah - - hahaha - - haa-ah! she sings. It sounds different from the song of the thrush or the golden oriole, different from the friendly motif of the cuckoo, but Bambi loves the song of the owl because he feels a secretive earnestness in it, an indescribable cleverness and a mysterious melancholy. Then the tawny owl is there again, a charming little lad. Dignified, faithful and more inquisitive than most, he always wants to stir up a fuss. Uy-iik! Uy-iik!

he calls, in a voice that is shrill, terrifying and very piercing. It sounds as if his life were in danger. But he is a cheerful character and it delights him when he startles someone. Uy-iik! he shouts, so loudly that it alarms anyone in the wood within half an hour's distance. But then he has a gentle cooing laugh, just for himself, and you can only hear if you are right next to him. Bambi had realized that the tawny owl is pleased when he startles somebody or if somebody thinks something awful has happened to him, and ever since, whenever the tawny owl is nearby, he rushes to him and asks, "Has something happened to you?" or he might sigh and say, "Oh, you really startled me!" Then the owl feels very satisfied. "Yes, yes," he says with a laugh, "it's quite a distressing sound, isn't it." He puffs up his feathers so that he looks like a soft, grey ball, and looks very charming.

A couple of times there was even thunder and lightning, both day and night. The first time it was by day and Bambi felt how he became afraid when, in his leafy bedroom in the woods, it became darker and darker. It seemed to him that the night had fallen down from the sky in the middle of the day. Then, as the storm roared its way through the woods so that the mute trees began to groan loudly, Bambi shook with fear. And as the lightning lit up the sky and the thunder roared, Bambi went mad with the horror of it and thought the world was about to be torn to pieces. He ran behind his mother, who was slightly unsettled, had jumped to her feet and was walking to and fro in the thicket. He was unable to think, unable to understand. Then the rain burst down in an angry gush. Everyone had hidden himself away, the woods seemed empty, and there was nowhere to flee. Even in the thickest undergrowth you were whipped by the water as it rushed through. But the lightning stopped flashing, its fiery beams no longer flamed their way through the tops of the trees; the thunder moved away and there was only a distant rumbling to be heard before it was entirely silent. Now the rain became gentler. Its broad patter could be heard everywhere but powerfully for another hour, the forest stood breathing deeply in the still air and allowed itself to be soaked, no-one, now, was afraid to stand in the open. That feeling was gone, washed away by the rain.

Bambi and his mother had never gone out onto the meadow as early as they did that evening. In fact it was hardly even evening. The sun was still high in the sky, there was a powerful freshness in the air, it had a richer fragrance than at other times and the woods sang with a thousand voices, for everyone had come out of his hiding place and was hurrying round to each other in their excitement to tell them about what they had just experienced.

Before stepping onto the meadow they had to pass by a big oak tree standing right at the edge of the woods, just beside their path. They had to pass by this big, beautiful tree every time they went out onto the meadow. This time there was the squirrel sitting on one of its branches, and he wished them good evening. Bambi and the squirrel were good friends with each other. The first time he met him Bambi thought the squirrel was a very small deer because of his red coat, and stared at him in amazement. But Bambi really was too young at that time and simply could not understand anything. Right from the start, he felt an exceptional liking for the squirrel. He was so well mannered in every way, the way he spoke was so pleasant, and Bambi adored the wonderful way he performed acrobatics, how he climbed, how he jumped and how he kept his balance. He would take part in the conversation while running up and down the smooth trunk of the tree as if that were nothing at all. He sat upright on a branch of the tree as it moved to and fro, he leant comfortably against his bushy tail which rose up high and handsome behind him, he showed his white breast, moved his front paws with great elegance, turned his head to left and right, laughed with merry eyes and in a very short time he would say so many entertaining or interesting things. Then he came down from the tree again, and did so fast and in such jumps that anyone would think he was about to fall down onto your head. He swung his long red tail vigorously and said, "Hello, Hello! So nice of you to drop by!" while he was still far above Bambi's head.

Bambi and his mother stood where they were.

The squirrel ran down the smooth trunk. "Now then," he began to chat. "Did you understand that alright? I can see, of course, that everything's nice and tidy. And that's always the main thing after all." As quick as a flash he ran back up the trunk, saying, "No, it's too damp for me down there. Just a moment and I'll find a better place. I hope you don't mind. Thank you. I thought you wouldn't mind. And we can talk just as well from where we are now."

He ran to and fro on a level branch. "What a business that was!" he continued. "So much noise, such a scandal that was! Just think how shocked I am. You squeeze yourself into a nook, keep perfectly quiet, hardly daring to move. That's the worst thing of all, sitting there like that without moving. You hope, of course, that nothing's going to happen, don't you, and my tree certainly is especially suited for that sort of trick, no, it can't be denied, my tree is especially suited ... it has to be said. I am content. However far I roam I don't wish for any other. But when things happen like they did today it does get you so upset, it's disgusting."

The squirrel sat there, his beautiful erect tail close behind him, he showed the white of his breast and held his two front paws emotionally pressed against his heart. It was obvious that when he said he had been made cross he was telling the truth.

"We want to go out onto the meadow, now," said Bambi's mother, "so that we can dry ourselves off in the sunshine."

"Oh, what a good idea," the squirrel exclaimed. "You really are so clever, really, I always say that you are so clever!" With a single leap he was on a branch higher up. "There's nothing better that you could do now than to go out onto the meadow," he called down. Then he rushed around in nimble leaps hither and thither and up into the canopy of the trees. "I want to get up to where I can get some sunshine," he chatted contentedly, "we're all soaking wet! I want to get right up high!" He was not at all concerned about whether anyone was still listening to him.

On the meadow, it was already very lively. Bambi's friend the hare was sitting there with his family all around him. Auntie Ena was standing there with her children and some other people she knew. Today, Bambi saw his father again. They came slowly out from the trees, some here, some there, then someone else appeared. They walked slowly up and down along the edge of the woods, each one in his own place. They paid no attention to anyone, they did not even talk to each other. Bambi frequently looked over at them, respectfully but full of curiosity.

Then he talked with Faline, Gobo and a few other children. He thought it would be alright to play for a little while. All of them said they agreed, and then the running round in circles began. Faline showed that she was the merriest of them all. She was so lively and nimble and she sparkled with sudden new ideas. Gobo, though, quickly became tired. He had been terribly afraid while the storm was raging, it had made his heart beat fast and it was still doing so. Maybe Gobo was a little bit of a weakling, but Bambi loved him because he was so good-natured and so helpful and never let anyone see it when he was a little bit sad.

CHAPTER 6

Time passes, and Bambi learns how good grass tastes, how tender the buds of leaves are, and how sweet clover is. When he presses himself against his mother to get some refreshment she often pushes him away. "You're not a little child any more," she says. Sometimes she will be even more direct and say, "Go away, leave me in peace." Sometimes his mother would even stand up in the middle of the day in their little place in the wood and just walk away without looking to see whether Bambi is following her or not. There are even times when she is walking along the familiar paths when she seems not to notice whether Bambi is trotting behind her like a good boy. One day his mother was not there, and Bambi does not know how that is possible, cannot understand it. But his mother is gone and Bambi, for the first time, is alone.

He is bewildered, he becomes uneasy, he becomes nervous and anxious, and he begins to long for her quite pitifully. Very sadly he stands there and calls to her. No-one answers, no-one comes.

He listens, he smells the air. Nothing. He calls again. Gently, inside himself, imploringly, he calls, "Mother ... Mother ..." All in vain.

Now he is gripped with doubt as to whether he can endure it, so he begins to walk.

He wanders along all the paths he knows, stops and calls out, walks on with hesitant steps, fearful and unable to understand. He is very sad.

He carries on walking and finds himself on paths where he has never been before, he finds himself in parts of the wood which are strange to him. He is lost.

Then he hears the voices of two children who are calling out like him:

“Mother ... mother ...!”

Surely that is Gobo and Faline. It must be them.

He runs quickly towards the voices and soon sees their red coats shining through between the leaves. Gobo and Faline. There they stand next to each other under a dogwood, looking forlorn and calling, “Mother ... mother ...!”

They’re glad that they can hear something rustling in the undergrowth, but they are disappointed when they see it is only Bambi. But they are a little bit glad to see him. And Bambi is glad that he is not quite so alone any more.

“My mother’s gone away somewhere,” says Bambi.

“Ours is gone too,” lamented Gobo.

They look at each other in their dismay.

“But where could they be?” asks Bambi, almost in tears.

“I don’t know,” sighs Gobo. His heart is beating fast and he is feeling quite miserable.

Suddenly, Faline says, “I think ... they’re with our fathers ...”

Gobo and Bambi look at each other in astonishment. They are immediately gripped by a sense of awe. “You mean ... with our fathers?” asked Bambi and shudders.

Faline shudders too, but she makes a face that seems to be saying a lot. She looks like someone who knows more than he is willing to say. She does not really know anything at all of course; she does not even know where she got the idea from. But as Gobo repeats, “Do you really mean that?,” she makes herself look clever and says each time, “Yes, I think so.”

That is, of course, a guess, but it is at least worth thinking about. It does not make Bambi any less uneasy though. He is not now capable of thinking, he is too anxious and too sad.

He moves away. He does not like to spend too much time on one spot. Faline and Gobo go with him a little way; all three of them call "Mother ... mother ..." But now Gobo and Faline have stopped; they do not dare to go any further. Faline says, "Where are we going? Our mother knows where we should be. So let's stay there so that she can find us when she comes back."

Bambi walks on by himself. He wanders through a thicket where there is a little bare patch. In the middle of the bare patch Bambi stops. It is as if he is held there by his roots and cannot leave the spot.

There, at the edge of the bare patch, in a tall hazel bush, he could make out a form. Bambi has never seen a form like this. At the same time a scent came to him in the air, a scent he has never smelt before. It is a strange aroma, heavy and sharp and exciting, enough to make you mad.

Bambi stares at the form. It is remarkably erect, exceptionally narrow, and it has a pale face which is quite naked on the nose and around the eyes. Horribly naked. This is a face that projects a dreadful horror. Cold and gruesome. This face has a monstrous power to it, a power that could leave you crippled. This face is painful to behold, hardly bearable to behold, but Bambi nonetheless stands there and stares at it, captivated.

The form remains there motionless for a long time. Then it reaches one leg out, a leg that is positioned high up, and puts it near its face. Bambi has not noticed that it was there at all. This terrible leg stretches right out into the air, and it is merely this gesture that sweeps Bambi away like a candle in the wind. In an instant he is back in the thicket he has just left. And he runs.

Suddenly his mother is back with him. She leaps through bush and undergrowth next to him. The two of them run as fast as they can. His mother leads the way, she knows the path, and Bambi follows. In this way they keep running until they are at the entrance to their chamber.

“Did you ... did you see that?” asks his mother gently. Bambi cannot answer, he has no breath left. He merely nods.

“That was ... that was Him!” she says.

The two of them shuddered in horror.

CHAPTER 7

Bambi was often left alone now. But he did not have the same fear of it as he had the first time. His mother would disappear, and then, however much he called for her, she did not come. But then she would reappear unexpectedly.

One evening, feeling very lonely, he wandered once more along the paths. He had not found Gobo and Faline even once. The sky had already turned to a light grey and it was beginning to get dark, so that the tops of the trees could be seen over the bushes and undergrowth. Something rustled in the bushes, something hurtled its way between the leaves, and then his mother appeared Close behind her another deer made its way in. Bambi did not know who it was. Auntie Ena or his father or someone else. But Bambi's mother saw immediately who it was, despite the speed at which she had rushed past him. He heard the shrillness of her voice. She screamed, and it seemed to Bambi that she did so only in fun, but then it occurred to him that there was a slight ring of fear in that scream.

Another time, it happened in full daylight. Bambi had been walking for hours through the dense woods and finally began to call. Not so much because he was afraid, but because did not want to remain so alone any more, and he felt he would soon be in a terrible state. So he began to call for his mother.

Suddenly there was one of their fathers standing in front of him, looking at him severely. Bambi had not heard him coming and he was startled. This elder stag looked more powerful than the others, he was taller and more proud. His coat was aflame with a deep dark red, but his face shone silver-grey; and a powerful, black pearly crown extended high above his playful ears.

“What are you calling for?” the old stag asked severely. Bambi trembled in awe of the elder stag and did not dare to make any answer. “Your mother hasn’t got the time to spend on you now!” the elder continued. Bambi was completely cowed by this imperious voice, but at the same time he felt admiration for it. “Can’t you be by yourself for a while? You should be ashamed of yourself!” Bambi would have liked to say that he could be by himself perfectly well, that he had often been by himself, but he said nothing. He did as he was told and became terribly ashamed. The elder turned round and left him. Bambi did not know how the stag left, where he had gone, did not even know whether he had left quickly or slowly. He was simply gone, just as suddenly as he had arrived. Bambi strained his ears, but he heard no steps moving away from him, no leaf being disturbed. That made him suppose the elder must still be quite near to him, and he smelt the air on every side. He learned nothing from that. Bambi sighed in relief as he was once more alone, but at the same time he yearned to see the old stag again and to make sure he was not displeased with him.

Then his mother arrived but Bambi said nothing about his meeting with the elder. Nor did he ever call for her, now, when she was out of sight. He thought about the old stag when he wandered about on his own; he felt a powerful wish to come across him. Then he would say to him, “See? I’m not calling for anyone.” And the elder would praise him.

He did speak to Gobo and Faline though, the next time they were together on the meadow. They listened with excitement and they had had no experience of their own that could compare with this.

“Weren’t you scared?” asked Gobo excitedly. Yes! Bambi admitted, he had been scared. Just a little bit. “I’d have been terribly scared,” Gobo told him. Bambi answered that no, he had not been very scared, because the elder had been so majestic. Gobo told him, “That wouldn’t have been much help for me. I’d have been too scared even to look at him. When I get scared everything flickers in front of my eyes so that I can’t see anything and my heart beats so

hard that I can't breathe." What Bambi had told them made Faline very thoughtful and she said nothing.

The next time they met, though, Gobo and Faline rushed to him in great leaps and bounds. They were alone once more, as was Bambi. "We've been looking for you for ages," declared Gobo. "Yes," said Faline with an air of importance, "as now we know exactly who it was that you saw." Bambi was so keen to know he jumped in the air. "Who ...!?"

Faline took pleasure in saying, "It was the old prince."

"How do you know that?" Bambi wanted to know.

"Our mother told us!" retorted Faline.

Bambi was astonished, and he showed it. "Did you tell her about it then?" The two of them nodded their heads. "But that was a secret!" objected Bambi.

Gobo quickly tried to excuse himself. "It wasn't me. It was Faline who did it." But Faline cheerfully called, "Oh, so what? Secret!? I wanted to know who it was, and now we do know, and that's much more interesting!" Bambi was burning to hear all about this, and his wish was satisfied. Faline told him everything. "He's the most noble stag in the whole wood. He's the prince. There is no second most noble, no-one comes near to him. No-one knows how old he is. No-one knows where he lives. No-one knows who his relatives are. Very few have ever even seen him. Now and then there's a rumour that he's dead because he hasn't been seen for a long time. Then somebody catches a glimpse of him and then everyone knows he's still alive. No-one has ever dared to ask him where he's been. He doesn't speak to anyone and no-one dares to speak to him. He goes along the paths where no-one else ever goes; he knows every part of the wood, even the most distant corner. And nothing is a danger to him. Other princes might tussle with each other, sometimes as a test or in fun but sometimes they fight in earnest. It's many years since he

fought with anyone. And there's no-one still alive who did fight with him a long time ago. He's the great prince."

Bambi forgave Gobo and Faline for having carelessly chatted about his secret with their mother. He was even quite satisfied about it as now, after all, it was him who had experienced all the all these important things. Nonetheless, he was glad that Gobo and Faline did not know everything quite precisely, that the great prince had said, "Can't you be by yourself for a while?," that they did not know he had said, "You should be ashamed of yourself!" Bambi was glad, now, that he had kept silent about these admonitions. Faline would have told everything about that just like everything else, and then the whole forest would have been gossiping about it.

That night, as the moon was rising, Bambi's mother came back again. She was suddenly there standing under the great oak at the edge of the meadow and looking round for Bambi. He saw her straight away and ran over to her. That night Bambi had another new experience. His mother was tired and hungry. She did not walk about as much as she usually did but satisfied herself there on the meadow where Bambi also usually took his meals. Together there, they munched on the bushes and as they did so, in that remarkably pleasant way, they wandered deeper and deeper into the woods. There was a loud noise that came through the greenery. Before Bambi had any idea of what was happening his mother began to scream loudly, just as she did when she was greatly startled or confused. "A-oh!" she screamed, jumped away, then stopped and screamed, "A-oh, ba-oh!." Then, Bambi saw some immense figures appear, coming towards them through the noise. They came quite close. They looked like Bambi and his mother, like Auntie Ena and anyone else of their species, but they were enormous, they had grown so big and powerful that you felt compelled to look up at them. Like his mother, Bambi began to scream, "A-oh ... Ba-oh ...Ba-oh!." He was hardly aware that he was screaming, he could not stop himself. The line of figures went slowly past, three or four enormous figures one after another. Last of all came one that was even bigger than the others, it had a wild mane around its neck and its head was

crowned with a whole tree. Just to see it took your breath away. Bambi stood there and howled as loudly as he could, as he felt more frightened and bewildered than he ever had been before. His fear was of a particular kind. He felt as if he were pitifully small, and even his mother seemed to be the same. He felt ashamed, although he had no idea why, at the same time the horror of it shook him and he once more began to howl. "Ba-oh ... Ba-a-oh!" It made him feel better when he shouted like that.

The line of figures had passed. There was nothing more to see and nothing more to hear from in. Even Bambi's mother became silent. There was only Bambi who would whine briefly from time to time. He was still afraid.

"You can be quiet now," his mother said, "look, they've gone away."

"Oh, mother," whispered Bambi, "who was that?"

"Oh, they're not really that dangerous," his mother said. "They were our big relatives ... yes ... they are big and they're quality ... much higher quality than you or me ..."

"And aren't they dangerous?" Bambi asked.

"Not normally," his mother explained. "But they say there are many things that have happened. People say this and that about them but I don't know if there's any truth in these stories. They've never done anything to me or to anyone I know."

"Why would they do anything to us when they're relatives of ours?" thought Bambi. He wanted to be quiet, but he was still shaking.

"No, I don't suppose they'll do anything to us," his mother answered, "but I'm not sure, and I get alarmed every time I see them. I can't stop myself. It's the same every time."

Bambi was slowly soothed down by this conversation, but he remained thoughtful. Right above him, in among the branches of an

alder tree, an impressive tawny owl shrieked. But Bambi was confused and forgot, for once, to show that he was startled. The owl, however still came down to him and asked, "Give you a shock, did I?."

"Of course," answered Bambi. "You always give me a shock."

The owl gave a quiet laugh; he was satisfied. "I hope you don't blame me for it," he said. "It's just the way I do things." He fluffed up his plumage till he looked like a ball, sank his beak into his soft, downy feathers, and put on a terribly nice, serious expression. That was enough for him.

Bambi opened his heart to him. "Do you know," he began in a way that seemed older than his age, "I've just had a shock that was far bigger than the one you gave me."

"What?" asked the owl, no longer so satisfied with himself.

Bambi told him about his meeting with his enormous relatives.

"Don't tell me about your relatives," declared the owl. "I've got relatives too, you know. But all I have to do is look round me anywhere in the daytime and they're all over me. Na, there's not much point in having relatives. If they're bigger than you they're good for nothing, and if they're smaller they're even more good for nothing. If they're bigger than you then you can't stand them 'cause they're so haughty, and if they're smaller they can't stand you 'cause they think you're haughty. Na, I don't want to know anything about anything of that."

"But ... I don't even know my relatives ..." said Bambi shyly and wishing he did. "I'd never heard anything about them and today was the first time I saw them."

"Don't you bother about those people," the owl advised him. "Just take my word for it," he said, rolling his eyes in a meaningful way, "take my word, that's the best thing to do. Relatives are never as

good as friends. Look at the two of us, we're not related but we're good friends, aren't we, and very nice it is too."

Bambi was about to say something more, but the owl continued speaking. "I've got some experience in things like that. You're a bit young, still. Take my word, I know better about these things. And anyway, I don't see why I should get involved in your family matters." He rolled his eyes, and rolled them in a way that seemed so thoughtful, and sat with an expression that seemed so earnest and meaningful, that Bambi was modest and said nothing.

CHAPTER 8

Another night went by, and the following day something else happened.

The sky was cloudless, and the morning was full of dew and freshness. All the leaves on the trees and the bushes suddenly had a more vivid scent. The meadow breathed the air in broad waves and lifted it up to the tree tops.

'Peep' said the tits as they woke up. They said it quite quietly, but as it was still twilight and the sky was grey they said nothing more for a little while. For a time there was silence. Then the raucous, rasping sound of a crow came from high up in the air. The crows had woken up and were visiting each other in the tree tops. The magpie answered straight back: "Shakerakshak ... can you believe this, I'm still asleep?" Then hundreds of calls, here and there, far and near, tentatively began: peep! Peep! Tiu! These sounds still had something of sleep, something of the twilight about them. And yet they were actually all quite distinct from each other.

Suddenly a blackbird flew up to the top of a fir tree. He flew right up to the very highest, thinnest point, reaching into the air. He sat high up there and looked out over all the other trees, near and far while the pale grey sky, still tired from the night, began to glow in the east and come to life. Then the bird began to sing. She was only a tiny dark spot if you glimpsed her from the ground. In the distance her little black body looked like a wilted leaf. But her song spread out all over the forest in great celebration. And then everything came to life. The finches struck up and the robins and the goldfinches made their voices heard. Pigeons rushed from one place to another with wide flapping and swishing of their wings. The pheasants shouted out loud as if their throats would burst. The sound of their wings was gentle but powerful as they swooped down to earth from the trees

where they had been sleeping. On the ground they repeated their metallic, bursting cry many more times, and then they would coo gently. High in the sky, the falcons called out their sharp and joyful 'yayaya!' .

The sun had risen.

'Diu-diyu!' rejoiced the oriole. As he flew back and forth between the twigs and branches his round, yellow body shone in the beams of the morning sun like an exhilarated ball of gold.

Bambi stepped under the big oak tree on the meadow. It sparkled in the morning dew, had a scent of grass, flowers and wet earth, it whispered of the thousand lives it had led. There sat Bambi's friend, the hare, and he seemed to be thinking about something very important. There was a haughty pheasant there, walking slowly. He pecked at the stalks of grass and looked carefully all around himself. His dark blue neck sparkled in the sunlight like a jewel necklace. But close in front of Bambi there stood one of the princes, very near to him. Bambi had never seen him before, had never even seen any of the fathers this close up. He stood there before him, very close to a hazel bush and still slightly concealed behind its twigs. Bambi did not move. He hoped the prince would come out fully from behind the bush, and he wondered whether he could dare to speak to him. He wanted to ask his mother and glanced around for her, but his mother had already gone ahead and stood a long way away with Auntie Ena. Just then, Gobo and Faline came out of the woods and ran onto the meadow. Bambi did not move but wondered about what he should do. If he wanted to get over to his mother and the others he would have to pass by the prince. He thought that would be unseemly. So what? he thought, I don't need to get my mother's permission first. It was the old prince who spoke to me first and I didn't tell my mother anything about it. I will speak to the prince, I'll see if I can. I'll say to him: Good morning your highness. There's nothing about that that might make him cross. And if he is I can just run away. Bambi wondered whether he had made the right decision, and it kept on making him feel unsteady on his feet.

Now the prince stepped away from the hazel bush and onto the meadow.

Now ... thought Bambi.

Just then there was a loud clap of thunder.

Bambi recoiled and did not know what had happened.

He saw how the prince jumped high into the air in front of him and saw him rush past him into the woods.

Bambi looked hard all around himself, he felt as if he could still hear the thunder clap. He saw his mother, Auntie Ena, Gobo and Faline, some way away, had fled into the woods, he saw his friend the hare rush away in a panic, saw the pheasant run away with his neck stretched out ahead of him, and he could not understand what it all could be about. The prince lay there, a broad wound had torn his shoulder open, he was bloody and dead.

“Don’t just stand there!” came a shrill cry from beside him. It was his mother who was running at a full gallop. “Run!” she called, “Run as fast as you can!” She did not stop, but rushed on, and her command pulled Bambi along with her. He ran with all his strength.

“What is that, mother?” he asked. “What was that, mother?”

His mother, gasping for breath, answered, “That ... was ... Him!”

Bambi shuddered, and they ran on.

Finally, out of breath, they stopped.

“What do you say? Please, what do you say?” called a thin voice from above them. Bambi looked up and saw the squirrel hurrying down to them through the branches of the tree. “I jumped all the way here beside you” he called. “No, it’s terrible!”

“Were you there when it happened?” asked Bambi’s mother.

“Well of course I was there” the squirrel replied. “I’m still shaking from it, all my limbs are shaking.” He sat upright, his magnificent flag against his back, showing his slender, white breast and pressing both his front paws against his body to reassure himself. “I’m quite beside myself with fear.”

“I’m afraid too, and it’s made me quite numb” said Bambi’s mother. “I can’t understand it. None of us saw anything.”

“Really?” The squirrel became excited. “You’re wrong there, you know. “I’d been watching him for a long time!”

“So had I!” called another voice. It was the magpie; she flew up to them and sat down on a branch.

“And me!” called another screeching voice from even higher in the ash tree. There was the jay sitting there.

And from the very tops of the trees there was a pair of crows who cawed angrily. “We saw him too!” they interjected.

They all sat round in earnest discussion. They were exceptionally agitated and, it seemed, full of anger and fear.

Who, thought Bambi, who have they seen?

“I did everything I possibly could do,” the squirrel assured them as he pressed both his forepaws to his heart. “Really everything, to bring Him to the attention of the poor prince.”

“So did I,” the jay screeched, “I don’t know how many times I shouted to him! But he just didn’t want to hear me.”

“He didn’t hear me either,” the magpie said with a laugh. “Ten times it was I called to ‘im. Just as I was going to fly over to him, I thought to meself; well if ‘e can’t hear me I’ll fly over onto that hazel bush, just where he’s standing; he’s got to hear me from there. But that was just when it happened.”

“But my voice is louder than yours, and I did all I could to warn ‘im,” said the crow in a bitter tone. “But you posh lot never give enough attention to birds like us.”

“Yes, never enough at all,” agreed the squirrel.

“We do what we can,” thought the magpie, “but it’s not our fault if somebody’s unlucky.”

“He was such a handsome prince,” the squirrel lamented, “and in the prime of life.”

“Ach!” the jay screeched, “if he hadn’t been so stand-offish and paid a bit of attention to us.”

“He was certainly not stand-offish!” the squirrel contradicted him.

The magpie added, “Na, no more than the other princes like him.”

“Stupid then!” the jay laughed.

“You’re pretty stupid yourself!” a crow called down from above them. “You can’t talk about being stupid. The whole forest knows how stupid you are.”

“Me?” retorted the jay in astonishment. “No-one can accuse me of being stupid. A bit forgetful sometimes, but I’m certainly not stupid.”

“Suit yourself,” said the crow, now serious. “Don’t forget what I’ve just said, but bear in mind that it wasn’t being haughty or stupid that cost the prince his life, it’s ‘cause you can’t get away from him.”

“Ach!” screeched the jay. “I don’t like talking like this!” He flew away. The crow continued speaking. “There’s even a lot in my family who he’s tricked. He kills anyone ‘e feels like killing. There’s nothing we can do about it.”

“You’ve just got to keep a watch out for him,” the magpie added.

“Yeah, you certainly do,” said the crow sadly. “Cheerio.” She flew away and her family went with her.

Bambi looked around. His mother was no longer there.

What are they talking about? he thought. I can't understand everything they're saying. Who is this 'He' they're talking about? It must be that 'He' that I saw in the woods that time ... but he didn't kill me ...

Bambi thought of the prince whom he had just seen lying in front of him with a bloody, shredded shoulder. He was now dead. Bambi walked on. The forest was again in song with a thousand voices, the sun drove its broad beams of light through the tree tops, everywhere was light, the leaves began to steam, high in the air called the falcons, and here, close by, a woodpecker was laughing out loud as if nothing had happened. Bambi did not become cheerful. He felt under threat from something dark, he could not understand how the others could be so gay and carefree when life was so hard and so dangerous. At that moment he was gripped by the desire to get a long way away from there, to go deeper and deeper into the woods. He felt the urge to go to a place where the trees were at their densest, where he could find a corner to slide into, a place surrounded broad and far by the most impenetrable undergrowth, where he could not possibly be seen. He did not want to go back out onto that meadow.

Something gently moved in the bushes beside him. Bambi was greatly startled. There, in front of him, stood the elder.

There was something twitching in Bambi; he wanted to run away but he took control of himself and remained. The elder looked at him with his big, deep eyes. “Were you there when it happened?”

“Yes,” said Bambi quietly. His heart was beating so hard he could feel it in his mouth.

“Where is your mother?” the elder asked.

Bambi answered, still speaking quietly, "I don't know."

The elder continued to look at him. "And you're not calling out for her?"

Bambi looked into that venerable, ice-grey face, looked up at the elder's majestic crown, and suddenly found himself full of courage. "I can be by myself, too," he said.

The elder looked at him for a while and then, softly, he said, "Are you not the little one who, not very long ago, was crying for his mother?"

Bambi felt slightly ashamed, but continued to be courageous. "Yes, that was me," he admitted.

The elder looked at him in silence, and it seemed to Bambi that these deep eyes were watching him with more tenderness. "You told me off for it, elder prince," he exclaimed, "for not being able to be by myself. I can do now, though."

The elder looked at Bambi, examining him, and smiled, very slightly, barely noticeably, but Bambi did notice it. "Elder prince," he asked trustingly, "what happened back there? I can't understand it ... who is this 'He' they're all talking about ...?" He stopped, shocked at the dark look that bade him to be silent.

They said nothing for a while. The elder stopped looking at Bambi and stared into the distance, then he said, slowly, "Listen for yourself, smell for yourself, watch for yourself. Learn for yourself." He raised the crown on his head even higher. "Farewell," he said. Then nothing more. And then, he had disappeared.

Bambi, dismayed, stayed where he was and wanted to give up hope. But the prince's farewell was still in his ears and gave him some comfort. Farewell, the elder had said. So he wasn't cross with him.

Bambi was filled with pride, felt that he had been lifted out of something that was formal and serious. Yes, life was hard and full of

danger. Let it bring whatever it wants, he would learn somehow to bear all of it.

Slowly, he walked deeper into the woods.

CHAPTER 9

The leaves were falling from the big oak tree at the edge of the meadow. They were falling from all the trees. One of the branches of the oak was much higher up than the others and it stretched a long way out over the meadow. At its tip there sat two leaves together.

“Things ain’t like they they used to be,” said one of the leaves.

“They ain’t,” the other answered. “There were so many of us last night who ... we’re just about the only ones left here on this branch.”

“You never know who it’s goin to ‘appen to next,” said the first. “Even when it was nice and warm and the sunshine gave you some heat you get a storm or a cloudburst sometimes, and lots of us got torn off then, even them that were still young. You never know who it’s goin to ‘appen to next.”

“You don’t get much sunshine these days,” the second leaf sighed, “and even when the sun does shine there’s no strength to it. You’ve got to get your strength from somewhere else.”

“Do you think it’s true,” pondered the first, “is it true that other leaves will come along and take our place once we’ve gone, and then another lot, and then another lot ...?”

“Course it’s true,” whispered the second, “only, we can’t work out how ... it’s above what we can understand, that is.”

“It’d make you really sad, and all,” the first added.

They remained silent for a while. Then the first said quietly to himself, “What do you have to go away for, anyway?”

The second asked, “What ‘appens to us after we’ve fallen?”

“We sink down ...”

“And what is it, what’s down there?”

The first answered, “I don’t know. Some say one thing, others say something different ... nobody knows, really.”

The second asked, “D’you think you feel anything, d’you think you know anything about yourself when you’re down there?”

The first answered, “Who can say? None of them who’ve gone down there has ever come back to tell us.”

They were again silent for a while. Then the first leaf said tenderly to the other, “Don’t get yourself all upset about it, here, you’re shivering, look.”

“Oh don’t bother about that,” the second answered, “anything makes me shiver these days. You just don’t feel properly attached to where you are, do you.”

“We’d better stop talking about things like that,” said the first leaf.

“Yeah, we’d better leave it,” the other replied. “Only ... what we going to talk about now then?”

They became silent, but after a short time resumed the subject. “Who d’you think’s going to be the first of us to go down there, then...?”

“It won’t be for a while yet,” the first reassured him. “Let’s just think about how beautiful it used to be, how wonderfully beautiful! When the sun came out and burned us so hot it seemed we’d just swell up with all the good health it gave us. Remember? And then there was the dew, early in the morning ... and the lime trees, wonderful nights ...”

“The nights are horrible now,” whined the second. “They never seem to come to an end.”

“We can’t complain,” said the first leaf gently, “we’ve lived longer than so many others.”

“Have I changed much?” the second leaf asked, shyly but emphatically.

“Not a bit,” the first assured him. “What, ‘cause I’ve gone all yellow and ugly? No, it’s gone a bit different for me ...”

“Oh, give over,” the second contradicted.

“No, honest,” the first repeated emphatically. “It’s true, what I’m telling you. You’re as lovely as you as you were on the very first day. Might be a few yellow stripes here and there, but not so’s you’d notice, but they just make you look all the lovelier. Honest!”

“Well, thank you,” the second leaf whispered, feeling quite touched. “I’m not sure I believe you ... well not everything ... but thank you for it. You are so good to me ... and you always ‘ave been ... it’s only now that I’m starting to understand how good you’ve always been to me.”

“Oh, stop it now,” said the first, and became silent himself. He could not talk any more because he was upset.

Now they were both silent. The hours passed. A damp wind blew cold and hostile through the tree tops.

“Oh ... now ...” said the second leaf, “... I ...” His voice broke off. He was gently removed from his place and fluttered down to the earth. - Winter had come.

CHAPTER 10

Bambi noticed that the world had changed. It was hard for him to get by in this altered world. They had all been living like rich people and now they began to find themselves in poverty. But wealth was all that Bambi had ever known. He took it as a matter of course to be surrounded by the greatest excess and the finest luxury on all sides, to have no worries about finding food, to sleep in a beautiful room hung with green that no-one could see into, and to walk about in a majestically smooth, glossy, red coat.

Everything was different now, and he had not really noticed it, not properly. The change which had taken place had been, for him, just a sequence of short-lived appearances. He found it entertaining when milky-white veils of mist drew the morning dampness up from the meadow, or when they would suddenly sink down from the twilight sky. They were so beautiful as they dissipated in the sunlight. He liked the frost too, which surprised him when he saw the ground and the meadow strewn with white. He spent much time luxuriating in the sound of his grown-up relatives, the stags, as they shouted. The whole forest would rumble from the voices of these kings. Bambi would listen and be very afraid, but his heart would thump in admiration whenever he heard this thunderous call. He thought about the crowns worn by these kings, so big and with so many branches, like a majestic oak, and he would think their voices were just as powerful as their crowns. Their imperious commands rolled out in the deepest tones, the monstrous groans of noble blood as it rushed around their bodies and seethed with the ancient power of yearning, haughtiness and pride. Whenever Bambi heard these voices he felt overwhelmed by them, but he was proud to have such distinguished relatives. At the same time he felt a peculiar, excited irritation at their being so unapproachable. That hurt him, that humiliated him, although he did not know exactly why or how, or even how he could come any closer to knowing.

It was only when the kings' time for lovemaking was over, and their thunderous cries went silent, that Bambi started paying attention to other things once more. When he walked through the woods by night or lay in his room by day he heard the whisperings of the leaves as they fell through the trees. The rustling sounds, as they trickled down through the air from every tree top, every twig, were incessant. The gentle, silvery light of the moon ran continuously down to the earth. It was wonderful to wake up to it, and it was delicious to go to sleep with this mysterious, sad whispering. The leaves at that time lay deep and loose on the ground, and when you walked through them they crackled loudly and they rustled quietly. It was fun to have to push them aside with each step because their layers were so deep. They made a shhh-shhh noise that was very fine, very light and silvery. This was also very useful, as during these times there was no need to make great effort with listening and smelling. Everything could be heard from a long way off. The leaves rustled from the slightest movement, they cried out Shhh! Who could possibly sneak up on you? No-one.

But then came the rain. From early morning to late in the evening it poured down, it struck and splattered from late in the evening and all through the night until back to the morning, eased off for a little while and then began again with new strength. The air seemed full of cold water, the whole world seemed full of it. Your mouth was filled with water if you only tried to gather a few blades of grass and if you pulled at a bush then water would gush down into your eyes and up your nose. The leaves on the ground no longer rustled. They lay there soft and heavy, pressed down by the rain, and made no sound at all. Bambi, for the first time, learned how vexing it was to have water streaming down on you all through the day and all through the night and to be soaked to the skin. He was still not very cold, but he yearned for warmth and he thought it was miserable to have to move about while soaked through and through.

But then, when the stormy weather came down from the north, Bambi learnt what it really means to be cold. It was little help to cuddle up close to his mother. At first, of course, he liked it very

much to lie there and be nice and warm, at least on one side. But the stormy winds raged all through the night and all through the day and all through the forest. It seemed to be driven by an incomprehensible, ice-cold fury, an insane rage that wanted to tear all the trees up by the roots and carry them away or to destroy them in some other way. The trees roared as they put up powerful resistance, they fought bravely against this immense attack. You could hear their long drawn out groans, the sighs of their creaking, there was a loud bang when one of their mighty boughs split, the angry crack when, here and there, the trunk of a tree would break, the cry of pain from all its wounds as its body was overpowered, split and killed. But then it became impossible to hear anything more, as the storm fell onto the forest with even greater violence and its roars drowned out any other voice.

Bambi now understood that a period of need and poverty had begun. He saw how much the rain and the storms had changed the world. There were now no leaves on any of the trees or bushes. They stood there robbed of all they had, their whole body was naked and could be clearly seen, they looked pitiful as they stretched their naked, brown arms up to the sky. The grass on the meadow was limp and dark brown and so short it seemed to have been burnt to the ground. Even the place where Bambi and his mother slept seemed pitiful and bare now. Since its green walls had disappeared it offered no privacy, and the wind blew in from every side.

One day a young magpie flew over the meadow. Something white and cold fell into her eye, then another, then another, and laid a light veil over her sight. Little, soft, dazzling-white flakes were dancing all around her. The magpie flapped her wings and nearly stopped, but then directed herself upward and went higher in the sky. In vain! The soft, cool flakes were there again and again they fell onto her and into her eyes. Once again she directed herself upward and rose even higher.

“Just don’t bother, love,” called a crow from above her who was flying in the same direction, “just give it up. You can’t fly high enough

to get out of these flakes. That's snow, i'n'it."

"Snow?" said the magpie in amazement as she struggled against each new flurry that came at her.

"Well, yeah!" said the crow. "Winter's here. That's snow, that is!"

"Forgive me," answered the magpie, "I only left the nest in May. I don't know what winter's like."

"Yeah, there's a lot like that," the crow observed. "You'll soon find out though."

"Well, if that's what snow is," thought the magpie, "I'd like to sit down for a little while." She went down and sat on a twig on an alder tree and shook herself.

The crow flew lazily on.

At first, Bambi was pleased to see the snow. The air was still and mild, the white stars floated in the sky and everything in the world looked entirely new. It had become lighter, even gayer, thought Bambi, and for the brief periods when the sun came out everything lit up, the white covering sparkled and shone with such power that it was quite dazzling.

But Bambi soon stopped being pleased about the snow, as it was becoming harder and harder to find food. You had to scrape the snow aside and that took a lot of effort before a small patch of limp grass was exposed. And the snow cut into your legs too, so that you had to be careful not to get your feet injured. Gobo already had done. But, of course, that is what Gobo was like, he was never able to endure very much, and he caused his mother a lot of worry.

They were together now for almost all of the time, and they also had more company than previously. Ena would often call by with her children. Marena, a girl who was nearly grown up, had also begun to mix in their circle. But it was probably old Mrs. Nettla who came by

for a chat most often. She was quite alone and had an opinion about everything. “No,” she said, “I want to have nothing more to do with children. That’s a pleasure that I’ve really had enough of.”

Then Faline would always say, “Why’s that then, when it’s a pleasure?” And Mrs. Nettla would pretend to be cross and say, “It’s a bad sort of pleasure, and I’ve had enough of it. Everyone enjoyed chatting very much. They sat next to each other and talked. The children had never had as much to listen to.

Even one or two of the princes came and kept company with them now. At first it felt a little awkward, especially as the children were still somewhat shy with them. But that passed quite quickly and then there was a pleasant atmosphere. Bambi admired Prince Ronno, who was an impressive gentleman, and he felt a tempestuous love for the young, beautiful Karus. They had cast off their crowns and Bambi would often stare at the two round, slate-grey discs on their heads where glamour, splendour and many tender points could be seen. Karus seemed very elegant and distinguished.

It was tremendously exciting when one of the princes would tell him about what had happened to him. On Ronno’s left foreleg there was a big lump which was now overgrown with fur. He would often ask, “Have you ever noticed how I limp on this leg?” Everyone was prompt to assure him that no-one had ever noticed any limp at all. That was what Ronno wanted to hear. And it really was true to say that it was barely noticeable. “Yes,” he would then continue, “I escaped from something very dangerous that day.” And so Ronno would go on to recount how he had been taken by surprise by Him and hurled fire at him. But he was only hit here on his leg. It hurt so much it could drive you mad. But it was only here, on his leg, that he had been hit. It hurt nearly enough to drive him crazy. No wonder. The bone had been shattered. But Ronno did not panic. He got up and went, on just three legs. He kept going despite the pain, as he was well aware that he was being chased. He ran and ran until night fell. Then he allowed himself some rest. But the following morning he moved on again until he felt he was in safety. Then he groomed

himself, hidden and alone, and waited for the wound to close up. Eventually he came out of his place of safety and he was a hero. He had a limp, but that was barely noticeable.

Now, when they were all together in one place so often and for so long, when so many stories were told, Bambi heard more about Him than he ever had before. They talked about how horrible he was to look at. Nobody could bear looking into this pale face. This was something that Bambi already knew from his own experience. They even talked about the smell of him that spread all around, and here, too, Bambi would have been able to contribute to the discussion if he had not been too well brought up to join in with the conversations of grown ups. They said this scent was of a rather puzzling sort, always changing but instantly recognizable as it was always remarkably stimulating, unidentifiable, mysterious, but in itself rather disgusting. They talked about Him only needing two legs to walk on and about the wonderful strength of both his hands. Some of them did not exactly know what hands are. But Mrs. Nettla explained it to them. "I don't see anything surprising about it. The squirrel can do everything you've just mentioned and does it in just the way he wants to, and every little mouse can do the same." She turned her head disrespectfully away from them. "Oh!" the others exclaimed and they made her understand that it's far from being the same thing. But Mrs. Nettla was not to be intimidated. "And what about the falcon?" she declared, "what about the buzzard? And the owl? They've only got two legs, and when they want to take hold of something, as you call it, they just stand on one leg and hold it with the other. That's a lot harder to do, and I'm sure He can't do it. "Mrs. Nettla was not in any way inclined to admire anything about Him. She hated him with all her heart. "He's disgusting," she said, and nothing would change her mind. And there was nobody who contradicted her, as there was nobody who found Him very lovable. But the matter became even more confusing as they talked about it, saying He had a third hand, not just two hands but a third hand as well. Mrs. Nettla's reply was curt. "That's just an old wives' tale," she concluded. "I just don't believe it."

Now Ronno joined in. "So what?" he asked, "and what do you think it was that He used to shatter my leg? Just tell me that, will you!"

Mrs. Nettla gave a glib retort. "That's your affair, my love! He's never shattered anything of mine."

Auntie Ena said, "I've seen lots of different things in my life, and I think there must be something in it if he insists He's got a third hand."

Young Karus observed politely, "I can only agree with you there. There's a crow who's a friend of mine ..." He stopped in embarrassment for a short while and looked at all the people there as if he were afraid of being laughed at. But when he saw that they were listening to him and giving him all their attention, he continued. "The crow is exceptionally talented, I can't deny that, she's astonishingly talented. She told me that He really does have three hands, but not all the time. It's that third hand, the crow told me, that's the nasty one. It doesn't grow out of Him like the other two; He carries it hanging on his shoulder. The crow says she can always tell whether He or any of his kind is dangerous or not. If He comes along without that third hand then He isn't dangerous."

Mrs. Nettla laughed. "This crow of yours is just stupid, Karus, take it from me, my love. If she was as clever as she thinks she is she'd know that He's always dangerous –always!"

But the others had something to say too. "But there are some of them who are not dangerous at all," Bambi's mother thought. "You can see it straight away."

"So what?" asked Mrs. Nettla. "Do you just stand there till they come up to you and say hello to them?"

Bambi's mother answered softly, "Of course I don't just stand there, I run away."

And Faline burst out with, "You should always run away!" Everyone laughed. They continued talking about this third hand, and as they did so they became more serious and the sense of the horror of it came among them. Whatever it was, a third hand or something different, it was something terrible, something they could not understand. Most of them knew about it only from what they had been told by others, but some of them had seen it with their own eyes. He would stand there, a long way off, without moving, there was no way of explaining what He did or how it happened, but there would suddenly be a bang like thunder, fire sprayed out, and even at that distance from Him you would collapse with your breast torn open, and you would die. They all lowered their heads while she told them this as if they were pressed down by some dark force that had some inexplicable power over them. They listened eagerly to the many different accounts of seeing Him, and every story was full of horror, full of blood and suffering. They took all this in and still wanted to hear more of what was being said. Stories that must have been made up, all the fairy tales and legends they had heard from their grandfathers and great-grandfathers, and as they listened they unconsciously learned, while still afraid, about how to make peace with this dark world or, at least, to run away from it.

"How does that happen, asked young Karus, quite dispirited, "that He can be so far away and still knock you down?"

"Didn't your clever crow explain that to you?" sneered Mrs. Nettla.

"No," said Karus with a smile, "she says she's often seen it, but no-one knows how to explain it."

"Well, He can even knock the crows down from the tree when He feels like it," observed Ronno.

"And He knocks the pheasants down from the sky," Auntie Ena added.

Bambi's mother said, "He throws His hand out there. That's what my grandmother told me."

“Does He really?” Mrs. Nettla asked. “And what is it that makes that horrible thunderous noise then?”

“When His hand tears itself away from His body,” Bambi’s mother explained, “there’s a flash of fire and it makes a bang like thunder. On the inside that’s all He is, just fire.”

“Excuse me,” said Ronno. “There is some truth in saying He’s nothing but fire on the inside, but it’s wrong to say it’s His hand He uses. A strike from a hand could never cause injuries like that. You can see it for yourselves. It’s much more likely to be a tooth that He throws at us. Think about it, that would explain a lot. And so you die because He bites you.”

Young Karus breathed a deep sigh. “Will He never stop chasing us down?”

Then Marena spoke, the girl was now nearly an adult. “That means that one day He’ll come and join us and be as gentle as we are. He’ll play games with us, everyone in the forest will be happy and we’ll make peace together.”

Mrs. Nettla shrieked with laughter. “It’s best if He just stays where he is and leaves us alone!”

“You shouldn’t say things like that,” Auntie Ena admonished her.”

“And why not then?” retorted Mrs. Nettla as she became more heated. “That’s really not something I could imagine. Make peace with Him! He’s been murdering us for as long as we’ve been able to think, and our sisters and our mothers and our brothers! For all the time we’ve been in the world He never leaves us in peace, He kills us whenever he sees us ... and you want to make peace with him? That’s just so stupid!”

Marena looked at everyone with her gently sparkling eyes wide open. “There’s nothing stupid about making peace,” she said. “We’ve got to make peace.”

“I’m going to get something to eat,” said Mrs. Nettla as she turned round and ran off.

CHAPTER 11

The winter went on. Sometimes it became milder, but then the snow would come again, and each time it did it lay higher on the ground so that it was impossible to scrape it away. Worst of all was when it became warm enough for it to thaw, and then the snow that had melted into water would freeze when the night came. Then there would be a thin layer of ice which you could easily slip on. It would also often break, so that the sharp splinters would cut the deers' tender fetlocks, cut them bloody. But now there was a hard frost which had lasted for days. The air was clean and thin such as it never had been before and the frost was full of strength. It began to tinkle with a sound that was fine and high. It was so cold that the air sang.

Everything was quiet in the forest, but something shocking happened every day. One time, the crows attacked the hare's little son, who was already lying down ill, and killed him in a gruesome way. His cries of pain were long and pitiful and could be heard by all. Bambi's friend, the hare, was away at the time but when he heard the sad news he could not contain himself. Another time, the squirrel was running around with a serious wound on his neck from where the polecat had bitten him. By some miracle the squirrel had been able to get away from him. He could not speak because of the pain but he ran between all the twigs and branches. Everyone could see it. He ran like a madman. From time to time he would stop, sit down, raise his forepaws in confusion, take hold of his head in his shock and his suffering, and as he did so his blood gushed over his white breast and turned it red. He ran around like this for an hour, then he suddenly collapsed, fell hard against the branches of the tree and fell, dying, into the snow. A pair of magpies immediately came down on him and began their feasting. There was also the time when the fox attacked the pheasant and tore him to bits, even though everyone liked and respected the pheasant for his beauty and his

strength. His death was a cause for concern far and wide, and everyone felt sorry for his inconsolable widow. The fox had snatched the pheasant out of the snow he had settled in and where he thought he was well hidden. No-one could feel safe any more, as all these things happened in broad daylight. It seemed that the penury they were suffering would never come to an end, and it spread bitterness and ruthlessness all around. It made all experience worthless, it undermined the conscience, destroyed all trust and all good manners. There was no mercy any more, no peace, no holding back.

“It’s impossible even to think that it might ever get any better,” Bambi’s mother sighed.

Auntie Ena sighed too. “And it’s impossible to think that it ever was any better.”

“Don’t be silly,” said Marena looking straight ahead. “I think about how lovely it used to be all the time!”

“Listen,” Mrs. Nettla said to Auntie Ena. “Your little one is shivering, isn’t he!” And she pointed to Gobo. “Does he always shiver like that?”

“Sad to say,” answered Auntie Ena, somewhat worried, “he’s been shivering like that for several days now.”

“Well then,” said Mrs. Nettla in the open way she had of saying things, “I’m only glad I haven’t got any children any more. If he was my little one I’d be worried about whether he gets through the winter.”

Gobo indeed did not look well. He was weak, he had always been less strong than Bambi or Faline and had not grown as fast as those two. But now, he looked worse from day to day. He could not keep his food down, what little there was of it now. He was in continual pain. So, with the cold and the difficulties of life, he had lost all of what strength he had. He shivered all the time and could barely hold himself upright. Everyone looked at him with concern.

Mrs. Nettla went to him and gave him a friendly push in the side. "Now don't you be sad," she told him sternly. "That's not right for a young prince and it's bad for your health." She moved away from him because she did not want anyone to see how concerned she was.

Ronno was sitting in the snow to one side, but now he jumped up. "I don't know what that is ...," he mumbled and looked all around.

Everyone paid attention. "What what is ...?" they all asked.

"I don't really know," Ronno repeated, "but I'm worried ... all of a sudden I'm worried. It's as if there were something wrong ..."

Karus had tested the air. "I can't smell anything odd," he declared.

They all stood there, listening, and testing the air. "Nothing!," "I can't smell anything ...," they all said, one after the other.

"But still!" Ronno persisted. "You can say what you like ... but there is something wrong ..."

"The crows have been calling ..." said Marena.

"They're calling again now!" added Faline quickly, but by now the others had heard them too.

"Look, that's them, flying!," Karus pointed out to the others.

Everyone looked up. Above the tops of the trees, crows were flying away in swarms. They came inwards from the outermost edge of the woods, from wherever it was that the danger was approaching, and spoke anxiously to each other up there. It was clear that there was an exceptional disturbance of some sort.

"There, wasn't I right?" asked Ronno. "You can see that there's something going on!"

"What are we to do?" whispered Bambi's mother uneasily.

“Get away from here, now!” insisted Auntie Ena in alarm.

“Wait!” commanded Ronno.

“Wait? With all the children here?” Auntie Ena contradicted him.
“When Gobo won’t be able to run?”

“Alright then,” Ronno conceded “You get away from here with your children. I don’t see any point in it, of course, but I don’t want to have you blaming me for it later.”

He was serious and decisive.

“Gobo, Faline, come this way! Not too fast! Go slowly! Stay behind me,” Auntie Ena admonished them. She, with her children, slipped away.

A time went by. They stood still, listening and smelling the air.

“That’s all we need,” Mrs. Nettla began. “We’ve got to put up with all of this and now, this is all we need!” She was very cross. Bambi looked at her and felt that she was thinking of something dreadful.

Now the magpies were also coming out of the same part of the thicket as the crows had come, three or four at a time. “Look out, look out!” they cried. They still could not be seen, but their loud warnings could be heard one after another: “Look out, look out!” Now they came nearer, continued to flap their wings, shocked and disturbed.

“Hakh!” the jays cried, yapping loud in their alarm.

Suddenly, and all at the same time, all the deer came together. It had seared through them as if they had been hit by something. Now they stood still and breathed heavily.

It was Him.

There was a frenzy of smelling the air like never before. There was now nothing left to examine. The smell entered their noses, befogged their senses and made their hearts freeze.

The magpies were still playing about, the jays above them were yapping, but now there was agitated movement everywhere. The tits swished between the branches, hundreds of little feathery balls, and they chirruped “away, away!” The blackbirds rushed dark and lightning-fast above the trees, with long drawn out screams of chirping as they flew. The deer looked down at the white snow through the network of bare twigs on the bushes, and saw a confused rush of small shadowy figures as they ran to and fro. They were the pheasants. Further away there was a shimmer of red. That was actually the fox, but no-one was afraid of him now, for continuous, broad waves of that dreadful smell wafted to them, breathing alarm into their minds and uniting them all into one crazy fear and into one feverish desire to flee, to save themselves.

This mysterious, overpowering scent permeated the wood with such power that they could tell that He was not alone this time but seemed to have come with all His friends, and things were at their most extreme.

They did not move, they watched the tits as they hurried away with frantic flapping of their wings, The blackbirds, the squirrels rushed away leaping from one tree top to another; they thought these little ones had no good reason to be afraid, but they nonetheless understood why they fled when He could be smelt. There was no creature in the forest who could bear to have Him anywhere near.

Now our friend, the hare, hopped away hesitantly, sat still, and hopped further.

“How does it look?” Karus called to him, impatiently.

But our friend, the hare, just looked around, madness in his eyes, and could not speak straight away. He was very disturbed.

“What’s the point of asking ...” said Ronno grimly.

Our friend the hare gasped for breath. “We are surrounded,” he said in a monotone. “There’s no way out on any side. He is everywhere!”

Just then they heard His voice. Twenty times, thirty times He called out. Hoho! Haha! It rang out and shook them more than thunder and lightning. It struck the trunks of the trees which trumpeted the sound out. It brought them horror, it threw them down. A distant rustling and cracking of the undergrowth as the bushes were pushed apart and the sound forced itself over to them, the screams and bangs of twigs as they broke.

He was coming! He was coming right here, into the thicket.

Now, behind them, they could hear short whistles and trills. Already, there was a pheasant there standing up as he heard His steps. They heard the flapping of the pheasant’s wings fading as he rose high into the air. A flash and a clap of thunder. Quiet. Then the muffled sound of something hitting the ground. “The pheasant has fallen,” said Bambi’s mother with a shudder.

“The first ...” added Ronno.

Then Marena, the young girl, spoke. “There are many of us who are going to die very soon. I might be one of them.” No-one listened to her. Now the great terror was among them.

Bambi tried to think. But the raging noise, which He was raising higher and higher, tore all his thoughts apart. Bambi could hear nothing but this noise, a noise that made you numb, and in among all this howling, bellowing and banging he could hear the thump of his own heart. All he felt was curiosity and was completely unaware that all his limbs were shaking. Now and then his mother came close to his ear and said, “Stay with me.” She shouted, but in all that uproar it seemed to Bambi that she was whispering. This “Stay with me” offered him some support. It held him fast as if he were held in place with a chain, otherwise he would have run away without a second

thought, and he always heard it again just when he would have lost self control fled. He looked around. There was a crowd of many different people running around in a blind panic between each other. A pair of weasels ran past, slender lines like a snake which it nearly impossible to follow with the eye. A polecat listened spellbound for all the information he could get from the stuttering, confused hare. The fox stood there among the disordered rush of the pheasants. They paid no attention to him, ran right past his nose, and he paid no attention to them. Without becoming excited, his head stretched forward, his ears pointing up high, his nose working hard, he strained himself to hear through the tumult as it came closer. The only thing moving was his tail. It looked as if he were straining to think. A pheasant hurried past, out from behind, out of the most serious danger, and he was in a panic. "Don't go up there!" he shouted to the other birds. "Don't go up there ... just run! Don't let them get you! Nobody go up there! Just run, run, run!" He kept on repeating the same thing, as if he were trying to warn himself. But he no longer knew what he was saying. A clamour of "Hoho! Haha!" seemed to come from somewhere quite close. "Don't let them get you!" called the pheasant. At the same time his voice suddenly became a whistle-like sobbing, with a loud rattle he spread his wings and flew upwards. Bambi watched him as he went, flapping his wings loudly, flying up directly and steeply between the trees, his resplendent body glittering with its metallic dark blue, gold-brown sheen, as majestic as a precious gem. His long tail feathers swept proudly behind him like the train of a gown. The curt thunderclap rang out sharp. The pheasant in the sky collapsed suddenly into himself, twisted himself round as if trying to snap at his feet with his beak, and hurtled heavily to the ground. He fell in the middle of the others and moved no more.

Now no-one was able to stay calm. They all rushed around away from each other. Five, six pheasants rose into the air with noisy clattering. "Don't go up there" shouted the others as they ran. The thunderclap came again, five times, six times, and some of those who had flown up in the air fell back to the ground lifeless.

“Now, come with me!” said Bambi’s mother. Bambi looked up. Ronno and Karus had already gone. Mrs. Nettla had also disappeared. Only Marena was still with them. Bambi went with his mother. Marena demurely followed them. All around them there was upheaval, loud cracks, bellowing and thunderclaps. Bambi’s mother stayed calm. She was trembling, just slightly, but she kept her thoughts together. “Bambi, my child” she said, “always stay right behind me. We’ve got to get out of here and across the clearing. But here inside we need to go slowly.”

The bellowing became more hurried. The thunderclaps came ten, twelve times, thrown out from the hands of Him.

“Stop that” said Bambi’s mother. “Don’t run! Once we’ve gone past the clearing then run, run as fast as you can. And Bambi, my child, don’t forget, you shouldn’t pay me any attention once we’ve reached the outside. Even if I fall, pay me no attention ... just keep going, keep going! Do you understand, Bambi?”

His mother made deliberate steps through the booming noise. The pheasants ran in all directions, pressed themselves into the snow, jumped out again, started to run once more. The whole family of the hare jumped here and there, sat down, ran again. No-one spoke a word. There were all exhausted with their fear, crippled by all the bellowing and by the thunderclaps.

Ahead of Bambi and his mother it was getting lighter. Through the cage-work of the bushes shone the clearing. Behind them, getting closer and closer, there were startling bangs that rattled on the tree trunks, the cracking of twigs as they broke, the yells of haha, and hoho!

Now their friend the hare with his two young rushed past close beside them and into the clearing. Bang! Ping! Bam! the thunder crashed. Bambi saw the hare did a somersault as he ran, and fell with his pale belly facing upwards and then just lay there. He twitched a few times, and then he was still. Bambi stood there as if made of stone.

But from behind he heard shouts of, "They're there! Everyone, just get out!"

A widespread rustling of wings as they hurriedly unfurled, whistling, sobbing, swoosh of foliage, flapping. The pheasants rose up, lifted themselves up almost all at the same time like the straw in a sheaf. The air burst with many thunderclaps, and the muffled impact of the fallen could be heard as they hit the ground, the fine whistling of the survivors rang out as they flew away.

Bambi stopped and looked back. There He was. He was coming out from the undergrowth, here and there and there again. He was appearing everywhere, striking everywhere, damaging the bushes, drumming on the tree trunks and shouting terrifying cries.

"Now!" said his mother. "Straight ahead. And don't come too close behind me!" With one leap she was out of the woods, so that the snow merely threw up a few flakes. Bambi hurried after her. They were attacked by the sound of thunder from every side. It was as if the Earth had been ripped in half. Bambi saw nothing. He ran. The urge to get away from this tumult had been accumulating, away from the steam of the storm that whipped everything up, from the gathering urgency to flee, the wish to save himself, all these were now unleashed. He ran. It seemed to him that he saw his mother fall, although he did not know whether she really had done. He felt a veil around his eyes. It had been thrown over him by the fear of the thunderclaps, booming all around him, which had now broken out. He was unable to think, unable to see, he ran.

The clearing was now behind him. A new thicket took him in. From behind him came another shout, another sharp thunderclap, and in the twigs above there was a very brief rattling, like a first spray of hailstones. Then it became quieter. Bambi ran. A pheasant with a twisted neck lay dying on the snow, twitching his wings weakly. As he heard Bambi approach he stopped his spasmodic movements and whispered, "It's finished ...". Bambi paid him no attention and continued running. He found himself in a tangle of undergrowth that forced him to slow his pace and look for a path. He kicked around himself impatiently. "Over here," called somebody in a broken voice. Bambi had no choice but to follow it, and immediately found himself in a place where he could walk. But in front of him somebody was struggling to get to her feet. It was the hare's wife. It was her who had called. "Do you think you could give me a little help?" she said. Bambi looked at her and was shocked. Her rear legs dragged lifeless through the snow which was red and beginning to melt from the warm blood that dropped from her. She said once again, "Do you think you could give me a little help?" She spoke as if she were perfectly alright, relaxed and almost gay. "I don't know what's happened to me," she continued, "it's certainly not anything important ... but at the moment ... I can't walk ...". As she spoke she sank down onto her side and she was dead. Bambi, once again, was horrified and he ran away.

"Bambi!"

He stopped abruptly. That was one of his own people.

It was heard again, "Bambi ... is it you?"

There was Gobo stuck helplessly in the snow. He had no strength at all and could not even get onto his feet. He lay there as if he had been buried and merely raised his head weakly. Bambi went over to him in some agitation.

"Where's your mother, Gobo?" he gasped, "and where's Faline?" Bambi spoke quickly, agitated and impatient. In his anxiety his heart

continued to beat hard.

“Mother and Faline had to go,” answered Gobo in despair. He spoke gently, but as earnest and as wise as a grownup. “They had to leave me lying here. I’ve had it. You’ve got to go too, Bambi.”

“Get up!” Bambi yelled. “Gobo, get up! You’ve been resting long enough. There isn’t any more time for that! Get up! Come with me!”

“No, just leave it, Bambi,” answered Gobo quietly, “I can’t stand up. It’s impossible. I wish I could come with you, you know that, but I’m just too weak.”

“What’s going to happen to you then?” Bambi persisted.

“I don’t know. I expect I’ll die,” said Gobo simply.

The shouting started again and the sound of it came over to them. Between the shouts, new thunderclaps. Bambi was alarmed. There were rapid bangs and cracks from the undergrowth, rumblings sped across the snow, and in among the uproar young Karus came galloping over to them. “Run!” he called when he saw Bambi there. “Don’t just stand there, anyone who still can run, run!” He went past them in an instant and his headlong flight yanked Bambi along with him. Bambi was hardly aware whether he had started running again or not, and it was only a while later that he said, “Farewell, Gobo.” But by that time he was already too far away. Gobo could no longer hear him.

He ran through the woods, penetrated by the noise and the thunderclaps that seemed to be seeking him out, he ran around until it was evening. When darkness swept down it became quiet. There was soon a light wind blowing, helping to blow away that horrible storm that had been raging far and wide. But the terror remained. The first person Bambi saw whom he knew was Ronno. His limp was worse than ever. “Over there, where the oaks are,” Ronno said, “the fox is there, lying wounded. I’ve just come past him. It’s terrible, the way he’s suffering. He’s biting at the snow and in the earth.”

“Have you seen my mother?” Bambi asked.

“No,” answered Ronno shyly, and he quickly went away.

Later in the night Bambi came across Mrs. Nettla with Faline. All three were very glad to see each other.

“Have you seen my mother?” Bambi asked.

“No,” replied Faline. “I don’t even know where my mother is.”

“No,” said Mrs. Nettla cheerfully, “and that’s a fine mess for me. I was glad when I didn’t have to put up with children any more, and now suddenly I’ve got two of them I’ve got to look after. Thanks a lot!”

Bambi and Faline laughed.

They start talking about Gobo. Bambi told them about how he had found him, and that made them so sad that they began to cry. But Mrs. Nettla wouldn’t allow them to cry. “You’ve got to see that the most important thing now is to find something to eat. It’s unheard of! We haven’t had a bite to eat all day.” She led the two of them to a place where there was still some greenery, hanging low and still not quite dried out. Mrs. Nettla was exceptionally well-informed. She did not touch anything herself but urged Bambi and Faline to take a good meal. At places where she knew there was grass she pushed the snow aside and ordered them, “Here ... here is a good place,” or she would say, “Wait ... we can soon find something better than this.” But between giving this advice she would grumble, “This is so stupid! Children are so much trouble!”

Suddenly they saw Auntie Ena coming and they ran up to her. “Auntie Ena!” Bambi exclaimed. He was the first to have seen her. Faline was beside herself with joy and jumped up to her. “Mother!” But Ena was crying, and she was dead tired.

“We’ve lost Gobo,” she lamented. “I’ve been looking for him ... I’ve been to his sleeping place, out there in the snow where he collapsed

... it was empty ... he's gone ... my poor little Gobo ..."

Mrs. Nettla grumbled, "You'd do better to try to find out which way he went, that would be more sensible than crying."

"There are no tracks to show which way he went," said Auntie Ena.

"But ... He! ... He left lots of tracks ... He was there where Gobo was sleeping ..."

They were all silent. Then Bambi asked timidly, "Auntie Ena ... have you seen my mother?"

"No," replied Auntie Ena, quietly.

Bambi was never to see his mother again.

CHAPTER 12

The meadow had long since lost its catkins. Everything began to turn green, although the young leaves on the bushes and the trees were still small. Shimmering in the tender light of early morning they showed a smiling freshness and seemed like little children when they have just woken up.

Bambi stood in front of a hazel bush, striking his new crown against the wood. That was so enjoyable. And it was also necessary, as the glory of his head was still wrapped in velvet and fur. They had to come off, that was a matter of course; and no-one with any sense of tidiness would just wait for them to fall off by themselves. Bambi swept his crown so that the coating of velvet was torn into shreds, and long strips of it dangled around his ears. While he struck up and down at the hazel bush he felt that his crown was harder than it had been. This feeling permeated his whole being and gave him an inebriating sense of pride and strength. He pushed himself harder against the bush and this coating was torn off in long pieces. The naked, white wood could be seen, and in the unfamiliar open air it quickly turned a rusty red. Bambi was not able to care about that. He saw the pale flesh of the wood flash up under his movements, and that enchanted him. Here in this round place there were many other hazel bushes and dogwood bushes that showed the marks of his efforts.

“Have you nearly finished then ...?” said a cheerful voice from nearby.

Bambi threw his head up and looked around.

There sat the squirrel with a friendly look on his face.

Bambi and the squirrel were nearly startled by the woodpecker who, sitting close in to the trunk of the oak tree, called down, "Oh, please excuse me ... I always 'ave to laugh when I see the two of you like that."

"What is it then that's making you laugh so loudly?" asked Bambi politely.

"Well then," thought the woodpecker, "you're doing the whole thing wrong. For one thing, you ought to have chosen a tree that's stronger, you won't get anything from a thin little hazel bush."

"What should I be getting, then?" asked Bambi.

"Beetles ..." the woodpecker laughed. "Beetles and grubs ... Look, this is how you do it!" He drummed on trunk of the oak. Tok, tok, tok, tok.

The squirrel rushed up to him and quarrelsomely asked, "What do you think you're talking about? The prince isn't looking for beetles and grubs ..."

"Why not?" asked the woodpecker complacently. They taste delicious ... "He bit into a beetle, swallowed it, and went on drumming.

"You don't understand," the squirrel scolded again. "A noble gentleman like this has other, higher goals to pursue. You just make yourself look ridiculous."

"It doesn't matter to me," the woodpecker replied. "I don't care a thing about these higher goals of yours," he called cheerfully and flew away.

The squirrel scampered back down.

"Don't you know me?" he asked, looking very satisfied with himself.

“I think I do know you,” was Bambi’s friendly answer. “You live up there ...” And he indicated the oak tree above them.

The squirrel looked at him with a grin. “You’re confusing me with my grandmother,” he said. “I knew it. I knew you were confusing me with my grandmother. My grandmother lived up there ever since she was a child, Prince Bambi. She often told me about you. Only ... only then she was killed by the polecat ... a long time ago, that was ... in the wintertime ... don’t you remember?”

“Yes, I do,” Bambi nodded. “I heard about it.”

“Well then ... and after that my father moved in here,” the squirrel told him. He sat up, showed astonishment in his eyes, and held both his paws politely on his white breast. “But ... you might also be confusing me with my father. Did you know my father?”

“I’m afraid not,” Bambi answered. “I never did have that pleasure.”

“That’s what I thought!” exclaimed the squirrel in satisfaction. “My father was so surly and shy. He didn’t have any contact with anyone.”

“Where is he now?” Bambi asked.

“Oh,” said the squirrel, “a month ago the owl got him. Yes. And now it’s me who lives up here. I’m very satisfied with it. Just think, it was up here that I was born.”

Bambi began to turn and was about to go.

“Wait,” called the squirrel quickly. “I didn’t really mean to tell you all that stuff. I wanted to say something completely different.”

Bambi stayed where he was. “What was that then?” he asked patiently.

“Yeah ... what was that?” The squirrel thought about it, then made another sudden leap, sat upright leaning against his magnificent

bushy tail, and looked at Bambi. "Right! Now I've got it," he continued to burble. "I wanted to tell you that you'll soon be ready with that crown of yours, and it's going to be very beautiful."

"Do you think so?" asked Bambi, pleased.

"Beautiful!" declared the squirrel, and in his enthusiasm he pressed both his forepaws against his white breast. "So high! So majestic! And such long, bright points! You don't often find them like that!"

"Really?" Bambi asked. He became so pleased that he went back to the hazel bush and started striking at it for a little while longer. The velvet was thrown around into the air in long strands.

Meanwhile the squirrel went on speaking. "I really must say that others of your age don't have a crown as magnificent as yours. You wouldn't think it's possible. Anyone who knew you last summer – and I did catch sight of you a few times in the distance - probably wouldn't believe you're the same deer ... such thin little sticks you had in those days ..."

Bambi suddenly stopped. "Goodbye," he said hurriedly, "I have to go!" And he ran off.

He did not like being reminded of the previous summer. It had been a difficult time for him. First of all, after his mother had disappeared he had felt totally abandoned. The winter had been so long, the spring came hesitantly and it was a long time before anything green appeared. Without Mrs. Nettla Bambi would not have been able to manage, but she had taken him in and helped him in every way she could. Nonetheless, he often found himself alone. He missed Gobo all the time, poor Gobo, who must now be dead, like the others. Gobo was continually on his mind at this time, and it was only too late that he realized how lovable and he had been. He rarely saw Faline. She always stayed close to her mother, and turned out to be remarkably shy. Later, when, at last, it had become warm, Bambi began to recover his mood. He wiped his first crown clean of its velvet and was very proud of it. But a bitter disappointment was soon

to follow. The other crown-wearers chased him away whenever they saw him. They pushed him away angrily, they would not tolerate him going close to anyone, mishandled him, until, with every step he took, he was afraid of being found by them, afraid of being seen anywhere, and he crept along the most hidden paths with a feeling of being oppressed. At the same time, while the days became warmer and sunnier, he became gripped by a strange unease. His heart became ever more oppressed with a yearning that was both painful and welcome. Whenever he happened to see Faline or one of her friends in the distance he was overcome by a storm of excitement that he could not understand. It even happened quite often that that he would recognize just a trace of where she had been, or that he would draw in breath to test the air and smell that she was nearby. He felt irresistibly drawn to her ever more often. But if he gave in to this longing that drew him to her it always turned out badly. Either he would find no-one and in the end, tired out after wandering about for so long, have to acknowledge that the others were avoiding him, or he came across one of the crowned heads, who would immediately leap out at him, hit him, push him and drive him away, shouting insults. Worst of all, Ronno and Karus had taken against him. No, that was not a happy time.

And now the squirrel had stupidly reminded him of it. He suddenly became quite wild and began to run. The tits and the wrens flew out of the bushes in alarm as he went past them and asked each other urgently, "Who's that then ... Who was that?" Bambi did not hear them. A pair of magpies laughed nervously, "Has something happened?" The jay was cross and shouted, "What's going on?" Bambi paid him no attention. Above him the oriole flew from tree to tree, "Good morning ... I'm ... hap-hap-happy!" Bambi made no answer. All around him the thicket was already light and the rays of the sun ran through it in fine beams. Bambi did not bother about that. There was a sudden loud rattling sound from near his feet; a whole rainbow of gorgeous colours flashed up and shone into his eyes so that he was dazzled and he stopped. It was Janello, the pheasant, who had shot into the air in startlement because Bambi had nearly stepped on him. He rushed away, scolding Bambi as he went.

“Unheard of!” he shouted in his cracked, crow-like voice. Bambi was bewildered and watched him go. “Well it’s turned out alright, but you really were being very careless ...” said a soft, twittering voice from nearby on the ground. It was Janelline, the pheasant’s wife. She sat, brooding, on the ground. My husband was terribly alarmed,” she continued, dissatisfied, “and so was I. But I can’t move from this spot ... I can’t move from this spot whatever happens ... you could very easily have trodden on me ...”

Bambi was slightly ashamed. “Oh, I’m sorry,” he stuttered, “I wasn’t paying attention.”

Janelline answered, “Oh, please! Maybe it wasn’t quite that bad. But my husband and I, we’re so nervous at present. You understand ...”

Bambi understood nothing at all and went on his way. He had become calmer now. All around him the wood was singing. The light became warmer and more golden, the leaves on the bushes, the grass on the ground and steam rising from the damp earth took on a sharp aroma. Bambi’s youthful strength swelled up in him and stretched out into all his limbs so that he became quite stiff, his movements became hesitant as if he were something artificial.

He went over to a small elder bush and, lifting his knees high into the air, he struck against the ground with powerful blows so that clods of earth flew up from it. His fine, sharp, cloven hoof cut the grass away that was growing here, wild peas and wild leeks, violets and snowdrops, he scraped them all away till the earth lay before him quite dashed and bare. With each blow a dull thump could be heard.

Bambi caught the attention of two moles who had been tumbling around at the roots of an old privet bush. They looked up and watched him. “But ... that’s just ridiculous, what he’s doing,” whispered one of them. “That’s not how you dig ...”

The other raised the fine corners of his mouth into a jeering grin. “He’s got no idea ... that’s obvious ... But that’s what you get when people do things they don’t understand.”

Bambi suddenly stopped, lifted his head up high, listened, and looked around at the undergrowth. There was a flash of red between the twigs, it was unclear, but he could make out the points of a crown. Bambi snorted. Whoever it was creeping about there, Ronno or Karus or anyone else – go at him! I'll show him I'm not afraid of them any more, he thought! It was as if he had suddenly been taken over by his own exhilaration. I'll show them that I'm the one they should be afraid of!

He ran into the bushes with such force that they rattled, the branches cracked and broke. Now, Bambi could see the other deer in front of him. He was not able to recognize him because everything was swimming in front of his eyes. He could think of nothing but that he should go at him! With his crown lowered deep he stormed forward, gathering all his strength into his neck, ready to strike. He could already smell his opponent's hairy coat, could already see nothing in front of him but the red wall of his flank. Then the other made a very gentle movement. Bambi had expected him to stay still but he was robbed of this advantage when he rushed at him his antlers met nothing but thin air. He nearly fell over, but he staggered, pulled himself together, and swung back round to renew his attack.

The he saw who the elder was.

Bambi was so surprised he lost control of himself. He would have been ashamed to simply run from the spot, although that was what he most wanted to do. And he was ashamed to stay. He did not move.

“What's this then?” the elder asked quietly. His deep voice, at the same time so relaxed and so imperious, drove itself, as it always did, straight through the centre of Bambi's heart. He remained silent.

The elder asked again, “What's all this?”

“I ... I thought,” stammered Bambi. “I th ... thought it was Ronno or ...” He became silent and dared to look shyly at the elder, and as he looked he became even more bewildered.

The aged one stood there, motionless and powerful. His head had, by now, turned perfectly white, and his dark, proud eyes shone from their depths.

“Why not against me ...?” the aged one asked.

Bambi looked at him, filled with a remarkable enthusiasm and shuddering with a mysterious thrill. He wanted to call out, “Because I love you!” But, instead, he answered, “I don’t know ...”

The aged one looked at him. “I haven’t seen you for a long time. You’ve grown big and strong.”

Bambi gave no answer. He trembled with joy.

The elder continued, he wanted to test him and make his assessment of him. Then, surprisingly, he stepped very close to Bambi, causing Bambi much alarm. “Whatever you do, do it with nobility ...,” the aged one said.

He turned away, and in the next moment he was gone. Bambi remained on the same spot for a long time afterwards.

CHAPTER 13

It was summertime and burning hot. The yearning began to rise again in Bambi, the yearning that he had felt earlier, but this time it was much stronger than before, it boiled his blood and made him restless.

He wandered far and wide.

One day, he came across Faline. He had not expected to find her at all, for his thoughts were at that time very confused from all the restless yearning that had possessed him, and he had not realized she was there. Now she was standing in front of him. For a while he was speechless and merely stared at her, then, awestruck, he said, "Faline ... you've become so beautiful ..."

Faline retorted, "Can you still recognize me then?"

"Of course I can still recognize you!" Bambi exclaimed. "We grew up together, didn't we?"

Faline sighed. "It's been so long since we saw each other." And then she added, "People can become complete strangers to each other," but she said it in a teasing way, simple and elegant, like she had used to do.

They remained together, where they were.

"This path here," said Bambi after a long pause, "this is the path I used to go along with my mother when I was a child..."

"It leads to the meadow," said Faline.

"It was on the meadow that I first saw you," said Bambi, almost gaily. "Do you remember?"

“Yes,” Faline answered, “me and Gobo.” She sighed gently. “Poor Gobo.”

Bambi repeated her. “Poor Gobo.”

Then they began to talk about those days and frequently asked each other, “Do you remember?” It turned out, to their delight, that they both remembered everything.

“Out there, on the meadow,” Bambi recalled, “we played tag ... remember?”

“I think we did ...,” said Faline, and then she jumped away in a flash. At first Bambi just stood there, wondering what had happened, but then he rushed after her. “Wait! Wait for me!” he shouted gaily.

“No, I’m not going to wait,” Faline teased him. “I’m in a tremendous hurry!” And in short leaps she curved her way far across the bushes and grass. Finally, Bambi caught up with her, blocked her way, and then they stood quietly together. They laughed, and were very contented.

Faline suddenly jumped into the air as if something had stung her and leapt away again. Bambi rushed after her. Faline made a curve, and then another, threw herself from side to side and got away from Bambi time after time.

“Stay where you are!” he gasped. “Just stay where you are ... I’ve got to ask you something.”

Faline stood still. She was curious and asked “What do you need to ask me?”

Bambi said nothing.

“Oh, well if you’re just cheating ...” said Faline and was about to run off.

“No!” Bambi quickly exclaimed. “Stay there ... I want ... I want to ask you ... do you love me, Faline?”

She looked at him with even more curiosity than before and felt slightly wary. “I don’t know.”

“Yes you do,” Bambi insisted. “You must know! And I know it too, I can feel it perfectly well that I love you. I’ve got a furious love for you, Faline. So now tell me, do you love me?”

“Maybe, it could well be that I’m fond of you,” she answered casually.

“And will you stay with me?” enquired Bambi, becoming more excited.

“If you ask me nicely” ... said Faline gaily.

Bambi lost control of himself and exclaimed. “I am asking you, Faline! My love, my beautiful Faline, do you hear me? I’m asking you with all my heart!”

“Then I certainly will stay with you,” said Faline softly – and then she was gone.

Enchanted, Bambi shot off again in pursuit of her. Faline swept across the meadow, turned sharply and disappeared into a thicket. But when Bambi also turned suddenly in order to follow her there was a stormy rustling in the bushes, and out sprang Karus.

“Stop!” he called.

Bambi did not understand. He was too occupied with Faline. “Let me pass,” he said hurriedly, “I haven’t got the time for you!”

“Go away from here!” Karus ordered him crossly. “Go away, now! If not I will hunt you down till there’s not an ounce of breath left in you. I forbid you to chase after Faline!”

Slowly, Bambi began to remember the previous summer, when he was so often humiliated by being chased away. He suddenly became angry. He said not a word, but immediately lowered his crown and threw himself at Karus.

He hit him with such force than no-one could have resisted it and Karus was lying in the grass before he knew what had happened to him.

He got up again as fast as lightning, but he was barely back on his feet when he was struck by another blow that left him reeling.

“Bambi!” he shouted, and was about to shout a second time, “Bam...” when a third blow slid down from his shoulder and caused so much pain it took his breath away.

Karus jumped to one side to avoid receiving yet another blow from Bambi. He suddenly felt remarkably weak, and realized, to his disgust, that this was now a matter of life and death. A cold fear took hold of him. He turned to flee from Bambi who was rushing close behind, and realized from Bambi’s silence that in every sense, his anger and his ruthlessness, he was determined to kill him. Karus fell into a panic. He turned away from the path, used the last of his strength to break through into the bushes, there was nothing he could wish for, nothing he could think of, other than to yearn for mercy or for rescue.

Bambi suddenly stopped and left him alone. Karus was so terrified that he did not notice this and ran on through the bushes, as well as he could.

But Bambi had stopped because he had heard the fine call of Faline. He listened, there she called again, in fear, oppressed. He immediately turned round and hurried back.

Once he was back on the meadow he saw her just as she was fleeing into the thicket, pursued by Ronno.

“Ronno!” called Bambi. He was not aware that he had called out.

Ronno was not able to run very fast because his limp held him back, and he stopped.

“Well, look who it is,” he said in a genteel tone, “it’s little Bambi! Can I help you in any way?”

“I want,” said Bambi, calmly but in a voice that was distorted by the anger he was suppressing and the power he held back, “I want you to leave Faline alone and I want you to go away, immediately.”

“Oh, is that all?” said Ronno with contempt. “What a cheeky young lad you’ve turned into ... I never would have expected that of you.”

“Ronno,” said Bambi even more gently, “it’s for your sake that I want it. Because if you don’t go away now you will wish you could run away on those legs of yours, but you won’t be able to run away any more ...”

“What?!” Ronno called out crossly, “Because I’ve got a limp, is it? Is that why you talk to me like that? You can hardly notice it anyway. Or perhaps, after seeing what a pitiful coward Karus was, you think I’m frightened of you. Let me tell you this ...”

“No, Ronno,” Bambi interrupted him, “let me tell you something: Go Away!” His voice quivered as he spoke. “I’ve always liked you, Ronno. I’ve always thought you’re very clever and I’ve felt respect for you because you’re much older than me. But now I’m telling you, for the last time, go away ... I haven’t got any more patience left ...!”

“Pity you’ve got so little patience,” said Ronno with contempt. “A great pity for you, lad. But now just calm down, I’ll soon be finished with you. You won’t have to wait long. Or maybe you’ve forgotten how many times I’ve pushed you along.”

Bambi had no words to put against this reminder and was no longer able to control himself. He rushed at Ronno like a madman, and

Ronno received him with his head lowered. They crashed together. Ronno stood his ground and wondered why Bambi did not back away. He was also astonished at this sudden attack, he had not expected Bambi to attack at all. He felt uncomfortable at Bambi's enormous strength and realized he would need to pull himself together. They stood there, pressed brow to brow, and Ronno decided he would use a trick. He backed away suddenly so that Bambi lost his balance and tumbled over.

But Bambi raised himself on his hind legs and threw himself at Ronno with twice as much fury, before Ronno had even found the time to stand firm. There was a sharp crack as one of the branches of Ronno's crown broke. He thought his entire forehead had been smashed. He saw stars in front of his eyes and heard a swishing in his ears. In the next moment a powerful blow tore open his shoulder. He had no breath, he lay on the floor and Bambi stood angrily over him.

"Leave me alone," Ronno groaned.

Bambi continued to strike him anywhere he could. There was a gleam in his eyes. He seemed to have no thought of showing any mercy.

"Please ... just stop," Ronno begged him, pitifully. "You do know I walk with a limp ... I was only making a joke ... spare me ... don't you understand a joke ...?"

Bambi, without a word, stopped his attack. With great effort, Ronno stood up. He was bleeding and he staggered. Without a word, he limped away.

Bambi was about to go into the thicket to find Faline, but then she came out of it. She had been standing close to the edge of the trees and seen everything. "That was wonderful," she said with a laugh. But then she became serious and gently added, "I love you."

The two of them went on their way together and they were very happy.

CHAPTER 14

One day they were deep in the woods looking for the little clearing where Bambi had last come across the elder. Bambi told Faline about him with great enthusiasm.

“Maybe we’ll find him again, I really want to find him again.”

“That would be nice,” said Faline perkily. “I’d really like to talk with him some time.” But she was not telling the truth. She may well have been curious, but in fact she was afraid of the elder.

The sky was already light grey, the sun was about to rise.

They ambled along next to each other into the place where the bushes and wild cabbages stood isolated from other vegetation, so that there was a clear view in all directions. They heard a rustling not far away. They immediately stopped and looked in that direction. The stag strode slowly and powerfully through the bushes and into the clearing. In the twilight it was not possible to see any colours, and he appeared as an enormous grey shadow.

Faline immediately screamed. Bambi took hold of himself. He was, of course, just as startled as Faline and her scream only made it worse, but her voice had sounded so helpless that he felt pity for her and forced himself to reassure her.

“What’s the matter then?” he whispered anxiously, but there was a tremble in his voice. “What’s the matter. He won’t do us any harm!”

Faline simply continued screaming.

“Don’t get so upset, my love. It’s not nice,” Bambi urged her. “It’s ridiculous to always be afraid of these gentlemen. They are relatives of ours, after all.”

But Faline did not want to hear anything about their being relatives. She stood there, very stiff, stared at the stag as he went unbothered on his way, and she screamed and screamed.

“Pull yourself together,” scolded Bambi, “what’s he going to think of us?”

There was nothing that could have calmed Faline down. “He can think what he wants,” she shouted, and went on screaming. “Ah-oh! Ba-oh! ... nobody should ever be as big as that!”

She continued to scream, “Ba-oh!” and went on to say, “Leave me alone ... I can’t help it! I have to! Ba-oh! Ba-oh! Ba-oh!”

The stag was now standing in the little clearing and looking languidly in the grass for something tasty to eat.

As he looked alternately at Faline as she panicked and at the calm and relaxed stag, something rose up in Bambi. The words of comfort he had offered to Faline had also helped him to overcome his own alarm at the sight of the stag. Now he scolded himself for falling into a pitiful state every time he saw the stag; a state where horror, excitement, admiration and inferiority were all mixed together and made him suffer.

“That’s all nonsense,” he decided with much effort, “now I’m going to go right up to him and introduce myself.”

“Don’t do that!” shouted Faline, “don’t do that! Ba-oh! Something terrible will happen, ba-oh!”

“I’m going to do it whatever happens,” Bambi retorted. The stag, so relaxed as he picked out all the best things to eat, paid no attention at all to Faline as she screamed. It seemed to Bambi that he was far too haughty. He felt injured and humiliated. “I’m going out there,” he said. “Just calm down! Nothing’s going to happen, you’ll see. You wait here.”

He actually did go out there. But Faline did not wait. She did not want to wait, not in the slightest, and nor did she have the courage to do so. She swung round and ran away and could still be heard as she got further and further away: “Ba-oh! Ba-oh!”

Bambi would have liked to go after her, but that was no longer really possible. He pulled himself together and went forward.

Through the twigs and branches he could see the stag standing in the clearing, his head lowered to the ground.

Bambi felt his heart thumping as he went out there.

The stag immediately raised his head high and looked over at him. Then, as if confused, he looked straight ahead.

Bambi saw both these movements as very haughty, the way the stag had looked at him and the way he was now occupied with looking straight ahead as if there were nobody there.

Bambi did not know what he should do. He had come out here with the firm intention of speaking to the stag. Good morning, he would have said, my name is Bambi ... may I ask what your name is, sir?

Certainly! He had imagined this as flowing very smoothly, and now it turned out not to be as simple as he had thought. What was the use, here, of having the best intentions? Bambi did not want to seem to be badly brought up, but that is how he would seem if he came out here without saying a word. Nor did he want to impose himself on the stag, but that was what he would be doing if he started speaking.

The stag stood there in indignant majesty. Bambi was alarmed and felt humiliated. He tried in vain to shake himself into doing something and just one thought kept running through his head: Why should I let him frighten me ...? I'm just as good as he is ... just as good as he is!

It did not help. Bambi continued to feel frightened and felt deep in the heart of him that he was not just as good as he is. Not by a long way.

He felt pitiful, and he needed all his strength to keep any kind of dignity.

The stag looked at him and thought: He is charming ... truly delightful ... so good looking ... so elegant ... so fine in all his movements. But I'd better not stare at him like this. That would really not be proper. And I might even embarrass him.

And he looked away from Bambi and went back to gazing into the distance.

That haughty look, Bambi decided! It's unbearable, the way he puffs himself up!

The stag thought: I'd like to talk with him ... he seems so likeable ... it's so stupid, the way that people never talk to each other! And he continued to occupy himself with gazing thoughtfully into the distance.

I'm just like the air for him, said Bambi, people like that always act as if they were the only people in the world!

But what should I say to him ...? the stag wondered. I've never had any practice in this ... I'd say something ridiculous and make a fool of myself ... as I'm sure he's very clever.

Bambi pulled himself together and looked hard at the stag. He's so majestic! he thought, still unsure of himself.

Well ... perhaps another time ... the stag finally concluded, and he walked away, unsatisfied but majestic.

Bambi, embittered, stayed where he was.

CHAPTER 15

The forest was steaming under the burning sun. Ever since it had risen it had been drinking all the clouds out of the sky, even the tiniest wisps, and now it reigned alone in the expanse of blue, made pale by the heat. Over the meadows and the treetops the air shimmered in glassy, transparent waves like it does above a flame. Not a leaf moved, not a blade of grass. The birds remained silent, they sat hidden in the shade of the leaves and did not move from the spot. All the paths and lanes through the clearings were empty, as no animal was moving anywhere. The forest lay motionless in the dazzling light, as if in flame. The earth breathed, the trees, the bushes and the animals breathed in the weighty luxury of this heat. Bambi slept.

He had spent a happy night and into the light of morning romping with Faline, it was such bliss that he even forgot to eat. But that was because he had tired himself out so much that he did not even feel any hunger. His eyes fell shut. He had just gone into the middle of the undergrowth where he stopped, laid himself down and fell straight to sleep. The junipers, inflamed by the sun, threw out a bitter-sharp smell, the fine aroma from the young dampness rose into his head and exhilarated him as he slept and gave him new strength.

Suddenly he woke up and felt confused.

Was that not Faline calling out?

Bambi looked around. In his memory he could still see her as she stood here close by the hawthorns and picking off the leaves while he lay down. He had thought she would stay there beside him. But now she was gone, she had probably become tired of being alone and was now calling for him to come and find her.

As Bambi listened he wondered how long he could have been asleep and how many times Faline could have called. He could not work it out. His head was still dull behind the veil of sleep.

Then the call came again. Bambi swung round suddenly to face the direction the sound came from. There it was again! And he was suddenly cheerful. He felt wonderfully refreshed, felt he had rested long enough, felt strengthened, and he felt immensely hungry.

He heard the call again, loud and clear, as fine as gentle birdsong, yearning and tender, "Come ... come."

Yes, that was her voice! That was Faline! Bambi rushed from where he was with such urgency that the thin twigs on the bushes broke and their hot, green leaves merely rustled.

But while he was jumping he had to stop and throw himself to one side. There stood the elder, blocking his way.

The only thing seething in Bambi was his love. He did not care about the elder any more. He would certainly come across him again sometime. But now he had no time for old gentlemen, however venerable they might be. All he could think of now was Faline.

He made a perfunctory greeting, and wanted to get quickly past him.

"Where are you going?" the elder asked, seriously.

Bambi was slightly ashamed, wondered how he could talk his way out of it, but then he regained his senses and answered honestly, "To her."

"Don't go," said the elder.

For a second, a spark of anger rose up in Bambi, just one. Not go to Faline? How could the elder expect that of him. I'll just run away, thought Bambi. And he quickly looked at the elder. But the depth of

the gaze directed at him from the elder's dark eyes held him where he was. He shook with impatience, but he did not run away.

"She's calling for me ..." he said, by way of explanation. He said it in a way that was clearly pleading. "Don't get in my way!"

"No," said the elder, "she is not calling for you."

The sound came again, loud and clear like birdsong, "Come!"

"Again now!" shouted Bambi as he became more cross, "Listen to me!"

"I'm listening," the elder nodded.

"Goodbye then ...," Bambi threw at him curtly.

But the elder commanded him, "Stay here!"

"What is it you want then?" shouted Bambi, out of control. "Let me go! I haven't got time for this! Please ... if Faline is calling for me ... you must be able to see ..."

"I'm telling you," said the elder, "that is not Faline."

Bambi was puzzled. "But ... I recognize her voice, I can hear her quite clearly ..."

"Listen to me," the elder continued.

The call came again.

The ground was burning under Bambi's feet. "Later! I'll come back," he implored.

"No," said the elder sadly. "You would not come back. Not ever."

The call came yet again.

“I’ve got to! I’ve got to ...” Bambi was beginning entirely to lose control of himself.

“Alright then,” the elder explained, still in command, “but the two of us will go there together.”

“Quickly!” Bambi declared and ran ahead.

“No ... go slowly!” the elder now commanded in a voice that left Bambi with no choice but to obey. “You stay behind me ... step by step ...”

The elder began to move forward. Bambi followed behind him, impatient and sighing.

“Listen,” said the elder without stopping, “however many times you hear that call do not move from my side. If it is Faline then we’ll find her soon enough. But it’s not Faline. Don’t let it tear you away from me. It all depends on whether you trust me or not.”

Bambi did not dare to contradict him and remained silent.

The elder walked slowly forward and Bambi followed. Oh, how skilled the elder was in knowing how to walk! No sound came from under his hooves. Not a leaf moved. No twig cracked. In this way the elder crept through the dense undergrowth, slid his way through the tangle of ancient bushes. Bambi could only be amazed, he had to admire the elder despite his feverish impatience. He had never realized it was possible to go forward in this way.

The call came again and again.

The elder stopped, listened and nodded his head.

Bambi stood near him, shaken with yearning, tortured by what he had to do, and understood nothing.

The elder stopped several times without the call having been heard, he would throw his head up high, listen, and nod. Bambi heard

nothing. The elder turned away from the direction the call was coming from, he was going to approach it in a curve. This made Bambi very angry.

The call came over and again.

At last they were getting nearer, nearer still, and then very near.

The elder whispered, "Whatever you see now ... don't move ... do you hear? Pay attention to everything I do and you do exactly the same ... Be careful! And don't panic ...!"

A few steps further on ... there came suddenly that sharp, stimulating smell that Bambi knew so well, strong in his nose. It was so strong that he nearly cried out. He stood there as if nailed to the ground. His heart suddenly began to beat so hard he could feel it in his throat.

The elder stood relaxed next to him. He showed the direction with his eyes: There!

But there stood He!

He stood quite close nearby, pressed against the trunk of an oak tree, covered in hazel bushes, and the gentle call could be heard: "Come ... come ..."

All that could be seen was His back, His face was very unclear, and could only be seen at all when He turned His head slightly to one side.

Bambi was so completely confused, so shocked that he only slowly came to understand: He was standing there, it was Him who had been imitating Faline's voice. It was Him who had been whistling, "Come ... come ..."

A pale horror ran through all of Bambi's limbs. The thought of flight came up from his heart and pulled at him, tugged at him.

“Keep still!” the elder promptly commanded in a whisper, as if he wanted to pre-empt an outbreak of panic. And Bambi, with some effort, kept control of himself.

The elder looked at him; it seemed to Bambi at first, despite where he was, that the elder was gently mocking him. But then, straight afterwards, he seemed once more to be fully serious and benevolent.

Bambi blinked as he looked over to where He stood, and felt that he would no longer be able to stand being near something as horrifying as this.

The elder seemed to understand what Bambi was thinking and whispered, “Let’s go ...,” as he turned round and left.

They crept carefully away, the elder moving in strange zig-zags, though Bambi could not understand why. Even now he found it hard to contain his impatience as he followed these slow steps. It had been his yearning for Faline that had driven him along the path to this place, but now the urge to flee was chasing through his veins.

The elder, though, continued in his slow walk, then stopped, listened, went on, still on a zig-zag route, stopped again, went on again, slowly, very slowly.

They must, by now, have been well away from that place of terror.

“He keeps on stopping, so I suppose it’ll be alright to start speaking again, and then I’ll say thank-you to him.” He could see the elder just in front of him as he disappeared into a dense tangle of dogwood bushes. Not a leaf moved, not a twig cracked as the elder crept into it.

Bambi followed him and tried very hard to pass through just as silently, just as artfully to avoid making any sound. But he did not have that luck. The leaves rustled gently, branches bent under the

pressure of his flank, flicked back again with a loud rattling, dry twigs broke with a quick, loud crack against his breast.

“He saved my life,” Bambi continued to ponder. “What should I say to him?”

But the elder could no longer be seen. Bambi stepped very slowly out of the bushes, saw a wild tangle of goldenrods in front of him, raised his head and looked around. There was not a blade of grass moving for as far as he could see. He was alone.

There was nothing, now, to tell him what to do, and the urge to flee quickly took hold of him. As he rushed through them, the goldenrods were divided with a broad hiss, as if being cut down with a scythe.

It was a long time wandering lost in the forest before he found Faline. He was breathless, he was tired, he was happy and deeply moved.

“Please, my love,” he said, “please ... don’t call to me when we’re apart ... never call to me again ...! We can look for each other until we find one another ... but please, don’t call to me as ... your voice is something I can’t resist.”

CHAPTER 16

A couple of days later, with nothing to worry about, they made their way together through the thicket of oaks that lay on the other side of the meadow. They were about to go across the meadow and there, where the lofty oak tree stood, they would be back on their usual paths. The bushes ahead of them became lighter, and there they stopped and peered out. There, by the oak, there was something red moving.

“Who could that be ...?” whispered Bambi.

“I expect it’s Ronno or Karus,” thought Faline.

Bambi doubted this. “They don’t dare to come near me any more.” Bambi looked more carefully. “No,” he decided, “that isn’t Karus or Ronno ... that’s a stranger ...”

Faline agreed, astonished and very curious. “You’re right, a stranger, I can see that too now ... odd!”

They watched.

“He seems very careless!” called Faline.

“Stupid,” said Bambi, “he is really stupid. He’s behaving like a little child ... as if there weren’t any danger at all!”

“Let’s go over there,” suggest Faline. She was too curious.

“Alright then,” Bambi answered, “let’s go ... I want to get a closer look at this lad ...”

They made a few steps but then Faline hesitated. “But ... what if he wants to fight you ... he’s strong ...”

“Bah!” Bambi lowered his head to one side and had a disdainful look. “Look how small his crown is ... why should I be frightened of that? He’s big and fat ... but strong? I don’t think so. Just come with me ...”

They went. Across the meadow the other deer was busy biting at grass, and did not notice them until they had come quite a long way out onto the meadow. He immediately ran out to meet them. He made joyful, playful jumps and again seemed to be very childlike. Bambi and Faline were puzzled and waited for him. Now he was just a few steps away. Like them, he stood still.

After a little while he asked, “Don’t you recognize me?”

Bambi had lowered his head, ready for combat. “Do you ... know us?” he replied.

The stranger interrupted him. “But Bambi!” he called, full of admonishment but trusting.

Bambi became hesitant when he heard his name being used. The sound of this voice tugged at some kind of memory in his heart, but Faline made no delay and jumped forward to meet the stranger.

“Gobo!” she exclaimed and she was silent. She stood there without a word, without moving. She had lost her breath completely.

“Faline ...” said Gobo gently, “Faline ... sister ... you recognize me ...” He went to her and kissed her on the mouth. Suddenly the tears began to flow down his cheeks.

Faline cried too, and she was unable to speak.

“But ... Gobo ...” Bambi began. His voice quivered and he was very excited, he was deeply touched and astonished beyond measure. “Gobo ... aren’t you dead?”

Gobo laughed. “You can see, can’t you. I think it’s easy enough to see I’m not dead.”

“But ... that time ... in the snow?” Bambi persisted.

“That time?” Gobo lowered his head bashfully. “That time it was Him who saved me ...”

“And where have you been all this time ...?” asked Faline now, in astonishment.

Gobo answered, “With Him ... I’ve been with Him all this time ...”

He became silent, looked at Faline and Bambi and greatly enjoyed the sight of their helpless astonishment. Then he added, “Yes, my dear friends ... I have had many new experiences ... more than all of you put together here in this forest of yours ...” It sounded a little boastful, but they still did not notice that, they were too taken up with the enormity of their surprise.

“Tell us about them!” exclaimed Faline, unable to control herself.

“Well,” said Gobo complacently, “I could tell you about them all day long and wouldn’t have told you everything.

Bambi insisted. “Go on then, tell us!”

Gobo went over to Faline and became serious. “Is mother still alive?” he asked timidly and quietly.

“Yes!” Faline cheerfully declared. “She’s alive ... I haven’t seen her for a long time though.”

“I want to go and see her, straight away!” said Gobo. “Are you coming with me?”

And off they went.

All along the way they were silent. Bambi and Faline could feel Gobo’s impatient yearning to see his mother, and that’s why neither of them said anything. Gobo strode hurriedly forward and said nothing. They did nothing to stop him.

Except that now and then, when he blindly ran through a place where the paths crossed, always running straight ahead, or when in sudden haste he rushed into another direction they would quietly call to him. "This way!" Bambi would whisper. Or Faline would say, "No ... it goes round here now ..."

A couple times they had to go across broad clearings. They noticed that Gobo never stopped at the edge of the trees, never even glanced around to see that it was safe before he went out into the open. He would simply run out there with no caution at all. Bambi and Faline looked at each other in amazement whenever that happened, but they said nothing and hesitantly followed Gobo.

They had to wander about in this way, searching and going up and down, for a long time.

Gobo suddenly recognized the paths he had used in his childhood. He looked at them in wonder, and it did not occur to him that Bambi and Faline had led him to them. He looked round at them and declared, "What do you think of that? Look how good I was at finding my way here!"

They said nothing. They merely, once more, looked at each other.

Shortly afterwards they came to a small chamber in the foliage. "Here!" called Faline as she slipped into it. Gobo followed her and then stopped. It was the chamber where they both had been born, where they had lived as little children with their mother. Gobo and Faline looked close into each other's eyes. They said not a word. Faline kissed her brother gently on his lips. Then they hurried on.

They probably spent another hour going up and down. The sun shone more and more brightly through the twigs, the forest became more and more quiet. It was time to lie down and rest. Gobo, though, did not feel tired. He hurried forward, breathed heavily because of his impatient excitement and looked around without any plan. He flinched when a weasel rushed out from the long grass and passed under him. He nearly stepped on the pheasants who were pressed

close down to the ground, and when they flew up in front of him with loud flapping of wing and told him off he was very alarmed. Bambi was amazed at how unfamiliar he seemed with everything and how he proceeded as if blind.

Gobo stopped and turned to the two of them. "We can't find her!" he exclaimed in bewilderment. Faline soothed him. "We will do soon," she said with emotion. "Not long now, Gobo." She looked at him. He was once again wearing that disheartened expression that she knew so well.

"Should we call for her?" she said with a grin. "Should we start calling again ... like we used to, when we were still children?"

Bambi continued walking. Just a few steps. And then he caught a glimpse of Auntie Ena. She had already lain down to rest and lay without moving in the shadow of a hazel bush, very near.

"At last!" he said to himself. At that moment Gobo and Faline arrived. All three of them stood beside each other and looked over at Ena. She had quietly raised her head and looked sleepily at them.

Gobo made a few hesitant steps forward and gently called, "Mother!"

As if snatched up by a thunderbolt, Ena was no longer lying down but up on her feet and standing as if cemented into position. Gobo quickly jumped to her. "Mother ..." he began again. He wanted to speak but could not utter a word.

His mother looked closely into his eyes. She began to stand with less stiffness; she was shaking so much that wave after wave ran over her back and shoulders.

She asked no questions, she did not ask for an explanation, not for any account of what had happened. Slowly, she kissed Gobo on his lips, kissed his cheeks, his neck; without cease, she washed him with her kisses, just as she had done when she had given birth to him.

Bambi and Faline had left.

CHAPTER 17

They stood together in the middle of a thicket in a small clearing, and Gobo told them about where he had been.

Their friend the hare sat there too, raised his ears in amazement as he listened tensely and let them sink again in his awe at what he heard, only to raise them again immediately after.

The magpie squatted on the lowest twig of a young beech tree and listened in astonishment. The jay sat uneasily nearby on an ash tree, sometimes screeching in his amazement.

A pair of pheasants they knew had found their way there with their wives and children. They craned their necks in wonderment as they listened, drew them back in, turned their heads here and there and remained speechless.

The squirrel bounded in and moved in a way that showed he was very excited. He soon slipped down the ground, ran up one or other tree, then leant back on his erected tail and showed his white breast. He continually wanted to interrupt Gobo, wanted to say something, but each time all those around him ordered him to be quiet.

He told them about how he had lain helpless in the snow and waited for death.

“It was the dogs who found me,” he said, “those dogs are terrifying. They’re absolutely the most terrifying things in the whole wide world. Their throats are full of blood, their voices are full of anger and without mercy.” He looked round at everyone there and went on. “. . . but, well ... afterwards I played with them as if we were all equal ...” He was very proud of himself. “. . . I don’t need to be scared of them any more because now we’re all good friends. Still though, when

they start to get angry there's a thumping in my head, and my heart gets quite stiff. But they don't always mean it in such a nasty way and, as I've just said, I'm their friend now ... but there's so much power in their voices it's horrible." He became silent.

"Go on then!" Faline insisted.

Gobo looked at her. "Well, back then they would have torn me limb from limb ... but then He came along!"

Gobo paused. The others could scarcely breathe.

"Yes," said Gobo. "Then He came along! He called the dogs off and they immediately became quite quiet. He called to them again and they lay motionless on the ground in front of Him. Then he lifted me up. I screamed. But he stroked me. He held me gently pressed onto his chest. He didn't hurt me. And then He carried me off ..."

Faline interrupted him. "What do you mean, 'carried you'?"

Gobo began to explain, in detail and with some self-importance.

"It's very easy," interjected Bambi. "Think of the squirrel, Faline, what he does when he's holding a nut and carries it away ..."

Now the squirrel wanted a chance to speak at last. "... A cousin of mine ..." he began with enthusiasm. But the others immediately insisted, "Be quiet! Be quiet! Let Gobo carry on speaking!"

The squirrel had to say silent. He was cowed and bewildered, pressed his forepaws against his white breast and turned to the magpie to speak just to him. "... I was saying ... a cousin of mine ..."

But the magpie simply turned his back on him.

Gobo told them of marvellous things. "It's cold outside, and the storm is howling. But indoors, with him, there's no wind and it's as warm as in summer."

“Hach!” screeched the jay.

“Outside, the rain is lashing down from the sky so that everything is in water. But indoors, with Him, there’s not a drop of rain and you stay dry.”

The pheasants twitched their necks up high and turned their heads.

“When everywhere outside was deep in snow, I was inside and nice and warm, I was even quite hot, and He gave me hay to eat, chestnuts, potatoes, turnips, everything I could have wished for ...”

“Hay?!” they all asked in one voice, astonished, incredulous, excited.

“Fresh, sweet hay,” Gobo repeated calmly, and looked triumphantly round at them.

The squirrel tried to squeeze in his voice. “A cousin of mine ...”

“Just be quiet!” the others ordered.

And Faline asked Gobo vigorously, “Where did He get hay from, and all those other things, in the winter?”

“He grows it,” answered Gobo. “Whatever he wants, he grows it, and when he wants it it’s there for him!”

Faline continued asking questions. “Weren’t you afraid, Gobo, all the time you were with him?”

Gobo thought himself very clever and grinned. “My dear Faline, I wasn’t afraid, not any more. After all, I knew He didn’t want to do anything to hurt me. Why should I have been afraid? You all think He’s very nasty, but He’s not nasty. When He likes anyone, when anyone does something for Him, He’s nice. Lovely and nice. There’s no-one in the whole wide world who could be as nice as He is ...”

Suddenly, as Gobo was speaking in this way, an elder emerged silently from the bushes.

Gobo did not notice him and continued speaking, but all the others had seen the elder and held their breath in awe of him.

The elder stood there without moving and watched Gobo with deep and serious eyes.

Gobo said, "And it wasn't just Him, it was His children, they loved me too, and His wife and everyone. They stroked me, gave me food and played with me ..." He broke off. He had seen the elder.

Everyone became silent.

Then the elder, in his calm and authoritative voice, asked, "What's that stripe on your neck?"

Everyone looked at him and became aware, for the first time, of the dark stripe made up of compressed and eroded hair that went round Gobo's neck.

Gobo answered the elder uncertainly. "That ...? That's from the collar I wore ... it's His collar ... and ... yes, and ... and it's a great honour to wear his collar ... it's ..." He became confused and stammered.

All were silent. The elder kept a sad and piercing look on Gobo for a long time.

"You poor thing," he said gently, then he turned round and was gone.

In the silence that followed from this disturbance the squirrel started to chatter. "You see ... a cousin of mine was there with Him too ... He'd caught him and locked him in ... oh, for a very long time, till one day my cousin ..."

But no-one was listening to the squirrel.

They all went away.

CHAPTER 18

One day, Marena turned up again.

She was already nearly grown up when Gobo disappeared, but she was almost never to be seen since then. She held herself apart and went on her own solitary ways.

She had always had a slight build and looked quite young. But she was serious and quiet and was more gentle than anyone else. Now she had heard from the squirrel, from jays and magpies, from thrush and pheasant that Gobo had come back home and had had wonderful experiences. There she appeared, and wanted to see him. Gobo's mother was very proud and happy about her visit. Most of all, Gobo's mother was very proud of how happy she seemed. She was glad that the entire forest was talking about her son, she wallowed in his fame and she wanted everyone to acknowledge that Gobo was the cleverest, the most capable and the best.

“What do you think, Marena?” she called. “What do you think of Gobo?” She did not wait for an answer but just continued. “Can you still remember that time when Mrs. Nettla said he wouldn't amount to much because he shivered a bit in the cold ... and can you remember how she prophesied I'd never get much joy from him?”

“Gobo certainly gave you enough to worry about,” Marena answered.

“That's all in the past!” Gobo's mother declared, and was very surprised that anyone could still be thinking of these things. “Oh, I feel so sorry about poor Mrs. Nettla. It's such a shame that she's no longer alive and can't see what my Gobo has made of himself!”

“Yes, poor Mrs. Nettla,” said Marena gently, “it's a pity about her.”

Gobo enjoyed hearing his mother praise him like this. It pleased him. He stood there and felt as good as if standing in warm sunshine when he heard these praises.

His mother said to Marena, "Even the old prince came to see Gobo ..." She said it in a way that was secretive, in a whisper and celebratory. "He's never let any of us catch a glimpse of him ... but when it was Gobo, he came!"

"Why did he call me a poor thing?" asked Gobo, sounding very discontented. "I'd like to know what that was supposed to mean!"

"Don't you worry about that," his mother reassured him, "he's very old and ... a bit odd."

But now, finally, said what was on his mind. "All this time it's been going round my head what he meant by that. You poor thing. I'm not poor, I'm not unlucky! I'm very lucky! I've seen more, I've had more experiences than anyone else! I know more about the world and about life than anyone here in the forest! What do you think, Marena?"

"Yes," she said, "there's certainly no-one who can gainsay that."

From that day on, Marena and Gobo were always together.

CHAPTER 19

Bambi looked for the elder. He would walk around all through the nights, wandered about at the time the sun rose and when the morning sky was red, all along uncharted ways, without Faline.

There were times when he still felt an urge to go to her, sometimes he was still as happy to be with her as he had been before, he found it beautiful to walk about with her, to hear her chatting, to have a meal with her at the edge of a thicket; but now these were things that did not satisfy him as much as they had done.

Before, it was rare for him to think of the elder when he was with Faline, and even then it was only fleetingly. Now he was out searching for the elder, he felt an inexplicable yearning to see him and remembered about Faline only once. He could always find her whenever he wanted her. He felt little urge to be together with the others though, Gobo or Auntie Ena. He avoided them whenever he could.

Bambi was unable to stop thinking about the phrase that the elder had used about Gobo. He had been remarkably struck by it. From the first day that he had come back Gobo's reappearance had seriously disturbed him. Bambi did not know why, but when Gobo looked at him it immediately seemed to make him suffer. Bambi was ashamed of Gobo but did not know why; he was worried about him without knowing why. But now, whenever he was with the incautious, self-conscious, complacent and haughty Gobo, that phrase came to his mind: You poor thing! He could not get it out of his head.

But one dark night, in which Bambi had once again assured the owlet, just to please him, that he had been dreadfully startled by him, it suddenly occurred to Bambi to ask where the elder might be.

The owlet replied, in his cooing voice, that he did not have the slightest idea. But Bambi could see that he did not really want to say.

“No,” he said, “I don’t believe you. You’re so clever, you know about everything that goes on in the forest. I’m sure you know where the elder is hiding.”

The owlet went back down into a nice, soft, grey-brown ball, turned his big, clever, eyes a little, as he always did when he felt like it and asked, “Well then, do you really have such respect for me? Why’s that then?”

Bambi did not hesitate. “Because you’re so wise,” he said candidly, “and despite that, you’re such fun and so friendly. And because you can frighten others so well. That’s so clever to startle others, so very clever. I wish I could do that, that would be very useful for me.”

The owlet had sunk his beak deep into his breast feathers and was pleased.

“Well,” he said, “I know that the elder likes your company ...”

“Do you think so?” exclaimed Bambi as the owlet spoke, and his heart began to beat with joy.

“Yes, I’m sure of it,” answered the owlet, “he likes your company, and that’s why I think I might dare to tell you where he is now ...” He pulled his feathers down against his body and suddenly looked quite thin again. “Do you know that deep gorge where the willows are?”

“Yes,” Bambi nodded.

“Do you know the thicket of oak trees on the other side?”

“No,” Bambi admitted, “I’ve never been on the other side.”

“Now listen carefully,” the owlet whispered, on the other side there’s a thicket of oak trees. You have to go through there and you come to an area of bushes, hazel and white poplars, hawthorns and privet. In

the middle, there, you'll need to find an old beech tree that's been broken down by the wind. It won't be as easy for you to find down there on the ground, certainly not as easy as it is from up in the air. That's where the elder lives. Under the trunk of that tree. But ... don't say I told you!"

"Under the trunk?"

"Yes!" the owlet laughed. "There's a dip in the ground there. The hollow trunk lies over it. That's where he is."

"Thank you," said Bambi with enthusiasm. "I don't know whether I'll be able to find him, but thank you a thousand times."

He hurried away.

Making no sound, the owlet flew along behind him and close above him he began to screech. "U-y? Uiy!"

Bambi was startled.

"Did I shock you?" the owlet asked.

"Yes ...," he stuttered and this time he was telling the truth.

The owlet felt satisfied with himself and cooed, "I just wanted to remind you – don't say I told you!"

"Of course I won't!" Bambi assured him and he ran off. When he reached the gorge the elder emerged from the darkness of chamber right in front of him, so silently and so suddenly that Bambi was greatly startled once again.

"I'm not there any more, where you hope to find me," the elder said.

Bambi said nothing.

"What do you want from me?" the elder asked.

“Nothing ...” stuttered Bambi, “oh ... nothing ... do forgive me...”

After a pause the elder said gently, “It wasn’t just today that you started looking for me.”

He waited. Bambi said nothing. The elder continued, “you passed quite close to me twice yesterday, and twice this morning too, very close...”

“Why ...” Bambi gathered up his courage, “why did you say that about Gobo ...?”

“Do you think I was mistaken?”

“No,” Bambi declared with a passion, “no! I think you must be right!”

The elder nodded very slightly, and his eyes looked at Bambi with more benevolence than ever before.

Bambi said to these eyes, “But ... why? ... I can’t understand it!”

“It’s enough that you think so. You’ll understand it later. Farewell!”

CHAPTER 20

It was not long before everyone noticed that Gobo had an odd and puzzling habit. He slept at night, when all the others were awake and moving about. But by day, when all the others sought out a place to hide and sleep, he would cheerfully walk off somewhere. And when he felt like it he would go, without hesitation, out of the thick woods and stand in full daylight in the middle of the meadow with no worry at all.

Bambi was no longer able to keep quiet about this. "Do you not think of the danger?" he asked.

"No," came Gobo's simple answer. "There is no danger for me."

"Bambi, love," Gobo's mother put in, "you're forgetting that He is a friend of his. Gobo can afford to allow himself more than you can or anyone else." And she was very proud of this. Bambi said no more. One day, Gobo commented to him, "Do you know? Sometimes it strikes me as odd that I can eat here like this, whenever I want to and wherever I want to."

Bambi did not understand. "What's so odd about that? That's what we all do."

Gobo thought about this and said, "Yes ... well that's you! Bit with me it's a bit different. I've got used to having my food brought to me, and that they'll call me when it's ready."

Bambi looked at Gobo with pity. Looked at Auntie Ena, at Faline and Marena. But they just smiled and admired Gobo.

"I think," Faline began, "I think you'll find it hard to get used to the winter, Gobo. For us, outside in the winter there is no hay at all, no

turnips, no potatoes.”

“That’s true,” answered Gobo thoughtfully, “but if it gets too hard for me I’ll just go back to Him. Why should I go hungry? I really don’t need to.”

Without a word, Bambi turned round and walked away.

Gobo now was alone with Marena, and he began to talk about Bambi. “He doesn’t understand me,” he said. “Bambi is good, but he thinks I’m still just stupid, little Gobo, like I used to be. He still can’t understand that I’ve been changed into something special. The danger! Why is he always on about danger? I’m sure he means the best for me. But danger is something for him and for those like him, not for me!”

Marena agreed with him. She loved him, and Gobo loved her, and the two of them were very happy.

“You see,” he said to her, “no-one understands me as well as you do! Anyway, I can’t complain. Everyone respects and honours me, but it’s you who understands me best. The others ... I’ve told them so many times how good He is but they won’t listen to me. I’m sure they don’t think I’m lying but they keep on thinking he must be terrible!”

“I always believed in Him,” said Marena with enthusiasm.

“Really?” Gobo replied glibly.

“Don’t you remember,” Marena went on, “that day when you stayed lying in the snow? I said that one day He would come to us here in the woods and play with us ...”

“No,” retorted Gobo, speaking very slowly, “I can’t remember that at all.”

A couple of weeks went by, and one morning, just as the sun was rising, Bambi and Faline, Gobo and Marena, were all together in the

old thicket of hazel bushes that they saw as home. Bambi and Faline had just come back home from their wanderings, they had gone past the oak and wanted to seek out their place to rest when they came across Gobo and Marena. Gobo was just about to go out onto the meadow.

“Stay here with us,” said Bambi. “It’ll soon be broad daylight, no-one goes out into the open at this time.”

“Ridiculous,” Gobo mocked. “If no-one goes ... I go.”

He strode away, Marena followed him.

Bambi and Faline stayed where they were. “Come on!” said Bambi angrily to Faline. “Come on! He can just do what he wants.” They wanted to go on. Then outside, from the other side of the meadow, came the screech of the jay, loud and foreboding.

Bambi turned suddenly round and ran after Gobo. He caught up with him and Marena just before they had reached the oak tree.

“Do you hear that?” he called to him.

“Hear what?” asked Gobo in puzzlement.

The jay at the other side of the meadow screeched again.

“Can you really not hear it?” Bambi repeated.

“No,” said Gobo calmly.

“That means danger!” Bambi insisted.

Now a magpie appeared, chattering as he went, and immediately after there was another one and then, just as promptly, a third. At the same time the jay screeched once again, and the crows gave signals from high in the air.

Faline began to implore them too. "Don't go out there, Gobo! It's dangerous!"

Even Marena now began to urge him. "Stay here! For my sake stay here today ... it's dangerous!"

Gobo stood there and grinned in embarrassment. "Danger! Danger! Why should I be bothered about that?"

The danger of the moment gave Bambi an idea. "At least let Marena go out first, then we'll know ..."

He had not finished speaking before Marena had already slipped out there.

All three stood there and looked at her. Bambi and Faline held their breath, Gobo was openly patient, as if he wanted to let the others have their foolish way.

They watched as Marena walked, step by step, onto the meadow, slowly, her head raised high, her legs hesitant. She looked round and smelt the air on every side.

She suddenly turned round, as quick as lightning, a high leap and, as if blown in by a storm, she was back in the thicket. "He ... He's there ..." she whispered in a voice that was choking in horror. Her whole body was shaking. "I ... I... saw ... Him ... He ... is ... there ..." she stammered, "up there ... He's standing there ... by the alder tree ..."

"Let's get away from here!" Bambi called. "Now, let's get away!"

"Come away!" Faline implored them. And Marena, who by now was barely able to speak, whispered, "Please Gobo, I beg of you, come away with us ... I beg of you ..."

But Gobo remained calm. "Run away then, run away as far as you can?" he said, "I'm not stopping you am I. If He's there I'll go over

and say hello.”

There was nothing that could have held Gobo back.

They stayed where they were and watched him as he went out onto the meadow. They stayed behind because his immense confidence had a kind of power over them and at the same time held their terror for Him in its place. They were unable to move from the spot.

Gobo stood out in the open on the meadow and looked around to find the alder. Now he seemed to have found it, now he seemed to have glimpsed Him. Then the thunder-crack sounded.

The sound threw Gobo into the air, he suddenly turned round and, leaping as fast as he could, flew back into the thicket.

When he arrived they were still standing there, unable to move because of their horror. They heard the whistling of his breath, he did not stop but hurled himself forward in unthinking leaps. They turned to him, surrounded him, and gave themselves up to full flight.

But very soon Gobo collapsed.

Marena immediately stood still, close beside him. Bambi and Faline were a little further away, ready to flee at any time.

Gobo's flank had been torn open and he lay there with his bloody innards protruding. He made a dull movement of turning and raising his head.

“Marena ...” he said with some effort, “Marena ... He didn't recognize me ...” His voice broke off.

From the bushes between them and the meadow, there came an uproarious noise showing no thought of any need to be careful.

Marena lowered her head down to Gobo. “He's coming!” she whispered urgently. “Gobo ... He's coming ... can't you stand up and come with me ...?”

Gobo, once again, weakly turned his head and raised it. His legs twitched violently but he continued to lie where he was.

With a clattering and a cracking and a loud rustling the bushes divided and He entered.

Marena could see him from a short distance. She slowly crept back, disappeared behind the undergrowth, and hurried to join Bambi and Faline.

She turned around once more and there she saw Him as He bent down over the fallen Gobo and took hold of him.

Then she heard Gobo's pitiful scream of death.

CHAPTER 21

Bambi was by himself. He went over to the water that flowed quietly between the reeds and the willows on the bank.

Ever since he had been keeping to his own company he had come more and more often down here. There were not many paths here and he almost never came across any other deer. But that was just what he wanted. For his thoughts had become earnest and his spirit was heavy. He did not know what was happening inside him, and nor did he try to work it out. He merely tried to puzzle it out in a confused way, with no plan, and it seemed to him that his whole life had become darker.

When he went to stand at the riverside he would spend a long time there. He went to a place where the water flowed in a gentle curve and where it was possible to see a long way. The cool breathing of the ripples brought an unfamiliar smell with it, a smell that was refreshing but bitter, a smell that awoke a sense of being carefree and trusting. Bambi stood there and watched the ducks as they enjoyed one another's company. They chatted with each other without cease, friendly, serious and clever. There was a couple of mothers there, each of them surrounded by a crowd of children who received regular instruction and who never tired of learning. Sometimes, one of the mothers would give out a warning sign, and the young ducks would rush out in all directions, without hesitation they would glide out as if broadcast from a sower's hand and would do so in complete silence. At one moment Bambi saw how the little ones, who still could not fly, would go into the thick reeds, carefully, without touching any of the stalks which, if they moved, would betray their locations. Here and there he saw their small, dark bodies in among the rushes as they slowly hid themselves away. Then he saw nothing more of them. A short call from the mother, and they would all swarm around her in an instant. In this instant her flock had

gathered back together and they began, as before, to cruise along thoughtfully. This filled Bambi with admiration every time he saw it. It was like a work of art.

One time, after one of these brief alarms, he asked one of the mothers, "What was all that for? I've been watching carefully, but didn't see anything."

"Well, there was nothing to see," the duck replied.

Another time, one of the children gave the warning signal. He turned round as quick as a flash, steered his way through the rushes to the bank where Bambi was standing and stepped up onto it.

Bambi asked the little one, "What happened now then? I didn't see anything."

"Well there was nothing to see," the young duck answered. Like a wise old man he shook his feathers, carefully laid the tips of his wings down into the right place and went back into the water.

But Bambi continued to think about the ducks. He understood that they were more watchful than he was, that their hearing was sharper and their eyesight better. When he stood here, the anxiety that at other times he was always full was slightly relieved.

And he enjoyed talking with the ducks. They did not talk about things he heard about so often from the others. They talked about the capacious sky, about the wind and the distant fields where they would enjoy lots of delicious food.

Bambi sometimes saw something small rushing past him through the air, keeping close to the bank, like a fire-coloured lightning flash. "Srrr-ih!" shouted the kingfisher gently for himself as he sped past. A tiny whizzing dot. He glowed in blue and green, sparkled in red, lit himself up and he was gone. Bambi was amazed, he was enchanted, and he wished he could see this remarkable stranger close up, so he called to him.

“Don’t bother with ‘im,” the coot said up to him from the dense rushes. “Don’t bother with ‘im, you’ll never get an answer from ‘im.”

“Where are you?” asked Bambi and peered round in the reeds.

But the laughter of the coot came up loud and clear from a quite different place. “I’m over here! He’s a bad tempered bloke, him who you were trying to talk to just now, he don’t talk with anyone. There’s no point in trying to call to him.”

“He’s so beautiful!” said Bambi.

“Yeah, but he’s no good!” the coot replied, again from a different place.

“Why do you say that?” Bambi enquired.

The coot answered – again from a totally different place - “He can’t be bothered about any one or any thing. It don’t matter what happens, he never says hello to anyone and he never replies if anyone says hello to him. He never makes the alarm call when danger comes along and he’s never spoken a word to anyone.”

“The poor ...” Bambi started to say.

The coot continued speaking, and his cheerful, cheeping voice now, again, came from a quite different place. “I suppose he thinks we’re all jealous of that couple of colours he has in his feathers. I suppose that’s why he don’t want to let anyone get a closer look at him.”

“You’re not letting me get a look at you either,” Bambi suggested.

The coot immediately appeared in front of him. “Well there’s nothing to look at about me, is there,” came his simple reply. There he stood, slender, the water glittering on his back, his simple clothing, his elegant figure, ever-moving, content. And in a moment he was once more gone.

“I don’t know how you can be wondering for so long about a little speck,” his voice came from the water. And – again from a different place - he added. “It’s boring to keep on about a single speck. It’s dangerous and all.” Again from another different place he proclaimed, loud, triumphantly and gaily, “You’ve got to keep moving! If you want to stay safe and get your belly full, you’ve got to keep moving!”

Bambi was startled by a gentle rustling in the grass. He looked round. There, in the bushes, he glimpsed something reddish, which disappeared into the rushes. At the same time there came a warm but sharp trembling in his breath. The fox slipped by. Bambi wanted to call to the duck and stamped on the ground as a warning. There was a rustling and the reeds suddenly divided, the water splashed and the duck screamed in confusion. Bambi heard the clatter of her wings, saw the whiteness of her body in the shimmering greenness, and now he saw how her wings were flapping loudly and whipped against the cheeks of the fox. Then, all became quiet.

Very soon afterwards the fox came up into the bushes with the duck in his jaws. Her neck hung down loosely, her wings still moved feebly, the fox paid no attention. He looked sideways at Bambi, and his bulging eyes seemed to be jeering, and he slipped slowly away into the thick woods.

Bambi stood there, motionless.

Some of the older ducks had clattered up onto the bank, they flew around in confusion caused by the horror of what they had seen. The coot sounded shrill warning cries to every side. The tits in the bushes twittered excitedly, the young ducks pushed themselves into the rushes and, having become orphans, lamented with gentle tones.

The kingfisher rushed by along the bank.

“Please!” called the young ducks. “Please, have you seen our mother?”

“Srrr-ih!” the kingfisher shrieked, and seemed to sparkle as he rushed past. “What’s that to me?”

Bambi turned round and left. He wandered through a dense wilderness of goldenrods, passed through a group of tall beech trees, went through ancient hazel bushes, until he reached the edge of the great trench. Here he wandered round at random in the hope of coming across the elder. It was a long time since he had last seen him, not since Gobo met his end.

Now he saw him in the distance and ran towards him.

For a while, they walked beside each other in silence. Then the elder asked, “Well ... do they still talk about him?”

Bambi understood that he meant Gobo, and answered, “I don’t know ... I’m almost always by myself ...” He hesitated, “... but ... I can’t stop thinking about him all the time.”

“Ah!” said the elder, “are you by yourself now?”

“Yes,” said Bambi expectantly, but the elder remained silent.

They walked on. Suddenly the elder stopped. “Can’t you hear it?”

Bambi listened. No, he heard nothing.

“Come on!” the elder called as he hurried forward. Bambi followed him.

The elder stopped again. “Can you still not hear it?”

Bambi now could make out a sound that he did not understand. It was as if twigs were being pulled down and then allowed to snap up again. At the same time there were dull and irregular thumps on the ground.

Bambi wanted to flee.

“Come with me!” the elder called and ran in the direction of the noise. Bambi dared to ask, “Is it not dangerous there?”

“It is!” the elder replied mysteriously. “It’s very dangerous there!”

They were soon able to see the twigs that were being pulled down from below and were being shaken, and they saw the vigour with which they sprang back up. They came closer and noticed that there was a little path running through the middle of the bushes.

Bambi’s friend the hare lay on the ground, threw himself back and forth, fidgeted about, lay still, fidgeted some more, and each of his movements tore at the twigs above him.

Bambi became aware of a dark stripe, something like a tendril. It became stiff and dropped down onto the hare, where it wound itself around his neck.

By now, the hare must have heard that there was somebody coming. He hurled himself into the air, fell back to the ground, wanted to flee, defeated he rolled himself into ball and quivered.

“Keep still!” the elder ordered him and then, in a gentle and sympathetic voice that struck at Bambi’s heart, he went over close to the hare and repeated, “Stay calm, my friend, it’s only me! Don’t move at all. Just keep very still.”

The hare lay motionless, flat on the ground. His breathing was tense, and it made a gentle sound.

The elder took the twig with the peculiar tendril into his mouth, pulled it down, turned round elegantly, held it firmly against the ground under his hard hoof and did away with it with a single blow of his crown.

Then he turned to the hare. “Keep still,” he said, “even if it hurts.”

With his head turned to one side, he laid one of the points of his crown against the hare's neck and pressed it deeply into his fur behind his ears, felt around for something and gave a yank. The hare began to writhe.

The elder immediately moved back. "Keep still!" he ordered. "I'm trying to save your life!" He began anew. The hare lay still, but quivering. Bambi watched in astonishment, he was speechless.

Now the elder had pushed one point of his antlers firmly into the hare's fur, trying to get it under whatever was slung around the hare's neck. He was nearly on his knees but twisted his head as if drilling a hole, pushed his crown deeper and deeper until finally, whatever it was gave way and began to loosen.

The hare drew breath and at the same time gave in to his fear, his pain broke loudly out from him. "E ... e ... eh!" he wailed.

The elder stopped what he was doing. "Do be quiet," he chided, "be quiet!" His mouth was very close to the hare's shoulder, one of the points of his crown was between the ears and it looked as if he had impaled the hare.

"How can you be so stupid and start to cry?" he gently grumbled. "Do you want to get the fox to come here? Yes? Well then. Keep quiet."

He continued to work, slowly, carefully, attentively. Suddenly the sling around the hare's neck began to slip off. The hare slid out of it and he was free before he even knew it. He made a step or two and then sat there in a daze. Then he hopped away. Slowly at first, shyly, but all the time getting faster until he ran away in wild leaps.

Bambi looked at him as he went. "And not a word of thanks!" he declared in astonishment.

"He still hasn't quite come back to his senses," the elder said.

Whatever it was that had been around the hare's neck lay now in a circle on the ground. Bambi kicked at it lightly; it made a jangling noise and Bambi was startled. That was the sort of noise that did not belong in the forest.

"Him ...?" Bambi asked quietly. The elder nodded.

They walked on calmly next to each other. "You always need to be careful," said the elder. "When you're walking along a path you should always pay attention to the twigs on the trees and bushes, stretch your crown out, up and down, and if you ever hear that jangling noise turn right round. But if it's the time of year when you're not carrying a crown on your head you need to be doubly careful. I stopped going along the paths a long time ago."

Bambi was alarmed and wondered what the elder had meant.

"But ... but He's not ..." he said to himself in bewilderment.

The elder answered, "no ... He's not in the forest right now."

"But ... but it's Him!" said Bambi, shaking his head.

The elder continued, and his voice was full of bitterness. "What was it that Gobo said to you ...? Did he not give you a lecture about how He is almighty, how he is responsible for of everything ...?"

Bambi spluttered, "Is He not almighty then?"

"He's no more almighty than He is responsible for all," the elder complained.

Bambi was disheartened. "... But what about Gobo ... He was good to Gobo ..."

The elder stopped where he was. "Do you really think he was, Bambi?" he asked sadly. This was the first time that the elder had addressed him by his name.

“I don’t know!” declared Bambi in anguish. “I just don’t understand it!”

The elder replied slowly, “If we are to live we need to learn ... and to be vigilant.”

CHAPTER 22

One morning, something very bad happened to Bambi.

The feeble grey of dawn was creeping its way through the forest. A milky-white mist rose from the meadow and the quiet that breathes the change in the time of day stretched itself out everywhere.

The crows were still not awake, nor the magpies, and even the jay was asleep.

Bambi had come across Faline in the night. She looked sadly at him and was very shy.

“I’m by myself so much,” she said quietly.

“I’m by myself too,” Bambi replied hesitantly.

Faline seemed disheartened and asked, “Why don’t you stay with me any more?” and it pained Bambi to see that Faline, once so gay, once so bold, had become earnest and downtrodden.

“I have to be alone,” he replied. He had wanted to say it in a soothing way, but it sounded hard. He heard it himself.

Faline looked at him and quietly asked, “Do you still love me?”

Bambi did not hesitate and answered, “I don’t know.”

She went calmly away and left him alone.

There he stood under the great oak tree at the edge of the meadow, looked carefully out there to see that all was safe, and drank in the morning wind. Every time there had been a storm the air was moist and refreshing, it smelt of the earth, of dew and grass and of wet

wood. Bambi breathed deep. He suddenly felt free in a way he had not felt for a long time. He felt gay as he stepped out onto the misty meadow.

Then came a clap of thunder.

Bambi felt as if something had shoved him and it made him stagger.

In a panic he leapt back into the woods and continued running. He did not understand what had happened, he was quite unable to collect his thoughts but just kept on running. His terror kept a tight grip on his heart and took his breath away as he blindly rushed forward. But then, suddenly, a piercing pain ran through him, he did not think he would be able to endure it. He felt how it ran hotly over his left thigh, a narrow, burning thread starting from the place where he had first felt the pain. It forced him to stop running. It forced him to walk more slowly. Then his shoulders and legs seemed to go lame. He collapsed to the ground.

He was seen by Lapsal as he just lay there resting.

“Get up Bambi! Get up!” The elder stood beside him and pushed him gently on his shoulder.

Bambi wanted to retort, “I can’t,” but the elder said again, “Get up! Get up!” and there was such urgency in his voice and such tenderness that Bambi said nothing. Even the pain he felt in every part of his body abated for a moment.

Now the elder spoke hurriedly and in fear. “Get up! You’ve got to get away from here, son!” Son ... it seemed to be as soon as this word slipped out of his mouth that Bambi hurried back up on his feet.

“Right, then!” said the elder. He took a deep breath and continued to urge Bambi on. “Now, come with me, just stay with me all the time ...!”

He hurried forward. Bambi followed him, even though he was yearning to drop to the ground, to lay still and rest.

The elder seemed able to see this and spoke to Bambi without pause. "Whatever the pain is you've now got to just bear it, you can't even think about lying down ... never think of that at all, as that by itself will make you tired! Now you've got to just save yourself ... do you understand, Bambi? ... save yourself ... otherwise you're lost ... just bear in mind that He's coming after you ... do you understand, Bambi? ... He won't show any mercy ... He'll just kill you ... come with me ... just come with me ... it'll soon be gone ... it's got to go ..." Bambi no longer even had the strength to think of anything. The pain surged up in every step he took, robbed him of his breath and of his senses, and the line of heat that burned down into his shoulder brought a deep, delirious excitement into his heart.

The elder went round in a broad circle. It took a long time. Through his veil of pain and weakness Bambi was astonished to see that they were suddenly beside the great oak once more.

The elder stopped and smelt the ground. "Here!" he whispered, "here ... He's here ... here too ... the dog ... come with me ... faster!"

They ran on. The elder suddenly stopped.

"Can you see ...!" he exclaimed, "this is where you were lying on the ground."

Bambi saw where the grass had been pressed down and saw a broad pool of his own blood soaking down into the ground.

The elder smelt the place carefully. "They've already been here ... Him and the dog ..." he said. "Now, come with me!" He walked slowly on, continually stopping to smell the ground.

Bambi noticed the drops of red on the leaves of the bushes and on the grass. "We've already been past here," he thought, although he was not able to speak out loud.

“Good!” said the elder, almost gaily, “now we’ve got behind them ...”

He went for a while in the same direction. Then he turned suddenly to one side and set off in a new circle. Bambi staggered on behind him.

They arrived at the big oak tree once again, though this time from the other direction, they arrived once again at the place where Bambi had fallen, and then, once again, the elder took a new direction.

“Eat some of this!” he ordered, he had stopped, pushed the grass to one side and pointed to some tiny leaves, short and dark green, fat and fluffy, that were sprouting out of the bare ground.

Bambi did as he was told. The leaves were horribly bitter and had a repulsive smell.

After a while the elder asked, “How are you feeling now?”

“I’m feeling better,” Bambi promptly answered. All of a sudden he was able to speak again, he could think clearly, he felt less tired.

After another pause the elder ordered him, “You go ahead now,” and after he had been walking behind Bambi for some time he said, “At last!” They stopped. “Your blood has stopped running out from your wound, so it won’t show where you are any more, He and His dog won’t be able to find where to go to take your life.”

The elder looked very tired, but there was cheer in his voice. “Come on then,” he continued, “now you need to have a rest.”

They arrived at the broad gulley that Bambi had never been across. The elder climbed down into it, Bambi tried to follow but it took him a lot of effort to climb up the steep slope on the other side.

The fierce pain he felt began once more to go through him. He fell over, pulled himself back up, fell over again and began to gasp for breath.

“I can’t help you here,” said the elder, “you’ve got to get up here yourself!” And Bambi did get up to the top. He began once more to feel the hot band of pain that shot down his shoulder and felt for the second time that he was losing his strength.

“You’re bleeding again,” said the elder, “that’s what I expected. It’s not too much, though ... and ...,” he added in a whisper, “it doesn’t matter any more.”

They made their way very slowly through a grove of beech trees, as high as the sky. The ground was soft and smooth. It did not take too much effort to go through it. Bambi yearned to just lay himself down here, to stretch himself out and not to move a finger. He just could not go any further. His head hurt, there was a buzzing in his ears, his nerves were quivering and his fever began to shake him. His eyes went dim. There was nothing more inside him than the yearning for rest and a vague astonishment at how his life had suddenly been interrupted and altered, at how he had once used to go through the forest in good health and without injury ... just that morning ... just an hour earlier ... it seemed to him now like the happiness of a distant time that had long since vanished.

They passed through a low thicket of oaks and dogwood. The fallen trunk of a beech tree lay across their path, deeply embedded in the bushes. It was very big and they could see no way of getting past it.

“Now we’ve got there ...” Bambi heard the elder say. He walked the length of the beech trunk and Bambi followed him, nearly falling into a hole in the ground.

“Alright!” said the elder. “You can lie down here.”

Bambi sank down and did not try to move any more.

He saw that the hole in the ground under the fallen beech trunk was deeper than it had seemed, creating a small chamber. The bushes at the edge of it closed over him as he entered so that nobody could see in. Once he was down there it was as if he had disappeared.

“You’ll be safe here,” said the elder. “Stay here and don’t go anywhere.”

Days went by.

Bambi lay in the warm earth, the bark of the fallen tree slowly rotting above him, it listened to his pain as it grew inside his body, became stronger, then abated, became weaker and went down, steadily softer and softer. Sometimes he would struggle outside where he would stand, weak and unsteady, on his tired and unreliable legs, and take a few steps to look for food. He began to eat herbs that he had never before noticed. Now they had suddenly begun to offer themselves to him, called to him with their scent that had a strange and tempting sharpness. What he had until then despised, what he would have thrown away if he inadvertently got it between his lips, now seemed tasty and spicy. Many little leaves, many short stalks continued to seem unappetizing even now, but he nonetheless ate them under some kind of compulsion, and his wounds healed more quickly and he could feel how his strength was coming back to him.

He had been saved. But he still did not leave his chamber. He would only come out at night and take a few steps around, but in the daytime he would remain quietly in his bed. It was only now, when his body was feeling no more pain, that Bambi realized all that had happened to him, he was able to think once more, and a feeling of great horror arose within him, his character had been shattered. He was not able to simply wipe it away, not able to stand up and run about as he had before. He lay there and felt many emotions, alternately disgusted, ashamed, astonished, disheartened, but soon afterwards full of melancholy, soon afterwards full of happiness.

The elder was nearby at all times. At first he was at Bambi’s side day and night. Then there were times when he left him alone for short periods, especially when he saw that Bambi was lost in his thoughts. But there was no time when he was not close by.

One day there had been storm and thunder and lightning, the sky had been swept clean and that evening the sun, as it went down,

shone over a sky that was blue. The blackbirds sang out loudly from the tree tops, the finches flapped their wings, the tits whispered in the undergrowth, in the grass and under the bushes close to the ground the metallic bursts of the pheasants' cries could be heard, the woodpecker laughed in loud celebration and the pigeons cooed from the yearning for love that was inside them.

Bambi stepped out from his underground chamber. Life was good. The elder was standing there as if he had been waiting.

The wandered slowly off together.

But Bambi never went back across that gulley, never went back to see the others.

CHAPTER 23

One night, when the autumn leaves were falling and whispering through the whole of the forest, the tawny owl gave his shrill cry through the tree tops. Then he waited.

But Bambi had already seen him in the distance through the now sparse foliage and now he kept still.

The owl flew closer and gave his shrill cry even louder. Then he waited. But this time too, Bambi said nothing.

The owl could not hold back any longer. "Aren't you startled, then?" he asked discontentedly.

"Oh, yes," Bambi answered gently. "A little bit."

"Well ...," the owl grumbled, "only a little bit? You always used to be terribly shocked. It was always such a pleasure to see how shocked you were. What's happened then, what's happened that means your only a little bit shocked ...?"

He was annoyed and repeated, "just a little bit ..."

The owl had grown old, and that had made him even more vain and even more sensitive than he had been.

Bambi wanted to answer; I was never startled before, either, but I just said I was because I knew you liked it. But he decided he would rather keep this information to himself. He felt sorry for the good old owl, as he sat there being cross. He did his best to calm him down. "Maybe it's because I was just thinking about you," he said.

"What?" The owl became cheerful again. "What? You were thinking about me?"

“Yes,” answered Bambi hesitantly, “just when began to screech. Otherwise, of course, I would have been just as startled as ever.”

“Really?” the owl purred.

Bambi could not resist. What harm could there be in it? Let the little old boy have some pleasure.

“Really,” he confirmed and went on .”.. it pleases me ... it goes through all my limbs when I suddenly hear you like that.”

The owl puffed up his feathers, turned himself into a soft, brown and light grey, fluffy ball, and he was very pleased. “That’s very nice of you to have been thinking about me ... very nice indeed ...” he cooed gently. “It’s such a long time since we saw each other.”

“A very long time,” said Bambi.

“Maybe it’s that you don’t go along the same old paths any more?” enquired the owl.

“No ...,” Bambi spoke slowly, “I don’t go along the same old paths any more.”

“I’ve been seeing a lot more of the world too lately,” remarked the owl, puffing his chest out. He did not tell Bambi that he had been driven out of the old territory he had inherited from his ancestors by a young and reckless lad. “You can’t always stay on the same spot,” he added. Then he waited for Bambi’s reply.

But Bambi had gone. By now he had learned the art of disappearing in silence almost as well as the elder.

The owl was dismayed. “Shameless ...” he grumbled. He shook himself, buried his beak into his plumage and philosophized to himself; “You should never think you could make friends with these posh types. They might seem ever so likeable ... but one day they’ll

shamelessly ... and then you sit there looking stupid, just like I am now ...”

Suddenly he fell vertically down to the ground like a stone. He had seen a mouse, which then, caught in his talons, had the time to squeal just once. He tore the mouse into pieces because he was so angry. He pulled the head off this mouthful quicker than he normally would. And then he flew away. “What does Bambi matter to me?” he thought. “What does any of those posh people matter to me? Nothing. They don’t matter at all!” He started to screech. So shrill, so long, that a pair of wood pigeons he passed by were woken up and, with much loud flapping of wings, they fell out of where they had been sleeping.

The storm blew through the woods for many days, tearing the last of the leaves from the twigs and branches. The trees now stood there naked.

In the grey of morning twilight Bambi was making his way home in order to sleep together with the elder in their chamber.

A thin voice called to him, two times, three times in quick succession. He stayed where he was. Then the squirrel swooped down from the tree like lightning and sat on the ground in front of him.

“It really is you, then!” he piped with respectful astonishment. “I recognized you straight away when you passed by me, I didn’t really want to believe it ...”

“How come you’re here ...?” Bambi asked.

The cheerful, little face in front of him took on a worried expression. “The oak tree is gone ...” the squirrel began to complain, “my lovely old oak tree ... do you remember? It’s terrible ... He’s cut it down.”

Bambi lowered his head in sadness. It really did hurt his soul to hear about the wonderful ancient tree.

“It all happened so quickly,” the squirrel told him. “All of us who lived on the old tree, we all ran away and we could only watch as He bit through it with an enormous blinking tooth. The tree screamed out loud from his wound. He just kept on screaming, and the tooth screamed too ... it was horrible to hear it. Then that poor, lovely tree fell over. Out onto the meadow ... it made all of us cry.”

Bambi was silent.

“Yes ...” said the squirrel with a sigh, “He can do anything ... He’s omnipotent ...” He looked at Bambi with eyes wide open and pricked up his ears, but Bambi was silent.

“We’ve all got nowhere to live now ...” the squirrel continued, “I don’t even have any idea of where the others have got to ... I came over here ... but it’ll take me ages to find another tree like that.”

“The old oak tree ...,” muttered Bambi to himself, “I’ve known it since I was a child.”

“No ... but it’s good to see that it’s really you!” The squirrel became quite contented. “We all thought you must have died a long time ago. But there were some who said you were still alive ... some said that someone or other had seen you ... but we couldn’t find out anything definite, so we just supposed it was an empty rumour ...” The squirrel looked at him searchingly. “Well, that was ... that was because you didn’t come back.”

He sat there waiting for an answer, you could see that he was very keen to know what had happened.

Bambi was silent. But he, too, felt a slight, anxious curiosity. He wanted to ask. About Faline, about Aunt Ena, about Ronno and Karus, about everyone he had known as a child. But he was silent.

The squirrel continued to sit in front of Bambi and examined him. “Look at that crown!” he exclaimed in admiration. “What a crown!

Apart from the old prince, no-one has a crown like that, no-one anywhere in the forest!”

Earlier, Bambi would have felt very pleased and flattered by an observation like this. Now he just said wearily, “Yes ... I suppose so ...”

The squirrel nodded his head vigorously. “It really is!” he said in astonishment. “Really. You’re beginning to go grey.”

Bambi walked away.

The squirrel saw that the discussion was at an end and swung up into the branches. “Bye then,” he called down. “Look after yourself! I enjoyed seeing you again. If I see any of your old friends I’ll tell them you’re still alive ... they’ll all be glad to hear it.”

Bambi heard this and once again felt those slight stirrings in his heart. But it said nothing. You have to stay alone, the elder had taught him when Bambi was still a child. And the elder had shown him many things, told him many secrets, and continued doing so up to the present day. But of all the things he had been taught, this was the most important: You have to stay alone. If you’re going to preserve your life, if you want to understand existence, if you want to become wise, you have to stay alone!

“But,” asked Bambi one time, “but what about the two of us, we’re always together nowadays ...?”

“We soon won’t be,” the elder had retorted.

That had only been a few weeks earlier.

Now, it again occurred to Bambi, and it occurred to him very suddenly, that the very first thing the elder had said to him had been that he had to stay alone. That had been when Bambi was still a child and was calling for his mother. Then the elder had come up to him and asked, “Are you not able to be alone?”

Bambi walked on.

CHAPTER 24

The forest lay once more under snow and was silent under its thick, white coat. All that could be heard was the cawing of the crows, only now and then came the anxious croaking of a magpie or the shy, gentle, twittering conversations of the tits. Then the frost became harder, and everything was silent. Now, the coldness made the air itself ring.

One morning the deep quiet was torn apart by the barking of dogs.

It was an incessant, hurried barking that drove its way quickly through the forest, a sharp, curt and belligerent yapping that made him sound insane.

In the chamber under the fallen beech trunk Bambi raised his head and looked at the elder who was lying next to him.

The elder answered Bambi's look. "It's nothing, nothing that need concern us."

The two of them nonetheless listened.

They lay in their chamber, they had the old beech trunk as a protective roof over them, icy draughts were kept out by the height of the snow, and the tangle of bushes hid them like a dense grid from any spying eye.

The barking came nearer, angry, breathless, heated. It could only have been a small dog.

It came ever nearer. Now they could hear the gasping for breath at twice the speed, and through the angry barking they heard a gentle growling, as if from pain. Bambi became uneasy, but the elder again said, "It's nothing that need concern us."

They remained still and quiet in the warmth of their chamber, peering out to see what was happening outside.

The rustling in the twigs came ever nearer, snow fell from the boughs as they were suddenly run past, a dust of snow was kicked up from the ground.

Now it was possible to see who was coming.

Through snow and bushes, through roots and twigs there came, jumping and creeping and sliding, the old fox.

Immediately after him the dog broke through. It was a very small dog on short legs.

One of the fox's front legs was broken and just above the break his fur was ripped open. He held the broken leg high up in front of him, blood was spurting from his wounds, his breath was wheezy, his eyes were staring far ahead because of his horror and the efforts he was having to make. He was beside himself with terror and panic, he was confused and exhausted. He swung round in a swiping movement, which startled the dog so that he stepped back a few paces.

The fox sat down on his hind legs. He could go no further. He held the shot foreleg up in a way that was pitiful, his mouth was open, sucking in his cheeks he spat at the dog.

He, though, was not quiet for a moment. His high, shrill voice now became fuller and deeper. "Here!" he shouted. Here! Here he is! Here! Here! Here!" He was not shouting at the fox, at that moment he was not speaking to him at all but was clearly calling to somebody else who was still a long way away.

Bambi and the elder were both aware that it was Him whom the dog was calling.

The fox knew it too. The blood was now gushing down from his breast and into the snow and built up a gently steaming, scarlet stain on the icy-white layer.

The fox seemed to be having a mild fit. His shattered foreleg had no strength in it and it sank down, but when it touched the cold snow a burning pain shot through it. Arduously, he raised it up and held it, jittering, in the air in front of him.

“Leave me alone ...” he began to say. “Leave me alone ...”. He spoke quietly and imploringly. He was very dull and disheartened.

“No! No! No!” the dog threw back at him in a malevolent howl.

“I beg of you ...” said the fox, “I can’t go any further ... I’ve had it .. just let me go ... let me go home ... at least let me die in peace ...”

“No! No! No!” the dog howled.

The fox begged him even harder. “But we’re related ...” he lamented, “we’re almost brothers ... let me go home ... let me die among my own folk ... we ... we’re almost brothers ... you and me ...”.

“No! No! No!” the dog said excitedly.

Now the fox sat upright. His lovely pointed snout sank down to his bloodied breast, his eyes rose up and stared at the dog right into his face . In a quite different voice, in control of himself, sad and bitter, he snarled, “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself ...? You traitor!”

“No! No! No!” the dog yelled.

The fox, however went on. “You turncoat ... you defector!” His lacerated body became stiff with hatred and contempt. “You’re just His henchman,” he hissed. “You miserable ... you seek us out where He couldn’t find us ... you persecute us in places that He can’t get to ... you turn us in ..., and all of us are your relatives ... you turn me in,

and you and I are nearly brothers ... and you just stand there ...are you not ashamed of yourself?"

Suddenly many loud, new voices were heard around them.

"Traitor!" called the magpies from the trees.

"Henchman!" screeched the jays.

"Miserable!" squealed the weasel.

"Defector!" spat the polecat.

Shrill hisses and screeches came out from all the trees and bushes, and from the air came the screeching of the crows, "henchman!" All had hurried close, all had listened to the quarrel from the trees above or from a safe hiding place on the ground. The disgust expressed by the fox released the old, bitter disgust that they all felt, and the blood steaming in sight of them on the snow made them furious and made them lose all their reserve.

The dog looked around him. "You!" he called. "What do you want? What do you know about it? What are you talking about? All o' you belong to 'Im, just like I belong to 'Im! But me ... well I love 'Im, I pray to 'Im! I serve 'Im! But you, you don't know that 'E's in charge 'ere. You're pitiful you are, you can't rebel against 'Im? 'E's the almighty! 'E's above all of us! Ev'rything you've got comes from 'Im! E'vrything that grows and lives, it all comes from 'Im." The dog was shaking in his outrage.

"Traitor!" the squirrel screamed.

"Yes!" hissed the fox. "You're a traitor. Nobody but you ... you're the only one ...!"

They danced about in self-righteous anger. "I'm the only one ...? You liar! D'you think there aren't loads and loads of others who are with 'Im ...? The 'orse ... the cows ... the lamb ... the chickens ... and

some of all of you, all your species, there are loads who are with 'Im, who pray to 'im ... and serve 'Im!"

"Rabble!" hissed the fox, full of boundless contempt.

The dog could control himself no longer and hurled himself at the fox's throat. A snarling, spitting, gasping bundle, wild and whirring they rolled in the snow, snapping at each other, hair flew up, snow flew up, fine drops of blood flew up. But the fox was not able to maintain the fight for long. After just a few seconds he lay there on his back, showed his pale belly, twitched, stretched himself out, and died.

The dog shook him a few more times, then dropped him into the churned up snow, stood there with his legs wide apart and once more called out in a full, deep voice, "There! There! There he is!"

The others were disgusted and fled away in all directions.

"Horrible ..." said Bambi in his chamber to the elder.

"Worst of all," the elder replied, "is that they believe in what the dog just said. They believe it, they live a life full of fear, they hate Him and they hate themselves ... and they kill themselves for his sake."

CHAPTER 25

There came a break in the cold and a pause in the middle of winter. The Earth drank in the melting snow in great draughts, so that broad stretches of naked earth could be seen everywhere. The blackbirds were not singing yet but when they flew up from the ground where they had been hunting for worms, or when they flapped from tree to tree, they let out a long, shrill, cheerful cry which was almost like birdsong. The woodpecker began to laugh here and there, magpies and crows became more chatty, the tits talked gaily with each other, and the pheasants, when they had swung down from the trees where they had been sleeping, now remained in one spot for almost as long as they would in the good times, they would shake their plumage in the morning sunshine and continually burst out with their metallic cry.

On mornings like this Bambi would range out further afield than he normally would. When the sun had barely risen he arrived at his chamber under the beech tree. Over on the other side, there where he had used to live, there was something moving. Bambi remained hidden in the undergrowth and watched. He was right, someone of his own species was moving about there, seeking out the patches that were free of snow and setting about the early-risen grasses.

At first, Bambi wanted to turn round and go away, but then he saw that it was Faline. His first urge was to jump forward and call to her. But he stayed where he was as if rooted to the spot. It was so long since he had last seen Faline. His heart began to beat hotly. Faline was walking slowly, as if she were tired or sad. She looked like her mother now, looked like Aunt Ena, and when Bambi noticed this it was with painful astonishment.

Faline raised her head and looked in his direction, as if she could feel that he was near.

Again, Bambi felt the urge to go toward her, but, again, he stayed where he was, powerless and lame, he was unable to move.

He saw that Faline had become old and grey.

Gay and audacious little Faline, he thought, she used to be so beautiful, so nimble. His entire childhood suddenly shimmered up in him. The meadow, the paths his mother led him along, the happy games with Gobo and Faline, the good grasshopper and the butterfly, the struggle with Karus and Ronno by which he had won Faline for himself. He suddenly felt happy again, but nonetheless shaken.

Over there, Faline was walking away with her head sunk down to the ground, slow, tired and sad. At that moment Bambi loved her with a gush of tender pity, he wanted to cross through the hole under the beech trunk, which for so long had separated him from her and from the others, wanted to fetch her back, to talk to her about the time when they had been children, above all to talk about the past.

As he thought this he watched her as she went on through the bare bushes and finally disappeared from sight.

He stood there for a long time, looking in her direction.

A clap of thunder crashed. Bambi was startled.

That was here, on this side of the hole. Not very close, but here, on the side where he was.

Another crash of thunder came, and then another.

Bambi made a few steps deeper back into the thicket, where he kept still and listened. Everything was quiet. He crept carefully home.

The elder was already there, but had not gone down into their chamber, he just stood next to the fallen beech trunk as if he had been waiting.

“Where have you been all this time?” he asked, and he was so serious that Bambi remained silent. “Did you hear that, just now?” the elder went on after a pause.

“Yes,” Bambi answered. “Three times. He’s in the forest.”

“Clearly ...,” the elder nodded, and he repeated, with a strange inflexion, “He is in the forest ... we need to go.”

“Where?” Bambi could not stop himself from asking.

“Over there,” said the elder, and his voice was heavy. “Over there where He is now.”

Bambi was alarmed.

“Don’t be frightened,” the elder went on. “Come with me now and don’t be afraid. I’m glad I’ve got the chance to take you there and let you see it ...” He hesitated and gently added, “before I go.”

Bambi was taken aback at this and stared at the elder. He suddenly became aware of how frail he looked; his head was now entirely white, his face had become very gaunt, his beautiful eyes had lost their sparkle, they had taken on a dull green appearance and seemed to be somehow broken.

Bambi and the elder did not go far, they could feel the first winds of a heavy storm blowing at them, a storm that was capable of putting so much threat and dread into their hearts.

Bambi stopped, but the elder carried on walking, directly towards the storm. Bambi hesitantly followed behind him.

The scent of the storm came at them in ever stronger waves and drew them forward. The elder went straight on. Thoughts of flight had sprung into Bambi, he could feel tension in his breast which boiled through his head and all his limbs. They nearly tore him away

from the place. He stayed strong and continued to walk behind the elder.

Now this malevolent storm had swollen up into something so mighty that there was nothing else it was possible to feel, and so that it was now barely possible to breathe.

“There!” said the elder, and he stepped to one side.

Two steps away from them, He lay there on the ground on bent and broken bushes and in churned up snow.

Bambi half-suppressed a scream of horror, and with a sudden jump he fled, as he had already been wishing to do . He was nearly out of his senses in terror.

“Stop!” he heard the elder call. He looked back and saw that the elder was calmly standing there where He was lying on the ground. Beside himself in astonishment, Bambi stepped closer, compelled by his obedience, by his boundless curiosity, by his quaking anticipation.

“Come closer ... don’t be afraid,” the elder said.

There He lay, his pale uncovered face looking upwards, His hat a little to the side of him in the snow, and Bambi, who knew nothing about hats, thought that that awful head had been struck into two pieces.

The hunter’s neck was exposed and showed a wound as if it had been cut through. It lay open like a little red mouth. There was still a gentle flow of blood from it, blood was in His hair, under His nose, and had formed a large pool in the snow, melting it with its warmth.

“Here we are then,” the elder quietly began, “we’re standing right beside Him ... and where’s the danger now?”

Bambi looked down at Him as he lay there, His form, His limbs, His hair all seemed to Bambi to be something gruesome but puzzling. He looked into those broken eyes that stared sightlessly back up at him, and he did not understand.

“Bambi,” the elder continued, “do you remember what Gobo said, what the dog said, about what everyone believed ... do you remember?”

Bambi was incapable of giving an answer.

“You can see him there, Bambi,” the elder went on, “you can see Him lying there like any one of us. Listen to me, Bambi, He is not almighty like they say he is. He is not the source from which everything comes, everything that grows and lives. He is not our superior! He is beside us, He is like us, and just like us He knows fear and need and sorrow. He can be overcome just like us and now He lies helpless on the ground, just like the rest of us, just as you see Him now.”

They remained silent.

“Do you understand me, Bambi?” the elder asked.

Bambi answered in a whisper, “I think ...”

“Tell me what you think, then!” the elder ordered him.

Bambi blushed and quaked and said, “There’s someone else who is above all of us, ... above us and above Him.”

“The time has come, then, when I can go,” the elder said.

He turned round and the two of them wandered on for a little while.

At a tall ash tree the elder stopped. “Don’t come with me any more, Bambi,” he began, in a calm voice, “my time is up. Now I need to find a place for the end ...”

Bambi was about to say something.

“No,” the elder stopped him. “No ... at the time I am now approaching each of us is alone. Fare well, my son ... I have loved you very much.”

The summer's day started being hot as soon as the sun had risen, no wind, no chill of twilight. The sun seemed to be in more of a hurry that day. It rose quickly into the sky and broke out its dazzling flames like a dreadful blaze.

The dew on the meadow and on the bushes quickly evaporated; the earth became very dry and crumbly. In the woods it became quiet before its usual time. Only the woodpecker could be heard laughing here and there, and only the pigeons cooed in tireless, fervent tenderness.

Deep in a thicket there was a little, hidden clearing, giving a little free space, and that is where Bambi was standing. Around his head a swarm of midges danced and sang in the sunshine. From the leaves of the hazel bush beside him came a quiet buzzing, it came closer, and a big cockchafer flew slowly past him, straight through the swarm of midges, higher and higher up to the top of a tree where he intended to sleep until evening. His elegant wing covers stuck out from him and his wings were bursting with power.

“Did you see him ...?” the midges asked each other. “That's the elder,” said one of them. And the others sang, “All of his relatives are already dead, but he's still alive.”

A couple of very small midges asked, “How long do you think he's going to live?” The others sang their answer, “We don't know. He's outlived all of his family ... he's very old ... very old.”

Bambi walked on. The song of midges, he thought, song of midges ... A tender, anxious call came through to him. The voice of somebody of his own species. “Mother! ... mother!”

Before they understood what was happening, Bambi was standing there before them. Speechless, they stared at him. "Your mother does not have the time now," Bambi told them sternly. He looked in the little one's eye. "Can't you be by yourself for a while?"

The little one and his sister remained silent.

Bambi turned away, slipped into the nearest bush and disappeared, even before two of them could understand what had happened. He walked on. "I like that lad ..." he thought. "Maybe I'll meet him again when he's a bit bigger ..." He walked on. "And the little lass," he thought, "she's nice too ... that's what Faline looked like when she was a child."

He walked on and disappeared into the woods.

END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BAMBI

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