

## CHAPTER ONE

HE WAS BORN IN THE MIDDLE OF A THICKET, one of those small hidden places in the forest that appear to be open yet are shielded on all sides. The space was so small that there was barely enough room for him and his mother. Soon he stood up and swayed anxiously on his thin back legs. He looked all around him with foggy eyes that saw nothing. Befuddled, he lowered his head and trembled a good deal, for he was still somewhat bewildered.

“What a beautiful child!” the magpie exclaimed.

She had flown there lured by the gasps, groans, and screams that the fawn’s mother had uttered in her labor. Now the magpie perched on a nearby branch.

“What a beautiful child!” she cried again.

She received no answer and yet kept busily chattering away.

“It’s astonishing that he can stand and walk right away! How interesting! I’ve never seen anything like that in my entire life. Well, of course, I’m still young, just one year since I left the nest, which you perhaps know. But I think it’s wonderful. A child like that . . . born into this world and a second later he can already stand. I find it remarkable! In fact, I find everything that you deer do elegant and noble. Tell me, can he run already?”

“Certainly,” the mother responded softly. “But you must excuse me if I’m not able to continue talking to you any longer. I’ve got so much to do now . . . and besides, I still feel somewhat weak.”

“Well, I wouldn’t want to disturb you,” the magpie said. “I don’t have much time myself. But most people never see anything like this. Please, I know just how much bother and trouble things

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are for us mothers in situations like this. The children can barely move once they are out of the egg. They just lie there helplessly in the nest and need care and attention, so much care I tell you! Naturally, you can't imagine just how much care! It's so much work to feed them, and there's so much anxiety that goes into protecting them. Please, just think for a second how strenuous it is to fetch food for the children. At the same time, you have to make sure that nothing happens to them. They can't do a thing by themselves when you're not there to help them. Isn't that the truth? And just how long does it take until they can move about? How long does it take before their feathers grow, and they look somewhat respectable?"

"Pardon me," the mother replied. "I haven't been listening."

The magpie flew away and thought to herself, "What a stupid person! Refined, but stupid!"

The mother hardly noticed that the magpie had left. She continued busily cleansing her newborn child. She washed him with her tongue, which did everything all at the same time—body care, a warm massage, and tender caressing.

The little fawn stumbled a bit. Then, under his mother's pushing and strokes that touched him here and there, he pulled himself together and stood still. His little red coat was somewhat rumpled and covered by fine white spots, and there was still an expression of deep sleep on his drowsy baby face.

Mother and son were surrounded by hazel and dogwood bushes, black thorns, and young elderberries. The tall maple, beech, and oak trees formed a green roof over the thicket, and fern fronds, wild berries, and sage sprouted from the firm dark brown soil. Down below, the leaves of the violets had already blossomed, and also those of the strawberries that nestled in the ground. Just then the early sunlight penetrated the thick foliage like a golden thread. The entire forest resounded with myriad voices, imbued by a feeling of joy. The oriole rejoiced incessantly. The doves cooed without stopping. The blackbirds whistled. The finches warbled. The chickadees chirped. In the midst of all this

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music the young jays softly uttered their cries, while the magpies quarreled with laughter. Then the pheasants joined the chorus and burst with shrill cackling cries. At times the high-pitched shouts of the woodpecker penetrated all the other voices. The call of the falcon rang shrilly and urgently over the treetops. During all of this music the blustering chorus of the crows could be heard throughout the forest.

The little one did not understand any of the songs and calls, nor one word of the chattering and conversations. He didn't even listen to them. Nor did he perceive a single one of the smells that the forest exuded. He heard only the soft brushing of his mother's tongue as it ran over his little coat while she washed him, warmed him, and kissed him. He smelled only the closeness of his mother's body. He snuggled to be as near as possible to her pleasant body. Then he searched hungrily all around until he found the source of life.

As the little fawn suckled, his mother continued to caress her little one.

"Bambi," she whispered, and every now and then she raised her head, listened to the sounds of the forest, and sniffed the wind. Then she kissed her child again and was relieved and happy.

"Bambi," she repeated. "My little Bambi."