

BAMBI

[Illustrated]

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Marjorie Benton Cooke

Illustrated by

Mary Greene Blumenschein

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DEDICATION

TO BAMBI

With thanks to her for being Herself!

M.B.C.

I

"Professor James Parkhurst, I consider you a colossal failure as an educator," said Francesca, his daughter, known to friend and family as Bambina, or Bambi for short.

Professor Parkhurst lifted a startled face from his newspaper and surveyed his only child across the breakfast table.

"My dear, what causes this sweeping assertion of my incompetence?"

"I do! I do! Just what did you expect me to do when I grew up?"

"Why, to be happy."

"That's the profession you intended me for? Who's to pay the piper? It's expensive to be happy and also unlucrative."

"I have always expected to support you until your husband claimed that privilege."

"Suppose I want a husband who can't support me?"

"Dear me, that would be unfortunate. It is the first duty of a husband to support his wife."

"Old-fashioned husbands, yes—but not modern ones. Lots of men marry to be supported nowadays. How on earth could I support the man I love?"

"You are not without talents, my dear."

"Talents? You almost said accomplishments! If you were not living in the Pliocene age, Professor James Parkhurst, you would know that accomplishments are a curse—accomplishment is the only thing that counts. I can sing a little, play the piano a little, auction bridge a good deal; I can cook, and sew fancy things. The only thing I can do well is to dance, and no real man wants to be supported by his wife's toes."

Bambi

The Professor smiled mirthlessly. "Is this a general discussion, or are you leading to a specific point, Bambi?" he inquired.

"It's a specific charge of incompetence against you and me. Why didn't you teach me something? You know more about mathematics than the man who invented them, and I am not even sure that two and two make four."

"You're young yet, my dear; you can learn. What is it you want to study?"

"Success, and how to get it."

"Success, in the general sense of the word, has never seemed very important to me. To do your work well——"

"Yes, I know. It is the fact that you have not thought success important that hampers me so in the choice of a husband."

"Bambina, that is the second time a husband has been mentioned in this discussion. Have you some individual under consideration?"

"I have. I have practically decided on him."

"You don't tell me! Do I know the young man?"

"Oh, yes—Jarvis Jocelyn."

"He has proposed to you?"

"Oh, no. He doesn't know anything about it. I have just decided on him."

"But, my dear, he is penniless."

"That's why I reproach you that you haven't brought me up to support Jarvis in a luxury he will have to get used to."

"But why have you settled on this youth? I seem to recall a great many young men who are always about. I presume they admire you. Certainly this dreamer is the most ineligible of them all."

"Oh, that—yes. That's why I must take him. He'll starve to death unless some one takes him on, and looks after him."

"Isn't there some asylum, perhaps?"

Bambi's laugh rang out like a chime.

"A home for geniuses. There's an idea! No, Professor Parkhurst, Society does not yet provide for that particular brand of incompetents."

"It seems as if you were going rather far in your quixotism to marry him."

Again the girl laughed.

"I total him up like this: fine family, good blood, decent habits, handsome, healthy, poetic. He might even be affectionate. His one fault is that he is not adjusted to modern commercial standards. He cannot make money, or he will not—it comes to the same thing."

"I am unable to see why you are elected to take care of him. He must fit his time, or perish. You don't happen to be in love with him, do you?"

"No, I—I think not. He interests me more than anybody. I suppose I am fond of him rather."

"Have you any reason for thinking him in love with you?"

"Mercy, no! He hardly knows I'm alive. He uses me for a conversational blotting-pad. That's my only use in his eyes."

"He's so very impractical."

"I am used to impractical men. I have taken care of you since I was five years old."

"Yes, my dear. But I am not trying to feed the world bread when it demands cheese."

"No, you are distinctly practical. You are only trying to prove a fourth dimension, when three have sufficed the world up to date."

"Yes, but—"

"No buts. If it had not been for me you would have gone naked and been arrested, or have forgotten to eat and starved to death."

"Now, my dear Bambi, I protest—"

Bambi

"It will do you no good. Don't I remember how you started off to meet your nine o'clock class clad in your pyjamas?"

"Oh, my child!"

"Don't talk to me about impracticality. It's my birthright."

"Well, I can prove to you——"

"I never believe anything you have to prove. If I can't see it, first thing, without any process, it isn't true."

"But if you represent yourself as Y, and Jarvis as X, an unknown quantity——"

"Professor Parkhurst, stop there! There's nothing so unreliable as figures, and everybody but a mathematician knows that. Figures lie right to your face."

"Bambina, if you could coin your conversation——" Professor Parkhurst began.

"I am sorry to find you unreasonable about Jarvis, Professor."

He gazed at her, in his absent-minded, startled way. He had never understood her since she was first put into his hands, aged six months, a fluffy bundle of motherless babyhood. She never ceased to startle him. She was an enigma beyond any puzzle in mathematics he had ever brought his mind to bear upon.

"How old are you, Bambina?"

"Shame on you, and you a mathematician. If James is forty-five, and Bambina is two thirds of half his age, how old is Bambi? I'm nineteen."

His startled gaze deepened.

"Oh, you cannot be!" he objected.

"There you are. I told you figures lie. It says so in the family Bible, but maybe I'm only two."

"Nineteen years old! Dearie me!"

"You see I'm quite old enough to know my own mind. Have you a nine o'clock class this morning?"

"I have."

"Well, hasten, Professor, or you'll get a tardy mark. It's ten minutes of nine now."

He jumped up from his chair and started for the door.

"Don't you want this notebook?" she called, taking up the pad beside his plate.

"Yes, oh, yes, those are my notes. Where have I laid my glasses? Quick, my dear! I must not be late."

"On your head," said she.

She followed him to the hall, reminded him of his hat, his umbrella, restored the notebook, and finally saw him off, his thin back, with its scholarly stoop, disappearing down the street.

Bambina went back to the breakfast table, and took up the paper. She read all the want "ads" headed "female."

"Nothing promising here," she said. "I wonder if I could bring myself to teach little kids one, two, and one, two, three, in a select dancing class? I'd loathe it."

A ponderous black woman appeared in the door and filled it.

"Is you froo?"

"Yes, go ahead, Ardelia."

"Hab the Perfessor gone already?"

"Yes, he's gone."

"Well, he suttinly did tell me to remin' him of suthin' this mohnin', and I cain't des perzactly remember what it was."

"Was it important?"

"Yassum. Seemed lak I remember he tell me it was impo'tant."

Bambi

"Serves him right for not telling me."

"It suttin' am queer the way he can't remember. Seem lak his haid so full of figgers, or what you call them, ain' no room for nuthin' else."

"You and father get zero in memory—that's sure."

"I ain't got no trubble dat way, Miss Bambi. I remember everything, 'cepting wot you tell me to remember."

The dining-room door flew open at this point, and a handsome youth, with his hair upstanding, and his clothes in a wrinkle, appeared on the threshold. Bambi rose and started for him.

"Jarvis!" she exclaimed. "What has happened? Where have you been?"

"Sleeping in the garden."

"Dat's it—dat's it! Dat was wat I was to remin' the Perfessor of, dat a man was sleepin' in the garden."

"Sleeping in our garden? But why?"

"Because of the filthy commercialism of this age! Here I am, at the climax of my big play, a revolutionary play, I tell you, teeming with new and vital ideas, for a people on the down-slide, and a landlady, a puny, insignificant ant of a female, interrupts me to demand money, and when I assure her, most politely, that I have none, she puts me out, actually puts me out!"

Bambi choked back a laugh.

"Why didn't you come here?"

"I did. Your father refused to see me; he was working at his crazy figures. I burst in, and demanded you, but he couldn't remember where you had gone."

"What a pity! Well——"

"I told him I would wait in the garden. If necessary, I would sleep there."

"Yas'm, yas'm, dat's when he called me in, to tell me to bemin' him."

"That will do, Ardelia."

"Yassum," said the handmaiden, and withdrew.

"Now, go on."

"I was full of my big act, so I walked and walked for hours. Then I lay down in the summer-house, and I must have gone to sleep."

"Go up and take a bath, and come down to some breakfast. I will send Ardelia to get some of father's things for you if you need them."

"All right, but don't delay with breakfast. If I don't get this act down, I may lose it. That fiend, in female guise, held my paper."

"Go on! Get ready!"

He plunged out, and Bambi went to send Ardelia to him, while she cooked his eggs and fried his bacon. As she worked, she smiled, out of sheer amusement.

In due course of time, he appeared, freshened up, and with renewed eagerness to be at work. He scarcely noticed Bambina as she served his breakfast. He ate as if he were starved.

"I suppose the landlady held your clothes?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask. It was unimportant."

"How much do you owe her?"

He looked at her in surprise.

"I have no idea."

"Have you any money at all?"

"Certainly not. I'd have given it to her if I had, so she wouldn't interrupt me."

"What are you going to do?"

Bambi

"Oh, I don't know. I can't think about it now. I am full of this big idea. It's a dramatization of the Brotherhood of Man, of a sublime, socialistic world—"

"Has it occurred to you, ever, Jarvis, that the world isn't ready for the Brotherhood of Man yet? It's just out of the tent stage, where War is the whole duty of Man."

"But it must be ready," he urged, seriously, "for I am here with my message."

She smiled at him as one would at a conceited child.

"Poor old Jarvis, strayed out of Elysian fields! Were you thinking of sleeping in the summer-house permanently?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter; only the play matters. Give me some paper, Bambi, and let me get to work."

She rose and went to stand before him.

"Would you mind looking at me?"

He turned his eyes on her.

"Not just your eyes, Jarvis. Look at me with your mind."

"What's the matter with you?" he asked, slightly irritated.

"Do you like my looks?"

"I've never noticed them."

"That's what I'm asking you to do. Look me over."

He stared at her.

"Yes, you're pretty—you're very pretty. Some people might call you beautiful."

"Don't overdo it, Jarvis! Have you ever noticed my disposition?"

"No—yes. Well, I know you're patient, and you must be good-natured."

"I am. I am also healthy and cheerful."

"I don't doubt it. Where is the paper?"

She put her hands on his shoulders and shook him gently.

"Jarvis, I want you to give me your full attention for five minutes."

"What ails you to-day, Bambi?"

"The only thing I lack is a useful education, so that I am not sure I can make a very big living just at first, unless I dance on the stage."

"What are you driving at?"

"Would you have any special objection to marrying me, Jarvis?"

"Marrying you? Are you crazy?"

"Obviously. Have you?"

"Certainly I won't marry you. I am too busy. You disappoint me, Bambi; you do, indeed. I always thought you were such a sensible girl—
—"

"Father can help out a little, at first, but I may as well tell you, he doesn't approve of you as a son-in-law."

"I don't approve of him, impractical dreamer! Where is that paper?"

"You've got to be taken care of until you get an awful tumble. Then you will wake up and do big things, but in the meantime you must eat."

"You talk nonsense, and you're interrupting me. If I don't get at that scene—"

"Will you marry me? I can't take care of you if you don't, because the neighbours will talk."

"I won't marry you. I don't love you."

"No more do I love you. That's got nothing to do with it. Here's one of father's empty notebooks. Say yes, and you can have it."

His eyes fairly glistened as they fell on the book.

"For heaven's sake, don't torture me. Give me the book and have it your own way, whatever it is you want."

Bambi

She laughed, gave him the book, and he was at the table instantly, sweeping back the dishes with a ruthless hand.

"No, no, into the study you go, while I make a descent on your landlady, rescue your clothes, and get the license and the minister, my liege lord."

She settled him at his desk, where he was immediately lost to his surroundings.

Bambi slipped out noiselessly, dressed for the street, humming a little song, and presently departed.

Meanwhile, his first recitations being over, the Professor returned for two hours' research in his study, to find Jarvis ensconced there, oblivious to the outside world. "Go away, go away!" he shouted to Professor Parkhurst.

"I'll trouble you to get out of my study," said the Professor.

"You'll get your filthy money in due time, my good woman, so go away!" cried Jarvis.

"Whom are you addressing? Good woman, indeed!"

At this moment Bambi returned, and sensed the situation.

"Oh, I didn't expect you back, Father Professor. This is Jarvis. You see he's come. He has no objection at all to my marrying him, so I got a minister."

"A minister? You got him?"

"Yes, you see Jarvis is busy. There is no need of our waiting, so we are going to be married in half an hour or so."

"To-day? Here?"

"Yes, right here, as soon as Jarvis finishes this scene."

"Is he going to occupy my library permanently?" wailed the Professor.

"No, no. I'll fix him a place on the top floor."

"He's not at all my choice," said Professor Parkhurst firmly, gazing at the unconscious Jocelyn. "You can see by the way he tosses paper about that he is neither methodical nor orderly."

"Those are husband traits that I can do without, thank you."

Ardelia appeared.

" 'Scuse me, but yo' all expectin' the preacher up here? He say Miss Bambi tol' him to cum here at eleven o'clock."

"Yes, show him right in here."

"Yassum."

Ardelia reappeared with the Reverend Dr. Short at her heels. Bambi greeted him, and Professor Parkhurst shook hands absently. Bambi went to lean over Jarvis. He suddenly threw down his pen, stretched himself, and groaned.

"Now, if I can just get the last act outlined—"

"Jarvis, just a minute, please."

He suddenly looked at her, and at the other two.

"This is Reverend Dr. Short, Mr. Jarvis Jocelyn."

"I have nothing to say to orthodoxy," Jarvis began, but Bambi interrupted him.

"Doctor Short has come to marry us. Stand up here for a few moments, and then you can go on with your third act."

She laid her hand on his arm, and drew him to his feet.

"The shortest possible service, please, Doctor Short. Jarvis is so busy to-day."

Doctor Short looked from the strange pair to Professor Parkhurst, who looked back at him.

"You are sure this is all right?" he questioned.

"Do tell him to be quick, Bambi. If it's about that landlady I cannot—"

" 'Sh! Go ahead, Doctor Short."

Doctor Short read the service, and between the three of them they induced Jarvis to make the proper responses. He seemed utterly unaware of what was going on about him, and at the end of a brief service, when Bambi's hand was taken from his arm, he sat down to work at once. Bambi led the other two men from the room.

"He acted as if he were drunk, or drugged, but he isn't. He's just full of an idea," she smilingly explained.

"Have you known this young man long?" Doctor Short asked the Professor.

"Have we, my dear?"

"We have known him fifteen years," she answered.

"Well, of course that makes a difference," murmured the reverend gentleman. "I wish you every happiness, Mrs. Jocelyn," he added, and took his departure.

"How soon can you get him out of my study?" asked the Professor, looking at his watch. "I have only one hour left before lunch."

"Felicitate me, Professor, felicitate me on my marriage."

"I hope you will be happy, my dear, but I doubt it. His lack of consideration in taking my study——"

Bambina looked at him, and began to laugh. Peal followed peal of laughter until tears stood in her eyes.

"I'll go rescue the study, Herr Professor. Oh, this is too rich! Bernard Shaw ought to know about me," she laughed, as she tripped upstairs.

So it was that Bambina acquired a husband.

II

Two days later Jarvis, shaved, properly dressed, and apparently sane, appeared on the piazza, where Bambi and the Professor were at lunch. He hesitated on the threshold until they both turned toward him.

"Good morning," he ventured.

"Good morning, Jarvis," said Bambi gayly.

"Morning," tersely, from the head of the house.

"Might I ask how long I have been sojourning on the top floor of this house, and how I got there?"

"Do you mean to say you don't know?"

"Haven't an idea. I have a faint recollection of a big disturbance, and then peace, heavenly peace, with black coffee every once in a while, and big ideas flowing like Niagara."

Bambina's eyes shone at him, but her father looked troubled.

"You know what the big disturbance was, don't you?" he asked.

"It seems to me I wanted paper—that somebody was taking my things away——"

"You'd better tell him, Francesca; he doesn't remember, so I don't think it can be legal."

Jarvis looked from one to the other.

"What's all this? I don't seem to get you."

Bambi's laugh bubbled over.

"You get me, all right."

"For goodness' sake, talk sense."

Bambi

"You came here, three days ago, in a trance, and announced that you had been bounced from the boarding-house, and that you needed paper to blot up the big ideas—the Niagara ideas——"

"Did I?"

"So I took you in, redeemed your clothes for you——"

"It was you who planted me upstairs in that heavenly quiet place, and brought black coffee?"

She nodded.

"God bless you for it."

"I did something else, too."

"Did you? What?"

"I married you."

He looked at her, dazed, and then at the Professor.

"What's the joke?" he asked.

"There is no joke," said the Professor sternly. "She did it. I tried to stop her, but she never listens to me."

"Do you mean, Bambi——" he began.

"I mean you told me to go ahead, so I got a license and a minister, and married you."

"But where was I when you did it?"

"You were there, I thought, but it didn't seem to take. Can't you remember anything at all about it, Jarvis?"

"Not a thing. Word of honour! How long have we been married?"

"Three days. You couldn't come out of the play, so I dragged you upstairs, fed you at stated periods, and let you alone."

He looked at her as if for the first time.

"Why, Bambi," he said, "you are a wonderful person."

"I have known it all along," she replied, sweetly.

"But why, in God's name, did you do it?"

"That's what I say," interpolated the Professor.

"Oh, it just came to me when I saw you needed looking after—"

"Don't you believe it. She intended to do it all along," said her father, grimly. "I tried to dissuade her. I told her you were a dreamer, penniless, and always would be, but she wouldn't listen to my practical talk."

"I seem to get a pretty definite idea of your opinion of me, sir. Why didn't you wake me up, so I could prevent this catastrophe?"

"I supposed you were awake. I didn't know you worked in a cataleptic fit."

"Catastrophe!" echoed Bambina.

"Certainly. Why don't you look at it in a practical way, as your father says? I never had any money. I probably never will. I hate the stuff. It's the curse of the age."

"I know all that."

"You will be wanting food and clothes no doubt, and you will expect me to provide them."

"Oh, never! You don't think I would take such an advantage of you, Jarvis, as to marry you when you were in a work fit and then expect you to support me?"

The Professor shook his head in despair, and arose.

"It's beyond me, all this modern madness. I wash my hands of the whole affair."

"That's right, Professor Parkhurst. I married him, you know; you didn't."

"Well, keep him out of my study," he warned.

Then he gathered up his scattered belongings, and turned his absent gaze on Bambi.

"What is it I want? Oh, yes. Call Ardelia."

Bambi

Bambi rang, and Ardelia answered the summons.

"Ardelia, did I ask you to remind me of anything this morning?"

She scratched her head in deep thought.

"No, sah, not's as I recollect. It was yistiddy you tol' me to remin' you, and I done forgot what it was."

"Ardelia, you are not entirely reliable," he remarked, as he passed her.

"No, sah. I ain't jes' what you call——" she muttered, following him out.

Bambi brought up the rear, chuckling over this daily controversy, which never failed to amuse her.

When the front door slammed, she came back to where Jarvis sat, his untouched luncheon before him. He watched her closely as she flashed into the room, like some swift, vivid bird perching opposite him.

"I spoiled your luncheon," she laughed.

"Bambi, why did you do this thing?"

"Good heavens, I don't know. I did it because I'm I, I suppose."

"You wanted to marry me?" he persisted.

"I thought I ought to. Somebody had to look after you, and I am used to looking after father. I like helpless men."

"So you were sorry for me? It was pity——"

"Rubbish. I believe in you. If you have a chance to work out your salvation you will be a big man. If you are hectored to death, you will kill yourself, or compromise, and that will be the end of you."

"You see that—you understand——"

He pushed back his chair and came to her.

"You think that little you can stand between me and these things that I must compromise with?"

She nodded at him, brightly. He leaned over, took her two small hands, and leaned his face against them.

"Thank you," he said, simply; "but I won't have it."

"Why not?"

"Because I am not worth it. You saw me in a work fit. I'm a devil. I'm like one possessed. I swear and rave if I am interrupted. I can't eat nor sleep till I get the madness out of me. I am not human. I am not normal. I am not fit to live with."

"Very well, we will build a cage at the top of the house, and when you feel a fit coming on you can go up there. I'll slip you food through a wire door so you can't bite me, and I'll exhibit you for a fee as the wildest genius in captivity."

"Bambi, be serious. This is no joke. This is awful!"

"You consider it awful to be married to me?"

"I am not thinking of myself. I am thinking of you. You have got yourself into a pretty mess, and I've got to get you out of it."

"How?"

"I'll divorce you."

"You've got no grounds. I've been a kind, dutiful wife to you. I haven't been near you since I married you, except to give you food."

"How do you expect we are to live? Nobody wants my plays."

"How do you know? You never try to sell them. You told me so yourself. You feel so superior to managers and audiences that you never offer them."

"I know. I occasionally go to the theatre, by mistake, and I see what they want."

"That's no criterion. We won't condemn even a Broadway manager until he proves himself such a dummy as not to want your plays."

"Broadway? Think of a play of mine on Broadway! Think of the fat swine who waddle into those theatres!"

"My dear, there are men of brains writing for the theatre to-day who do not scorn those swine."

"Men of brains? Who, who, I ask you?"

"Bernard Shaw."

"Showman, trickster."

"Barrie."

"Well, maybe."

"Pinero?"

"Pinero knows his trade," he admitted.

"Galsworthy, Brieux."

"Galsworthy is a pamphleteer. Brieux is no artist. He is a surgeon. They have nothing to say to Broadway. Broadway swallows the pills they offer because of their names, but they might just as well give them the sugar drip they want, for all the good it does."

"Well, they get heard, anyhow. What's the use of writing a play if it isn't acted? Of course we'll sell your plays."

"But if we don't, where will you be?"

"Oh, I'll be all right. I mean to support myself, anyhow, and you, too, if the plays don't go."

He laughed.

"You are an amusing mite. Queer I never noticed you before."

"You'll like me, if you continue to be aware of me. I'm nice," she laughed up at him, and he smiled back.

"How do you intend to make this fortune, may I ask?"

"I haven't decided yet. Of course I can dance. If worst came to worst, I can make a big salary dancing."

"Dancing?" he exploded.

"Yes, didn't you ever hear of it? With the feet, you know, and the body, and the eyes, and the arms. So!"

She twirled about him in a circle, like a gay little figurine. He watched her, fascinated.

"You can dance, can't you?"

"I can. At times I am quite inspired. Now, if you and the Professor will be sensible, and let me go to New York and take a job, I could support us all in luxury. You could write and he could figure."

"I don't see that it is any business of ours what you do, but I certainly won't let you support me."

"Do you really mean it isn't your business?"

"Why should it be?"

"Well, if I am your wife, and his daughter, some people would think that it was distantly related to your business."

"Why New York? Why not here?"

"In this town they think I am crazy now. But if I burst out as a professional dancer—Wow!"

"That's so. It's a mean little town, but it's quiet. That's why I stay. It's quiet."

"You wouldn't mind my being away, if I went to New York, would you?"

"Oh, no. I'd be busy."

"That's good. I really think you are almost ideal."

"Ideal?"

"As a husband. They are usually so exacting and interfering."

"I've not decided yet to be your husband."

"But you are it."

Bambi

"Suppose you should fall in love with somebody else?"

"I'm much more apt to fall in love with you."

"Heaven forbid!" he exclaimed, and came to her side quickly. "Bambi, promise me that no matter what happens you will not do that. You will not fall in love with me."

She looked at him a minute, and then laughed contagiously.

"I am serious about this. My work is everything to me. Nothing matters but just that, and it might be a dreadful interruption if you fell in love with me."

"I don't see why, unless you fell in love with me."

"No danger of that," said he, and at her laugh turned to her again. "If ever you see any signs of my being such a fool as that, you warn me, will you?"

"And what will you do then?"

"I'll run away. I will go to the ends of the earth. That particular madness is death to creative genius."

"All right. I'll warn you."

"I've got to begin to polish my first draft to-day, so I'll go upstairs and get at it."

"Will you be gone two days this trip?"

He turned to smile at her.

"Some people would think you were eccentric," he said.

"They might," she responded.

"I am almost sane when I polish," he laughed. "It's only when I create that I am crazy."

"It's all right then, is it? We go on?"

"Go on?"

"Being married?"