Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Opening extract from

Bambert's Book Of Missing Stories

Written by & illustrated by

Reinhardt Jung and Emma Chichester Clark

Published by

Egmont

All text is copyright of the author

Please print off and read at your leisure.



CONTENTS

BAMBERI 11

THE EYE IN THE SEA 19

THE PRINCESS OF CORDOBA 25

THE MOVING LIGHT 35

THE SILKEN SCARF 41

FROZEN IN TIME 48

THE WAXWORKS CABINET 58

THE STRANGE GAME 67

THE FLIGHT OF THE DOLLS FROM PARIS 72

THE GLASS RAFTS 80

RED STOCKINGS, BLACK COAT 87

THE FAR SIDE OF THE DREAM 102



BAMBERT was a very short man. His head sat on his shoulders with almost no neck in between, he couldn't walk without a stick, and even then it was painful for him to get about.

His walking-stick had a gold knob. The rest of it was black, and it helped him to make his way through life.

Although he was so small of stature, Bambert was a great writer, but no one knew it except himself – he had never let anyone else read one of his stories. None the less, he was not really lonely: he had his stories to keep him company. They came to life in him alone, and only in those stories could Bambert travel through space and time as no one had ever done before.

He couldn't really travel because of the pain in his hips, and he no longer expected any help from the doctors at whose hands he had suffered in many ways throughout his childhood. They had stretched his sinews and his skin, broken bones, straightened and re-set them – until at last they had to admit that Bambert would never be any taller, and must resign himself to that fate when he grew up. Bambert felt like a shipwrecked mariner cast up on hostile shores on the far side of a dream. This world was purgatory to him. Over there on the other side was his lost paradise.

After his parents' death, Bambert had put all his money together and adapted the family house to suit himself. He let Mr Bloom the grocer go on keeping his shop on the ground floor, but he converted everything above

it, all the way up to the roof. He had furniture specially made the right size for him, and rails fitted to the stairs with an electric chairlift to carry him easily and painlessly up to the attic window, where he sometimes liked to sit enjoying the sense of the wide-open space outside.

Bambert particularly liked sitting up there at night, holding quiet conversations with the moon, for the moon, which seemed to know as many stories as Bambert himself, acted as a mirror in which he could see the world.

Out of that bright looking-glass, stories flew down to Bambert, and by day he wrote them down in a big book, which he called his *Book of Wishes*.

Bambert was very well educated. What he described as his 'little library' contained over a thousand books, and he had read every one of them. He saw the world through the eyes of poets and writers, but the world, for its own part, knew nothing about Bambert's own quiet life.

Like everyone else, Bambert read the newspaper, but since he felt panic-stricken when pictures passed rapidly before his eyes he avoided television. The violence of major news events made him feel helpless, and the oddity of the idea that they were all going on at the same time made him feel small. So Bambert would not have television in the house. It seemed to him a delusion designed as a personal attack on him and his small footsteps, and his preference for all that went slowly.

Mr Bloom the shopkeeper sent food and drink up from the ground floor in a lift which Bambert had fitted.

Bambert hardly ever left the house. He always feared that adults would pity him and children would laugh at him, for like the people at the employment centre they recognised Bambert as someone who was grown up, but still wore children's clothes.

As a writer, Bambert remained unknown. The employment centre offered him nothing but jobs exploiting his short stature. But he felt he could do without that kind of job: he didn't want to be one of the Seven Dwarves in a fairy-tale theme park, or show off his small height to amuse the audience at a variety show. Not that Bambert had anything against dwarves, but he was a human being and a writer too, and while he might be deformed he also had backbone.

One day Bambert happened to be sitting looking at his *Book of Wishes* when he saw that there was space left for only one story. That last story, thought Bambert, should be very special! It must be a true story, it must really happen, it mustn't just be invented and written down. But how could he make his stories come true?

That night the sky was overcast, and the moon refused to answer Bambert's question. All of a sudden he felt as if the stories which used to wander through his head at their leisure were caught and frozen in the *Book of Wishes*.

Making a story come true would mean letting it out of the book to go off into the world and look for its own setting, searching for cities, riverbanks, sea shores: places where it could come to life in real human beings, against real landscapes and within real walls.

That was the night when Bambert decided to tear up his *Book of Wishes* into its separate parts.

Freed from their cover, the separate stories now lay in front of Bambert, and he sent an order for ink eradicator down to Mr Bloom the shopkeeper.

The order came back up to Bambert's kitchen in the lift, and he started work at once, releasing his stories from the constraint of being set in any particular place. Bambert felt sure that the stories were strong enough to find their own settings for themselves. However, he left the people in his stories alone. Eradicating the characters would have felt like murder.

The very last story in the torn-up book consisted of four sheets of blank paper on which Bambert had not yet written anything. But because he secretly hoped that this last story might actually write itself if only it tried, he stapled the four blank sheets together too. He had now stapled each of the eleven stories together, folded them and put them in separate envelopes.

Bambert immediately sent another order down in the lift. Old Mr Bloom was surprised when he read the note telling him what Bambert wanted. It asked:

Please get me eleven Japanese tissue paper hot-air balloons, powered by tea-lights, which can fly a very long way.

Bambert.

Bambert had to wait almost two weeks before Mr Bloom the shopkeeper finally sent the folded hot-air balloons from Japan and their tea-lights up in the lift.

Meanwhile Bambert drafted the letter which he planned to send with his stories when they went on their travels. It said that he, Bambert,

was letting his stories go out into the world to find their own settings, settings to suit the characters. Would the finders please send him back the stories and tell him where they had been discovered? For not until he, Bambert, knew where his stories had put down roots could he collect them all in a book again.

He promised to send a copy of the book to the finder of each story, signed his name and added his address: care of Mr Bloom, Retail and Wholesale Groceries.

Bambert put a copy of this letter in with each of his stories, even the last, which was just blank pages. It was his bold idea that an unwritten story needed to find the right setting even more than the others.

Now he was waiting for the nights to turn cold, since common sense told him that cold weather would carry his hot-air balloons higher and take them further than any mild and gentle breeze.

And at last the weather was right: a keen east wind was dusting frost over the city rooftops when Bambert got on the stairlift and took his hot-air balloons up to the attic window. It was about three in the morning, because Bambert did not want to attract any attention, and he also thought that at this dead hour the crows and aeroplanes, which might endanger his tissue paper hot-air balloons, would not be around. The balloons were thin-skinned, and their flight was gentle and graceful.

He sent the first three stories flying away that night. They floated out of the open attic window, rose slowly into the night sky, and finally disappeared behind the clouds like faint little moons. Bambert was happier than he had ever been in his whole life.