

February 21, 2020



A Day in the Life

of Bombonica

Hopartean: Sunday



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Bombònica Hopàrtean was named after the fruit known as *bonbons* that used to grow in the ancient palm trees surrounding our small mining town long before this story begins. By “long before this story begins” I mean about a few million years ago (not that Bombònica herself had been alive and well then; no: she was the product of times closer to our own, as she was born in the mid-1950’s to middle-class parents in a middle-sized town in mid-Transylvania).

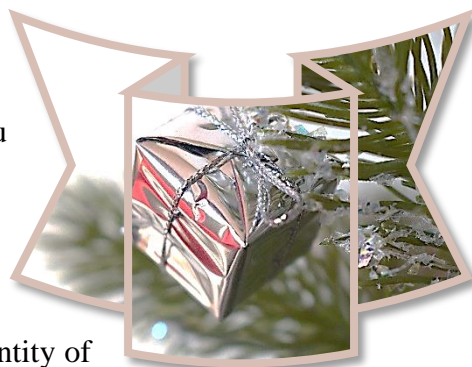
The palm trees in question, known as *bara*, were of a very special kind, the sort of palm trees you’ll never be able to find anywhere near our town these days, and, I’m almost certain, anywhere at all on Earth, no matter how hard you’d look for them. Anyway, these were the trees that had generously provided nourishment for a class of gigantic *sauria* known as *barabombosaurians*, and to this day it isn’t quite clear whether these *sauria* creatures took their name from the fruit they ingested (the *bonbons*, I mean), or whether the fruit itself was named after them. As the reptiles themselves have long been an extinct species (please note that even if some of their descendants were still alive in some form or shape, they couldn’t talk, for speech was invented only very recently in terms of global history and it appears to be a distinctly human trait—regardless of those rare occurrences of verbal communication found in some parrots from the Amazonian forests that would have you believe otherwise), I couldn’t possibly ascertain how the tradition of linking *bonbons* to *barabombosaurians* (or vice-versa) was handed down to us.

But of one thing I am sure: Bombònica was most definitely named after the delicious *bonbons* those ancient palm trees used to produce in abundance. Her being christened that way was meant to show how closely connected her parents felt to local history, and to what extent they desired (and were able to go) to immortalize and perpetuate a certain moment in the natural history of our area. Nowadays some would have it that these *bonbons* were made of chocolate, but this has not been proven beyond the shadow of a doubt; what I mean is, there’s no scientific proof, so I am just making a record of it and passing it on, the way I got it.

Anyway, it was on a sunny Sunday morning, shortly after *Terce* (for she had been snoring clear through *Matins* and *Lauds*, and only woke up about *Prime*) that Bombònica put on her new (for her) orange velvet skirt purchased for peanuts two days earlier from a second-hand clothing store and went for a walk in the neighborhood. She found herself at the corner of Red Creek and Holossy Simon streets, right across from the little Orthodox Church recently restored and repainted a depressing dark gray, when she heard a voice:

“Excuse me. I hope you don’t mind. May I ask you something?”

Bombònica turned around and found herself facing neither St. Gabriel nor St. Michael (both patron saints of Little Orthodox Church on Red Creek Street), but a stranger, rather poorly dressed and displaying a large quantity of





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wrinkles on his forehead, around his mouth and nose, and generally speaking on just about any spot on his face which was not covered in hair. She smiled and said:

“Oh, I don’t know. I may mind it. It very much depends on the question you’d like to ask. I hope it’s nothing offensive, for I’m a rather sensitive person.”

“Nothing of the kind,” the stranger said. “But still, I hope you don’t mind my stopping you like that—and me, a complete stranger to you.”

“Well,” Bombònica replayed, “yes, you are a stranger, and as such I think you fully realize you may not exactly inspire the strongest of confidence. Nevertheless, how can I help you? Perhaps you’d like a cigarette?” And she made a gesture towards her purse. The gesture, besides being impulsive, was also inspired by a rather large number of previous experiences she had had with strangers in town accosting her to beg for cigarettes—either that, or for a buck to buy bread for the famished children they didn’t have.

“Oh, no. I have my own,” he said, excavating from his breast pocket a pack of cigarettes which, as it was plain for anyone to see who knew his/her cigarettes, had been smuggled in from the Ukraine by people who had not been caught yet—“... but will be in the more or less near future,” Bombònica said to herself recalling the latest piece of local TV lore on the topic.

“Miss ... or Madam,” he continued. “May I now ask if you happen to be Joey’s sister? I see you now and then walking in the park, and I often wondered whether you might be related to him that way. No offense, I hope you don’t mind, and please excuse me if I’m wrong.”

“You’re right,” Bombònica said. “I am related to him that way, so, in fact, I am his sister. Is that all?”

“Well, Miss, I often wondered why you’re walking in the Municipal Park every day, but have not come to a satisfactory conclusion. May I be so bold as to advance the hypothesis of you having too much free time on your hands and not knowing what to do with it? You know, there’s yet another woman who walks there, just like you do, but that one’s crazy. She shouts at people and dances by herself in front of the great poet Lendvay’s bust.”

Bombònica knew exactly whom he was referring to (not the poet, but the woman—although she knew enough about Lendvay, too). She herself had been called a whore and other blissful names by the very same woman one day when she (Bombònica) had put on a pair of high-heeled red shoes and was just about to cross the street to get to the corner where she and the stranger were standing together at this very moment. In fact, the corner of Red Creek and Hollosy Simon streets appeared to be attracting weird individuals of both sexes more frequently than any other corner she knew other than the corner of Powell and Geary in San Francisco.

“So you said to yourself ...” she said to the stranger.

“I said to myself: perhaps this one’s crazy, too, but since I’ve never seen her dance in some alley and never heard her holler, I’ll take a chance and go ask whether she’s related to Joey the





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way a sister would be related to her brother. I hope you don't mind. You know, he and I have been class mates in grammar school."

"Oh, no," Bombònica thought (but didn't say it aloud) "I swear I thought he could have been my brother's father, judging by the looks of him. Come to think of it, by extension he could have been my own

father as well, since I'm related to Joey the way a sister is related to her own brother."

Then she addressed the stranger *viva voce*:

"I like dancing, but as a rule I refrain from doing so in the park, except in an emergency ... So you're a former class mate of my brother's."

"Yeah, and then we also worked together at the car repair shop out on the highway; that was many years ago, before he went to the Art Institute. I live on Red Creek Street, way up at the top of the hill. Have always lived there. I hope you don't mind I stopped you, but I was real curious."

"No, no, that's fine. I am my brother's sister, and I'm not crazy although I walk alone in the park, so from now on when you see me you can say hi; I know who you are. Bye now."

"Bye," he said, putting one of the smuggled cigarettes in his mouth and lighting it. "And I hope you don't mind my asking you. It was out of curiosity, you understand."

"Not at all. Although curiosity killed the cat."

Bombònica resumed walking on Hollosy Simon Street; it was a glorious early spring day and the sun was shining; it was doing so rather timidly, but you could tell it was there and that was all you could ask for in mid-February, especially since tropical climate, *barabombosaurians*, and *bara* palm trees have been for a long time things of an extremely distant past in these our parts; although for some reason one expects the sun to shine a little stronger on a Sunday.

In front of a pink house down the street two ladies and a little girl were sitting on the base of a cement fence turning their faces to the sun, the way sunflowers do in August; a dog nearby, wagging its tail looked as if it, too, belonged to the company. Bombònica knew one of the ladies well; the other one she knew by sight, and by having exchanged a few words with her about five times in five years. The little girl and the dog she didn't know at all.



"You look like a doll," the less-well-known lady said.

She might not have been aware of it, but she had a voice like a silver bell or a flute, sweet and melodious, almost magic, and Bombònica's ears were amply gratified and duly bewitched by the sonorous effect achieved every time the lady uttered a word. "A voice like that," Bombònica mused "I could listen to all day long. *Etenim mundus dicitur quod sub quadam armonia sonorum est constitutus, et ipsum celum sub armonie modulacione revolvitur.* The world is said to be



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constituted under a certain armonia of sounds, and the heavens themselves revolve under the modulation of *armonia*,” she whispered to herself, quoting John of Tewkesbury (one of her favorite authors [flourished c. 1351-1392], who in turn was quoting a Frenchman called Lambertus of Paris [flourished c. 1270]).

“Thanks. It must be my orange skirt,” she said. “It’s a gorgeous day; although it’s a little nippy, isn’t it?”

“Lovely,” the lady agreed. “Come, I’ll walk you home.”

They walked in silence for a while, followed by the little girl and the dog.

“Bombònica,” the lady said all of a sudden in that silver-bell voice of hers. “You **have time**.”

“Time for what?” Bombònica asked herself; but she did not actually voice the question. In fact, she did have time to take care of her mother, who was about the age of Methuselah and almost completely dependent on her; and to do the things she enjoyed doing whenever other people didn’t prevent her from doing them. But clearly the lady didn’t mean that. What she meant, Bombònica guessed, was “you have tons of free time on your hands and don’t know what to do with it. You **have time**.” Bombònica therefore didn’t dignify such impudence with an answer.

“Bombònica,” the lady continued. “Are you interested in philosophy?”

Now Bombònica was a medievalist with a Ph.D., and anyone with any amount of brains in their head would have known for a fact that one couldn’t study the Middle Ages and **not** be a connoisseur of Aristotle. Or at least of those works by him that had been translated into Latin by 1280 A. D. or so. Bombònica wondered if the lady would even begin to understand the footnotes she, Bombònica, so cleverly concocted—in academic papers, naturally—in reference to worthy lovers of wisdom such as Calcidius, Macrobius, Martianus Capella, Boethius, Ockham, Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, and a full battalion of other early and late medieval philosophers, all long dead and all much revered. Probably not, she concluded. The “philosophy” the lady had in mind must have been of the “philosophy of life” type, quite fashionable nowadays, the kind of thing Bombònica was so sick and tired of she could have remorselessly strangled the next person who’d mention it. She did not throttle the lady, though. Instead, she said:

“No.”

“Oh! You’re not interested in philosophy?! Hmm ...” the silver-bell voice murmured. Above and beyond the mellifluous tinkling, anguished undertones interspersed with disdainful overtones were clearly perceivable. The sound of them in concert was exemplarily disharmonious.

They took a few more steps, and the magic flute took over:

“Then, are you perhaps interested in personal growth? Exploring your inner self? Understanding who you are? Psychologically, I mean.”

“Dear God get me outta here,” Bombònica thought. That wouldn’t have been too hard a thing for God to do, either, since her house was in sight and there were only a few more steps to take





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to reach the iron gate leading into her garden, where she'd be safely out of the reach of individuals who volunteered to suggest various activities meant to enrich her life and give some meaning to the tons of free time she had on her hands.

She was no longer interested in listening to the euphonious chirping, but she judged it impolite to leave the lady abruptly in the middle of the street.

“No,” she said. “Self-exploration is not one of my interests. I dabbled in psychology and even psychiatry in my early twenties, but that interest has long vanished.”

“Oh. But then, **what** do you **do**?”

“Whatever I damn please, if you'd only let me” thought Bombònica. Aloud, however, she said:

“Look, I travel a lot within and without the country. I write a lot, read voraciously, and (although I count myself as one of the sanest people I know, meaning I'm not crazy by any stretch of imagination) I walk like crazy in the park and everywhere else my legs would take me to. I go dancing—and do a good job at it. I go to the opera—and love it; to symphony concerts—and adore them; I'm a sucker for ballet. I eat out and enjoy baked salmon no end. I make love like there was no tomorrow. I meet with friends, talk, laugh, and cry; and buy beautiful clothes, shoes, and purses. I take care of my mother. I've had and still have a very exciting life: full of adventure and exceedingly interesting. In fact, so interesting that should I kick the bucket this very moment, I'd look back at my life for a second—and die a happy woman. There's not one thing I'd like to redo. It's all been great—the joys and happiness, the drama and the heart-breaking moments—and they've made me who I am today. And I am very happy with who I am.”

“You **don't** say! You actually **like** yourself?!”

“I like myself very much, indeed. In fact, of all the people I know, I like myself best.”

Disappointment could be seen spreading on the lady's face the way an ink drop spilled on blotting paper spreads within seconds, swiftly acquiring dimensions not anticipated in one's wildest dreams: things were not going the way she had assumed they were supposed to go, and perhaps her Sunday was about to be ruined. Therefore for a moment Bombònica thought she was free to go now. But the lady wouldn't give up; she was clearly an obstinate, fearless champion of other people's well-being, so turning her beautiful, finely chiseled nose towards the single cloud in the sky:

“Bombònica,” she resumed with renewed energy “I beg of you, take good care of your daughter. She is way too fat, and every time I see her I ...”

“My daughter has lost forty pounds.”

“**No!** Seriously?!”

“Yes.”

“How on Earth did she **do** that?”





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“She’s only eating once a day. Small quantities of food.”

“Well then, I’m glad to hear that. I’m also glad we had this conversation. I hope you learned a thing or two.” She turned to the little girl and the dog:

“C’mon, darlings! We need to go home now. It’s time to feed ourselves and take a nap.” Then to Bombònica:

“Nice talking to you. Hope to see you again soon. Bye.”

“Bye,” Bombònica said. “I hope not,” she said to herself.

Then she stepped through the gateway and into the garden, up the seven steps and onto the glass-walled front porch. She dragged the little wooden stool all the way to the bed, on which she subsequently climbed and sat with her back propped against the pillow. From there she had a perfect visual command of the street and could ascertain the lady, the little girl, and the dog were all gone. The sun was still shining and the street was empty, with the exception of the orange neighborhood cat which was standing on its four legs on the sidewalk looking inquisitively at Bombònica.

“Curiosity killed the cat,” she softly whispered to the creature.

By now it was the Hour of *Sext* on a Sunday afternoon. Bombònica sighed a sigh of relief and fell asleep, eyes wide open, for she was a doll that couldn’t close her eyes.





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Bombònica's pillow

