

Ulla Hirvensalo

The Memory of Tree



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Acknowledgements

- to my friend Merja Malkki, who encouraged me to write this novel
- to my husband Matti Hirvensalo, who translated my book to into English

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Käännös: Matti Hirvensalo

Kustantaja: BoD™ – Books on Demand, Helsinki, Suomi

Valmistaja: Books on Demand GmbH, Norderstedt, Saksa

ISBN: 978-952-330-597-7

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Interlude

Song about the Spider by Jean Sibelius

Yonder, hiding amongst dark forests lies a lawn,
And lit by the rays of the sun,
crawls a spider, huge and black as the night,
spying on its pray and then devouring it.
The daylight, shy after the night, falls at its victim,
when this monster casts its deadly web in the evening.
On the nightfall, it starts working,
and it is capable of capturing every living soul,
torturing them, and finally taking their lives.

Berit had never before felt such a great anger, and yet been under so dreadful a fear as now, when she was about to land on Stansted airport. The air hostesses bid her a good day. Berit looked at her fellow passengers, mainly students, who were using cheap flying companies. For them, the good wishes were welcome, but she did not feel so. The shining floor of the airport felt awkwardly slippery. Berit walked slowly, dragging her suitcase, which was making a funny, murmuring noise. The taxi should wait outside, equipped with a sign with her name on it. Its destiny was unknown to her. There was no taxi around. Berit wanted to turn back, but she did not have the courage to do so. Some eye had certainly picked her, there was no return. Berit felt a hand, covered by a trench coat, fall on her shoulder. A voice, using bad English, ordered her to step into a taxi, which did not look like the black, spacy Rovers, so common London. The driver, smoking, hit the road. His mobile phone was clicking orders, unintelligible for Berit. At last, a turn for Dockland was made. A transparent building was there. Berit was escorted into a landscape elevator, where she tried

to relax, improvising some remarks, but she only managed to mumble in Finnish:

“Tieto maailmanrauhan tueksi”

“Information to guarantee piece in the world”

before they already reached the top floor, where she was pushed through the biggest door. The reflection of the sun from the windows of the opposing tower came straight to Berit’s eyes. For a moment, she saw nothing. Then she heard a voice that she would not have wished to hear ever again. The voice reminded her about sweaty hands. "Are you ready to sign the secrecy agreement?"

Overture

The flight of the bumblebee by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Duration: one minute + six months, during which

Berit was hit by a spearhead

multi-scientific ideas were sought

cross-over sounds of the tuba were listened to aboard m/s

Tarjanne

the possibilities of recognising the worm as a spearhead

idea

the components of a multi-scientific verse were recognised

Hardly had the world been through the chaos caused by the turning of the millennium, when a new threat was faced: the world falling short of ideas. Finland took heed of the threat, and started to act as an honest member of the EU. The government summoned a committee of wise citizens to compose a list of means, by which Finland was supposed to be lifted to be the number one country of the scientific world. At first, the word 'idea' was replaced by the word 'innovation', and then things started moving. Innovation waves struck over the whole of Finland. Not a single spot of the country remained intact. Single Lucky Lukes did not make their way in the waves without interconnection. From the splashes of the waves, new Vaisalas, Nokias, and elevators rose. Nanotechnology passed biotechnology. Transportation of timber in lakes and rivers, as well as sawing and cooking pulp belonged to the past as means of bringing prosperity.

Spearhead Cluster Ltd had decided to be one of the winners. It had cast webs, starting from Oulu, all over to Keilaniemi, and as the prey, almost fifty young promising researchers were sitting in the auditory of Hanasaari Cultural Centre. As a delegate from the Bioinformation Centre, Berit had been sent, whose doctoral thesis was still in its preliminary stage. The director of the Centre stated that all the strings had

to be pulled while the money was on the move. The company logo jumped from one screen to another. The walls became arenas of javelins. The final crescendo of Ravel's *Bolero* was resonating against Berit's lung bones. Its last measure flung the spears into the sky. The silence brought the spears back to a cluster. The patriotic finale of Sibelius' *Finlandia* made the spears form a flag with a blue cross. Berit sighed with relief. The dimensions of the flag were right. After the applause, the company spokesman told why the spear-heads played such a big role in the logo. Each of them corresponded to a new idea, and, when regrouped to form a cluster, they would give birth to new innovations. The question, why the music consisted of Ravel's *Bolero*, repeating the same theme with increasing tempo without variations, was answered by the spokesman with the explanation that this music was ideal, when the force of cooperation had to be described. This was to be the way to create a strong spearhead product. Berit was not satisfied with the answer, but she remained silent, in order not to lose the financing possibilities. From the previous innovation meeting Berit remembered only the mantra of the government, or, to be exact, that there was nothing to be remembered about it. The text had aroused cheering and sighs in the audience when it had appeared on the screen, word by word, as if the weight had been on every single word.

"The capacity to innovate is needed when even better productivity as well as new, more economic solutions are sought. Organisations capable of innovation are able to constantly gather and focus the creativity, know-how and other resources of the staff, producers of services, and customers, to form new solutions that bring about economic benefits. The steering of human capital calls for good management of allying and purchasing as well as networking capabilities from the organisation."

The words had flown like a spring creek, bumbled for its time, and then vanished.

Berit was fed up with self-steering meetings, where only the loudest were able to boast with their new pieces of information. The conversation launched at Hanasaari had not differed from the ones elsewhere, where she had had to spend her time. New projects, tasting of paper, were developed, and they revealed at once that no one had given them any deeper thought. A number was needed for the statistics. The registering of the result as zero would be left for others. Finland had so far lived by producing paper, but from now on, new means of creating wealth would have to be developed.

“Diffusion is needed”, some wise guy snapped.

“Wrong faculty”, was heard from the back row.

“Innovation is an organic growth process, whose breeding calls for innovations of leadership”, continued the wise guy from the front row.

The first speaker did not lose his mood, but continued drawing his colourful ideas on the flap board.

New ideas will be coupled with old ones; think about electricity or plastics

Innovation journalism is the science of tomorrow, and we here in Finland can be its forerunners

Information and know-how are the fuel of innovation cascades

Finland to the world map!

A multi-scientific working group!

Berit became sleepy, her ears were hissing. She surrounded her notes with innovation spheres and penetrated them every time she heard an old idea. In her thoughts, she already built methods of describing and searching information based on semantic webs, when her ears picked the idea “multi-scientific working group”. The innovation cascades, whatever they were, brought Berit back to this world. The Spearhead cluster had a new demo on the screen. Dancers, mathematicians, composers, medical doctors, visual artists, biochemists

and other scientists, engineers, singers, musicians, orchestras, small rock bands, planners of dash codes, nanotechnologists, carpenters, timbermen. After this, Berit was too tired to follow the performance. All were doing their jobs in their own corners, until a mutual understanding was started to be described with red idea spheres which were drawn together to clusters, and then exploded by the spears in order to conquer the world.

Berit remembered another session, where she tried to introduce a similar idea by stating:

“One of the basic principles of innovating is the fact that there is no judging without knowing all the details, e.g. one has to think broadly, with open eyes, “by forgetting oneself”, she was about to say, but, thinking the better of it, continued: “by thinking beyond one’s own field of expertise. Medical doctors and engineers, sociologists, and chemists, historians and futurologists, etc., have to be brought together to develop new productive innovations.”

This meeting did not end with conventional serving of wine and sandwiches nor with promises to send reports. The participants were allowed to choose their own favourites by filling out a questionnaire. Berit studied curiously the innovator’s lunch bag, which contained mini-pyramids formed by shrimps and pieces of sword fish. For desert, the innovators were ushered among water lilies. Icebergs had been built of strawberries.

“Berit, you are known to be interested in the behaving models of projects. You fit into this project.” Matias, a member of the Spearhead cluster, took Berit by the sleeve, while her hand was caressing the mermaids. In the beginning of their studies, they had met a couple of times, but soon their studies had taken them apart. “Well, into what?” was Berit about to say, but she did not have the time to do so, when her name was already on the laptop, and its lid closed. Then there was a long pause without anything new to happen, until, one evening, Berit had a new voice mail, which started with the whistle

of a steam ship. It could not go unnoticed. Berit could not anticipate the importance of that whistle to her career.

“The word ‘innovation’ came from the word ‘innovare’ - render new. That is supposed to suffice for getting ready for the meeting”, a thought that made Berit satisfied.

The message from the Spearhead cluster came with an animation. Berit had been named “the top of innovators”. The orders for service had been evaluated, and accordingly, she had scored by far the highest marks. She had been elected to the group of innovators, from which the next project leader of the Spearhead cluster would be chosen. Her final work in the Bioinformation Centre had just been accepted, so that she had good time to participate in the numerous tests. The next two weeks were full of assignments, filling of forms, and interviews. The Spearhead cluster was not short of test material nor of ideas. The questions dealt with anything else but the character of the candidate, the ability to get along with difficult persons, or the logic of series of numbers.

Berit had been curious since her childhood, to the point of getting on other people’s nerves; this was an early sign of her possible future as a researcher. Her period of making questions had started immediately after she had learned to pronounce the word “why”. The observation of nature had started at the same time as crawling. The baby crawling in the yard, watching ants, had aroused gaiety and wonder. “Muuha!” was the first word she had learnt about the wonders of the sandbox. In addition to thirst for knowledge, she had had an exceptionally strong desire to get things done in time. She remembered, amused, when her teachers had sighed: “Oh, Berit, please, just concentrate a little better on what you are doing, don’t jump from one subject to another.” She had only laughed and moved to solve another problem.

In her university studies Berit had begun to suffer from her lack of perseverance. Why, she asked herself, and she would have wanted as quick an answer as the one she got from her grandfather as a child. In her studies, it was her own duty to

dig deep into the whirlpools of books and databases, to face and solve problems, and to suggest new ways to proceed in research. She had found in herself new qualities that in her youth had been considered as bossing. It was called leadership. Even if she was unable to address herself to the same problem for years, she kept inspiring her group to work in a disciplined manner, with the goal clearly in their minds. She quickly learned to find the good properties in people, and use these in project work. The bio information branch of science was exactly meant for her. Team work, combining of new ideas, tearing down fences, as well as hectic work; she was at her best in all these fields.

The most important message came two days after Berit had sent her answers. The voice mail of the Spearhead cluster read:

“You have been chosen as the project leader. Come to the spot shown by the map. We will go on with the planning there.”

Led by the navigator, Berit wandered in the corridors of the Cable factory. When she pulled her together and started to observe her surroundings, her gaze focused on spearheads hung on the walls, for guiding those who were lost. There was no more doubt about the right door. She knocked on the spearhead that served as a handle, and the door opened. If she had expected to see tables full of Coca-cola bottles and nerds with their legs on the table, she was badly mistaken. The office was small, and the feeling of lack of space was highlighted by the presence of modern pieces of art, which filled almost half of the high room. In the back of the office was a speaker’s platform, which consisted of butterflies made of plastics. Behind it stood a man dressed in a pinstripe suit.

“Hello Berit! Take some fruit. I am Matias, you probably remember me. I am the only living soul working in this office. When this butterfly moves its wings, something important will happen.”

A pattering sound was heard, when the wings started fluttering.

“It resembles the cone sculpture outside Dipoli. When a button is pressed, the cone slowly opens its scales.”

Berit and Matias made room for their computers as well as for their thoughts. The fruit were consumed while Matias sorted out the operating conditions of the innovation project.

The setup words of the project were the following:

Set up a multi-scientific group and start inventing new innovations with it

Choose one of these for implementing it.

Berit was supposed to name the project, but first, the group should be together. A research freedom for five years felt like a dream to her. The financing would be guaranteed, and the facilities had been rented from the Innovation Centre. There was not much more in the research contract. The ideas as well as their potential commercialization would belong to the Spearhead cluster, as could be read on the lowermost row of the text. The font size was as small as in the list of side effects, given in the leaflets of medicine packages. With this paper in her hand, she left with light steps to launch the Innovation project.

Goodbye budget negotiations, follow-ups and explanation meetings. Ahead, freedom of research, not shackled by hour accounting nor by writing monthly reports. Berit's dreams were still dominated by experts of financial management, who, waving their cheese slicers, wanted to put the numbers in the files. The deviation reports had jumped around and sneered at her with their red eyes. To Berit, the proposition of the Spearhead cluster seemed like a pipe dream she had never had before. A multi-scientific research project; she was even allowed to define and decide what kind of group she would need. This was exactly what she had been suggesting for many years.

Did it go right - the establishing of the group - Berit kept pondering, sipping her cappuccino. She remembered the biblical phrase *He who seeks finds, him who knocks it will be opened!* But also as often the door was closed for him who knocked. The Cluster, as the financier had named itself, at first criticized the fact that the various disciplines were not in equilibrium. How on earth could more researchers have been engaged, when already the present ones would pose their own problems? And more; there were not too many aspirants, either. It had been a surprising disappointment. Curling up in the own sandbox was still the prevailing mode of action both within cultural and scientific circles. Who would risk their own credibility in a project that had no agreed goal, but only a vague proposition to innovate Finland on the map of the world? The Medical Faculty said a strict “no”, as did the Faculty of Political Sciences, against Berit’s greatest wish. A social view would have been valuable. The Faculty of Law answered that experts would be provided in case of legal problems. From this particular angle, problems were anticipated. Nobody would have time to attend to unnecessary meetings. Statisticians and IT technologists stayed out without explanations. Future research was the field that Berit wanted to take care of personally. Dancers, carpenters, plumbers, as well as other experts of hand and foot work informed their interest, but they shied away the academic nuance. They only promised to perform or participate in the building process, if needed.

The first project meeting would take place in two weeks. Berit felt a little excited, because she was not used to working with other scientists than naturalists. How would an arts student, a theologian, a composer, an engineer, a sculptor, a nanotechnology researcher, and a dendrologist integrate? Based on the tests of the Spearhead cluster, she had been chosen because of her interpersonal and scientific analytical skills. Scientific analytical skill, she pondered, what was it supposed to mean? She hated verbal trickery, especially when she noticed that the speaker was unaware of the meaning of the

The Memory of Tree is "science fiction". Main task is to find information (vibrations) from annual rings. the Spearhead cluster (Keihäänkärkiklusteri) started and financed the project Secrets open.

The Leader of the group is Berit, information scientist (BioInformation). Other members are: Pekka,dendrologist, Kalle, the sculptor, Niilo, M.S.C in nanotechnology Heikki,BA, Tellervo, theologian, Iivari student of Technology and Sirkka,composer. The key tasks of the project were the following: Set up a multi-scientific group and start inventing new innovations with it Choose one of these for implementation.of the group is Berit, information scientist (BioInformation). Other members are: Pekka,dendrologist, Kalle, the sculptor, Niilo, M.S.C in nanotechnology Heikki,BA, Tellervo, theologian, Iivari student of Technology and Sirkka,composer.

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