

**Hannu Hannu**

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**English sample translation by John Irons  
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WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I had a brother. He wore larger shoes than me. My clothes had been his before I grew big enough to use them. He was my elder brother, he took care of me, and he told me a lot no one else saw.

‘There are earthquakes no one notices,’ my brother said.

‘Inside the earth there’s a volcano,’ he said.

‘You’re so small,’ he said, ‘I’ll take care of you.’

I wasn’t that small, at least not that small all that long, but my brother used to say that.

When I lay in my bed in the evening and couldn’t sleep, and when I started to cry so that everybody could hear it, I heard my brother say: ‘I don’t mind going in to him.’

And he did. He came and sat down by my bed. He sat there for a while and then he left again. He never sat still. He went through the rooms quickly. He opened and shut drawers. He opened and shut doors. When he sat beside my bed, he looked into my face and tried to find something there. ‘What’s the matter?’ he said.

I used to cry in the evenings. I liked crying. To start with, I lay with my face against the wall, so that nobody could hear me. I thought I was completely alone, and my eyes grew moist. I thought that there was no one in the whole world who could help me. Then large, wet tears started to run down from my eyes. I liked to lie still and alone and feel the tears running down my face. The tears would roll down to my lips, some of them would get past my mouth and land up on the pillow. But some ran into my mouth – they tasted salt.

I cried, tasted my own tears, and then I cried a bit more. I tried to cry silently. I tried not to make a sound. But if I lay there alone too long, my voice also started to cry.

When my voice cried, it called out in the dark room. It called out louder and louder, and I got afraid of it. A voice can sound so long and sharp and quarrelsome. The voice can walk around the room on thin legs and come back at you from all sides. When my voice became thin and sharp, I cried even more. Then the voice would stride so quickly between the walls of the small room that it would trip over its long legs.

I howled so I wouldn’t hear myself cry. A howl is a long, straight line. A howl is a black carpet. A howl is the only room in the house where the light is switched on. And when I started to howl, the others could finally hear me.

Then my brother came in to me. When my brother came, I had cried so much that the bed was wet through, both the pillow and the duvet and my pyjamas. He turned over the pillow, shook the duvet and took off my pyjama top and dried my face with it.

He said. ‘Now you must stop crying.’

And I did.

IN THE MORNING, when my brother came to wake me up, he asked me if I had dreamt anything. Once I had dreamt about a camel that had such short legs that it had to crawl on its stomach in the sand. Once I had dreamt that the trees were without branches, they had pencil points at the top, and the sky was perhaps a sheet of paper, or perhaps a big balloon. Once I had dreamt about a green ball that was rolling on its own along the road. It was dark, and the ball couldn't find its way home.

If I couldn't remember having dreamt, I invented a dream so as to have something to tell, and so that my brother wouldn't go away.

'I dreamt about you,' I said to him. 'You were wearing a black cap, and you had pulled the cap down over your face, and you were walking in the forest at night. No one could see you had a head.'

Then my brother smiled with those big, square teeth of his.

'That's just something you're making up,' he said.

My brother made me breakfast and fixed my clothes.

'You can't wear the same pants you had on yesterday,' he said, 'you've got to find some that are clean.'

'I don't know where my pants are kept,' I said.

'Yes, you do,' my brother said, 'I'll show you.'

And then he showed me which drawer I had pants in, and which drawer I had trousers and shirts and sweaters in, so that I could always find my clothes myself. He had shown me this plenty of times, but I liked to forget he had.

I liked to forget. I forgot where my clothes were, and I forgot to eat. I forgot to wash myself, and when I finally did so, I forgot to turn the tap off afterwards. I forgot to shut my mouth when I watched the telly. I forgot to go out. When I finally went out, I forgot where I was and where I was supposed to go. Sometimes I forgot where I was when I was sitting quietly in my room, too.

My brother took care of me. Even though mum and dad were home, it was my brother I called out for when I couldn't find my clothes or the cheese slice or my satchel. Mum and dad left for work early in the morning, and it was my brother who said: 'Eat up your food, now.' It was my brother who said: 'Brush your teeth, now.' And it was my brother who said: 'Off to school, now.'

When I didn't dare go to school alone, he was the one who went with me.

I never dared go to school alone. He went with me every day.

He used to go with me right up to the classroom. 'Hurry in, now,' he said, and then ran off to his own classroom. His large backpack shook so heavily when he ran. My brother finished later than me, so I always went home on my own. I went home as fast as I could, and I didn't talk to anyone. I unlocked the door and went in and was alone.

I liked it best at home.

My brother cooked dinner at our home. Occasionally I helped him, but he was the one who knew what to do. He was the one who knew what mum and dad had bought or laid out on the kitchen unit, and he was the one who said I was

to lay the table, or clear away or go out with the refuse. After dinner I went in to my room. Sometimes my brother came in and said: 'What are you up to?' Sometimes I sat on the floor drawing. Sometimes I lay in my bed thinking. Often I sat at the window with my hand in my mouth. I used to bite my hand – I thought I tasted good. Then my brother said I needed to go out, to get some exercise, I needed some fresh air, needed to see something else than the view from my window. If I didn't dare go out alone, he went with me.

He always had to go with me.

WE LIVED ON THE OUTSKIRTS of a large town. Where the houses stopped, the forest began. My brother used to say that the forest was endless. The summer holidays came and my brother went off into the forest and stayed there the whole day. He had found something in the forest. He didn't want to tell me what it was. He had found something he didn't want to talk about, and that he didn't want to show anyone. He had found something he had to go back to each and every day.

'Why are you out in the forest?' I said.

'What is it you're looking for?' I said.

'What is it you've found?' I said.

'You don't dare,' my brother answered.

We went out together. My brother said he could go with me to the playground.

'Shall we bike or walk?' he said. 'If we bike, you can bike a bit on your own after I've left.'

But I didn't want to bike. I'd got a new bike with gears for my birthday, but there were so many gears on that bike I thought it was difficult to use it. I was afraid of changing to so high a gear that I couldn't manage to turn the pedals. I was afraid the bike would fall over on the gravel. I was afraid of scraping my face or my knees. I was afraid the pedals would go round too fast. I was afraid that the chain would hop off, or the brakes would fail, or that I would lose my grip on the handlebars. I was afraid of shutting my eyes in the middle of a downhill ride. I was afraid of biking with my mouth open and getting flies in my mouth. I was afraid of someone seeing me biking and that perhaps they would laugh, or say something that made other people laugh.

I simply didn't like biking.

My brother liked biking – he had an old, large man's bike that he used every day. It scraped and rattled when he pedalled away, but he liked it even so. He walked beside me and pushed the bike. Afterwards he needed it to get to the places he used to go off to. I didn't know where my brother used to go, but I knew it was much further from home than I dared go.

I had never gone any further than the playground. The playground was a large level piece of ground where the forest began. There was grass there and old raspberry bushes and big holes in the ground that my brother said were openings to underground passages that voles had dug.

'You're so small, you could creep down one and look,' he said.

'It's sure to be terribly cold down there,' I said.

'Quite the opposite,' my brother said. 'It's hot. It gets hotter and hotter the deeper you go. Inside the earth there is a volcano.'

'Do you understand?' my brother said.

'Sure,' I said. But I didn't.

It was sunny at the playground. The forest was dark. I sat down on a bench.

'Are you just going to sit here?' my brother said.

'Yes,' I said.

'If you feel like climbing trees, just go ahead,' my brother said. 'And if you feel like seesawing or kicking a football around or Chinese jump rope with the older kids, you can do that. But if all you dare do is sit here on the bench, that's OK too. Just don't go home until you've been outside long enough.'

My brother always used to say that. And then he said:  
'I'll be off, then.'

My brother got onto his bike. His face had freckles. It looked as if the tiny dark freckles crawled and crept around his face. He had long, thin arms – they were also full of freckles. My brother stood on the pedals and held onto the handlebars of his bike, and said:

'Are you coming along, or not?'

'I don't know,' I said.

'No,' I said.

'I don't dare,' I said.

'Or perhaps,' I said.

'Wait a moment,' I said.

'OK, then,' I said and felt dizzy when I said it.

I so much wanted to know what my brother did in the forest.

But he hadn't heard what I said; he'd already left. My brother cycled quickly into the forest without turning round.

I was left sitting alone on the bench. I liked sitting there. There were lots of other children at the playground; they were running around on the grass, skipping and playing football and building huts in the trees.

I knew quite a few of them, I knew what their names were and I had spoken to them before – some of them went to my school. They knew me too, but they didn't normally ask me if I'd like to join in. If they asked me, I just said no, so they had stopped asking me. Sometimes one or two of them came over to me and wanted to talk even so, but I didn't ever say very much. Nearly always I just said 'yes' and 'no', sometimes I said 'perhaps'. After a while they ran off and went back to playing.

I liked to watch them play. I liked to play too, and sometimes I joined in. But unfortunately I started crying so easily. And when I cried, I always ran home, even though I hadn't been outside long enough. That was why I most liked sitting on the bench. I sat on the bench and watched the others. The large crows flapped around the tree-tops complaining to each other, and the other children jumped and ran and climbed and laughed, and I thought of what I would have done if I had been one of them.

But I wasn't, I was just me. And just like all the others I best liked being me.

THE SUMMER HOLIDAYS had started quite a few days earlier. We hadn't gone anywhere. The idea was that we would go on holiday after a while. Mum and dad said that we would go on holiday later in the summer. That holiday never took place, but I didn't know then that it wouldn't.

I stayed at home all day long. I sat in my room drawing, or lay on the bed. I don't know what I used to think about, but sometimes I started to cry. I tried to keep quiet, so the others wouldn't hear me. They often did even so.

'What's the matter?' my brother said.

'Nothing,' I said.

'Why are you crying?' he said.

'I don't know,' I said.

'Why don't you ever go out?' he said.

'I don't want to,' I said.

'Yes, but why?' he said. 'Everyone goes out. All the others are outside playing.'

'I don't want to,' I said.

'I go outside too,' my brother said. 'I'm outside every day.'

'I know,' I said.

'I don't know what the matter with you is,' my brother said.

I didn't either.

My brother set off early in the morning. He came back late in the afternoon. Every day he left a trail of pine needles and grass and earth in the passage. His shoes were always wet. Mum and dad worked as usual, and they also came home late. I remember mum had a new dress with red flowers on it. I remember that she used red lipstick. I remember she was happy. When she wasn't out and wasn't talking on the telephone, she went round the kitchen or the living room and sang. But I can't remember her and dad being in the same room. When dad was in the kitchen, mum went into the living room. When dad was sitting in the living room, mum went into the kitchen.

Only when we ate dinner did everyone sit round the table. I remember we sat there, and I remember that we talked, but I don't remember what we talked about. I can't ask anyone how it was.

I remember dad, that his clothes almost seemed not to want to fit him. He always looked as if he had just got up, as if he had got dressed at full speed. His hair refused to lie the way he tried to make it. Sometimes he sat there completely still, looking out into thin air with his mouth open. If that happened while we were eating, the food fell out of his mouth.

'Dad,' my brother said.

'Yes, yes,' dad said, and then he shut his mouth and chewed and things went back to normal.

I thought they did, at any rate. There was a lot I didn't notice. But I noticed that my brother hardly ever ate anything, although he was the one who had prepared the meal, and that he left the table before the rest of us had finished. I noticed that he slammed the door when he left. I noticed that he came home later and later.

'You didn't ought to be so much in the forest,' dad said.

'There's nothing to be frightened of,' my brother said.

'Lots of people have got lost there. There was something in the paper about a man who got lost out there, an elderly man who went out into the forest. He was just going for a walk, but he never came back. No one has seen him since.'

My brother sat there chewing. I was looking at the freckles crawling around on his face. Suddenly he stopped chewing. When he answered, he wasn't looking at dad. He was looking at me.

'That man probably hasn't got lost,' my brother said. 'He's out there in the forest somewhere.'

'Yes, exactly,' dad said. 'I don't think you ought to wander about in there.'

'It's better there than here,' my brother said.

He didn't stop looking at me. And I didn't stop looking at him either.

My brother started to laugh, and then I had to too. We laughed, and tried not to, and that made us laugh even more. We laughed, or snorted, and it sounded as if we were crying. I liked it almost as much as crying. But nobody asked why we were laughing, and we didn't know ourselves either.

I thought that everything had always been like this in our home. I thought that I had always been afraid. I thought that I had always liked crying. I thought that my brother had always taken care of me. I thought that mum and dad had always been at work until late in the evening, and that mum had gone around with red lipstick on and a red dress. I thought that dad had always gone around looking as if his clothes were about to fall off. But it hadn't always been like that. Everything was different that summer.

And later nothing would ever be like it had been again.

THERE WAS A LOT I understood, even though I didn't normally think about it. I understood that mum was happy, and that dad was sad. Sometimes, mum was sad and then dad was a bit happy. It's strange, but true: Dad was only happy when he was able to comfort mum.

But I understood more than that. I understood that mum went around in a new dress and lipstick because she was in love. That was why she was so happy. She went round the rooms on her own singing songs she didn't know the words of. Unfortunately, it wasn't dad she was in love with. Dad was sad because he didn't like mum being in love. Mum was happy because she was in love, and at the same time she was sad because it wasn't dad she was in love with.

In the evenings I could hear their voices from the living room. Then they used to speak quietly and seriously. They sat still for a long time, in a way that also was serious. And when I thought they had finally gone to bed, they started to speak seriously with each other again. Later I understood that dad had been sad long before mum fell in love. If mum hadn't fallen in love with someone else, dad would still have been sad even so. But I didn't understand that then.

My brother and I never talked about mum and dad. My brother followed me to the playground, and then he cycled off into the forest. I was often afraid of the skeleton hand. It wasn't a hand, it was just a tree, a dead tree with large, branches that stood out stiffly. But it looked like a huge skeleton hand sticking up out of the ground. I never believed it was a real skeleton hand. I knew it was a tree, but I was afraid of it even so. I didn't like looking at it. I didn't like passing by it. The skeleton hand stood just inside the stone wall where the forest started. The large crows used to gather there, they gathered in the surrounding trees – and they specially liked to sit in the large skeleton hand. Then it looked as if fur was growing on the hand, as if the crows were tufts of black fur.

I didn't like the crows either.