

SUOMI TALVELLA: FINLAND IN WINTER

It was a quiet night. She looked around, seeing the moonlight glistening off the snow and darting through the dark pines. She pulled up her scarf closer around her face, watching the moisture glistening on her breath. Tiny particles of condensation hung from her eyelashes, impeding her view - though the track by moonlight was dark enough. Her feet, encased in solid rubber of six inch boots, trod solid clean tracks in the freshly fallen snow, crunching in the silence of the night. Not long now, she thought, as through her woollen glove-covered hands her fingers pulled her beanie further down her head, over her chilled ears. Ahead of her, she could see an opening in the track - the line of trodden white snow emerging from the dark forest to an open expanse of white wilderness. Bedraggled rushes poked through a casing of ice and a breeze whispered quietly over frozen water, barely enough to rustle the snow on the rushes. Knowing where the beach divided the lake from the ominous forest, she sat down. Her thick waterproof trousers kept out the damp snow, and her jacket kept out the chill. She looked out across the white expanse, stretching into further whiteness then back into black pines laden with their white burden, wistfully watching the dismal night. She could hear nothing but silence, and her breath breaking in on that silence...

It was summer. The gentle sound of the water lapping constantly on the beach provided a chorus to the laughter coming from the water, where she, and he, tussled. He was holding the branch of freshly picked birch leaves, soaked in the hot water by the sauna, and she was laughingly trying to evade the switch of the leaves against her back. Her long hair hung wet against her naked breasts, and his chest glistened with the sweat of the heated sauna. She dived under the water, screeching with mirth. He cursed, threw aside the pungent leaves,

and dived after her, taking a deep breath and giving a hard kick as he swam in her direction. She dove towards the wooden jetty, jutting out from the land nearby into the gently cooling water. Her hands grasped onto the wooden railings, pulling herself up out of the water and away from him. But his arms had reached firmly about her waist, pulling her back into the water and to his warm embrace. Laughing hard, a surge of water rushed into her mouth as they fell back into the lake. Both submerged, their breaths held. He, with one hand, pulled through the water to bring them above; with the other hand, held onto her, pulling her closer into his strong body. She didn't resist. Rather, she leaned closer into his embrace, feeling his muscled chest along her soft-skinned back. They emerged, gasping for air, and swimming hard to keep them afloat. She turned to him, her face no more than a foot away, and flicked water in his face. A giggle accompanied it. He grinned, and pulled her body closer with the arm still wrapped around her waist. His lips caught hers as her hand clutched his shoulder, her hair falling over both of them.

Later, they lay on the wet sand, two naked bodies curled closely together on the beach, his hand still possessively wrapped around her waist, as the midnight sun barely dipped below the horizon...

She raised a lone hand up to her scarf, pulling it over her blue lips. There would be no sun rising for many hours yet, and then, not even a few metres above the horizon, barely giving light to the snow encrusted forests. In front of her, the ice trapped the clean water underneath, and no sounds of gentle lapping could be heard. Below her, the sweet grains of sand lay frozen together, trapped with the rest of the frozen ground, impossible to reach. She caressed her gloved fingers along the glistening snow, the condensation of her lashes mingling with the tears of her eyes. Summer was gone, and now it was dark. Time to go, she thought, and stood up reluctantly, looking across the dark expanse one last time. Before her was

oppressive blackness, but her mind's eye could see the midnight sun. Her mind's ears,
however, could hear no laughter.