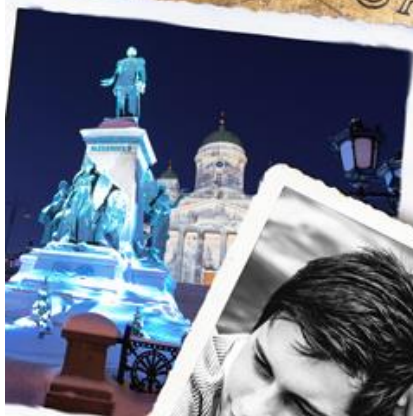


POST CARD



Helsinki Sunrise

MARION UECKERMANN

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Helsinki Sunrise

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Dedication

For my son, Kyle...I'm so glad you became a missionary and married a Finn. You inspired this story in so many ways.

Praise for *Helsinki Sunrise*

Beautiful and fulfilling ending! ~ Diane Tatum

I wanted to finish it. It's wonderful. Magnificent.
My thanks to God for your writing this. ~ Mary McCay

1

Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.
Luke 15:6

“I need to get away for a while.” Eveliina held her breath. If Joel said no, she’d go anyway. She’d resign. She’d break up with him. Whatever it took to bring a little peace and quiet to her harried life.

“But you just got back from Vaasa.” Joel crossed his arms and leaned back in his leather chair.

“Exactly why I need to get away.”

His eyes swept over her, and Eveliina hoped she didn’t look as frazzled as she felt.

“You work too hard, Eveliina, and I’m sorry. It’s just the nature of our business. Creating fantasy for the world is not for the fainthearted.” He rose from behind his smoked-glass desk, placed his hands on the edge of the table and leaned forward. “That’s why people like us aren’t married. We’re wed to our computers, and it’s hard to divorce ourselves from the beasts.” Joel straightened up. “But maybe soon we’ll change that. I know you’ll be as dedicated and talented a wife as you are—”

“I doubt I could love doing anything other than visual effects.” One sure thing got Eveliina uncomfortable—talk of marriage. And these days, Joel didn’t miss an opportunity. Eveliina stared him in the eye. “You’re right. I am married to my job. And I don’t

believe in divorce.”

She pointed to the framed 3D characters that lined the walls of Joel’s ultra-modern high-rise Helsinki office like family portraits. “You see those funny little creatures?—they’re the only ones I’m happy to create.”

Joel scratched his chin. “So, how was Ostrobothnia and the tall ships exhibition?”

“Bombarded by noisy children and people dressed as Vikings...?”

He pulled a face. “That bad?”

“You try seven days surrounded by,” she shuddered, “little people. If that wasn’t bad enough, those Viking lookalikes are a crude bunch with a weakness for blondes.”

His shoulders shook as he chuckled. “Did you at least get some good material to work from?”

“Yes, but this has all been too much, especially when our last project has barely finished rendering.”

“Eveliina...” He stretched out her name. “You know how vitally important research is, and that we can’t choose the timing for new business.”

She sighed as she looked down and kicked the floor with the toe of her shoe. “I know.” She raised her gaze in time to glimpse Joel’s clenched jaw before his troubled look faded. He slid his hands into his trouser pockets and slowly walked toward her.

“I didn’t realize you disliked children that much.”

She didn’t dislike them—they just made her nervous. And when she got nervous, her stress level rose. Then the relentless pounding in her head would begin. Instinctively, she rubbed her left temple and shrugged.

“OK. I can see I’m not going to talk you out of this, and you’re right, you have been working too hard.

Tomorrow's Friday—you can leave after you've briefed the team and done a handover. I'll give you two weeks to catch your breath. Then I need you back in this office." Joel slid his hand around her waist. "And in my arms."

She stiffened at his touch. This was how he always tried to talk her out of things. Not this time. Like a breeze, Eveliina slipped from his grasp. She picked up the small desk calendar from his table and a red pen. With an artistic swirl of her hand, she drew a fancy shape around August 27th and tapped the calendar with her finger. "I'll be back this Monday morning—ready, willing, and able."

Joel's fingers brushed her cheek before tucking her hair behind her ear.

Eveliina hated it when he did that. Not only was it uncomfortable, but she loathed exposing her ears. She found them too small, and they didn't sit as close to her head as she would have liked.

"Where are you going?" His question was filled with the usual possessiveness that accompanied anything to do with her. His eyes narrowed, his tone was controlling. He'd tried to hide it, but failed.

"If I tell you, you have to promise not to follow me. I need time alone."

He smiled.

"I'm serious."

Joel's breath was warm on her skin as he whispered in her ear. "And if I don't keep my word?"

Eveliina put the calendar down. "Then I'll break up with you, and I'll resign from Savant Studios." Her answer dared him to challenge her. She pushed past Joel and strode away. At the doorway, she paused and turned. "I don't think you want me to do either."

Joel shook his head.

Eveliina smiled as she leaned against the doorjamb. That got his attention. "Good. Then I'll tell you. I'll be at my grandparents' summer cottage."

"Lapland?" Disappointment shadowed his question.

Against her better judgment, she clarified. "No. The one on the outskirts of the city."

"You're staying in Helsinki?" A smile grew on his face. "You'll be that close?"

Eveliina nodded. "I need to be on my own for a while, and I don't want to drive far to get that. Besides, I love that wooden cabin."

Joel shifted on his feet. "Was it that stressful in Vaasa?"

"You have no idea."

He looked down at the floor. "Do you think you'll have some designs ready when you get back?"

A sigh escaped. What part of 'time out' did he not understand?

"I'll try my best, boss."

In far too many ways, Adam Carter should have been better prepared for this mission, but he'd been busy saving souls back home in rural Africa. And everything had happened so fast.

The call from his Finnish friend, Mikko Mikkola, came as a surprise—the command from God to go, totally unexpected. That's why these three weeks of seclusion at this cottage were so important. Going into battle was never easy; wrestling against the forces of darkness, the hardest of fights. He needed this time

alone with God—to fast, to pray, to connect with heaven. Nothing could disturb him out here on this little island.

Thankful he'd kept the sleeping mask from his Johannesburg-to-Helsinki flight earlier that week, he pulled the dark fabric over his eyes. *If I don't get some shut-eye tonight, I'm moving my mattress into the sauna. At least that small room is darker than this cottage. I won't survive another sleep-deprived night.*

It was one thing going without food, and coffee, and his cellphone—those niceties that made life pleasurable—but no sleep?

Fluffing the feather pillow, he sank back into its softness. Suddenly, his chuckle filled the air. “Land of the midnight sun...now it makes perfect sense.” At least the long days would be great for missions, but he'd miss the African nights with their extra hours of darkness. Adam loved his sleep. The thought of hibernating like a bear come winter was sorely tempting.

If he could just figure out how to lower the blinds, his light problem would fade. But remote-controlled gadgets didn't work without remotes, and Adam had searched the small one-bedroom cottage for the device. There wasn't one, and Mikko was hours away, somewhere in the middle of Finland in a town Adam couldn't pronounce, making preparations for the School of Intercession.

Mikko had dropped him off on the banks of Lake Sahajärvi two days ago, popped him in a boat, and steered him in the direction of the small piece of land some two hundred feet off shore.

“You can't miss the house, Adam. It's the only one on the island.” Mikko laughed as he walked back to his

car. "I'll see you in three weeks," he shouted.

The thought of Mikko returned Adam to the phone call responsible for his life doing a total turnabout. "You have to come to Finland for the next year, Adam. There's power in prayer, and I've never met a prayer warrior quite like you. God moves in miraculous ways when you pray. You have much to teach us. The team wants you here—yesterday. Please, will you come? Help us take back our cities for God."

Adam remembered his reluctance. His work in Zambia had just started to bear fruit. Still he prayed, as he promised Mikko he would. God's answer was swift and specific. Ten days later, he picked up his visa at the Finnish Embassy in Pretoria and headed to the airport. He didn't understand why God wanted him on the other side of the world, and in such a hurry, but he obeyed.

Much at the Mikkolas' summer cottage was akin to the African villages he'd lived in for the past four years. Bathing happened in the lake. He drew his water from a well, and filtered it through a muslin cloth. Dinner, once his fast was broken, would certainly come from the surrounding waters. Already he'd seen some whoppers jump. Probably pike.

The small outdoor toilet at the edge of the trees reminded him most of his former surrounds. Thankfully, it wasn't crude like the ones he'd been accustomed to, but neither was there the luxury of a flush system.

Electricity came in small amounts daily by means of a single solar panel. Not that Adam needed it—eleven in the evening was as light as four in the afternoon on an African summer's day.

So, with the lack of modern conveniences, Adam

found it most strange that the blinds were motorized.

A mosquito buzzed around his head, as inconvenient and annoying as the blinds he couldn't close. He swatted, and his hand hit its tiny target. But it didn't take long to hear the steady high-pitched noise once more. Over and over. This barrage was another thing he hadn't expected in Finland. Didn't Africa have dibs on mozzies?

Between the elements of nature, Adam wouldn't get much sleep...again. And no sleep always made him grumpy.

Eveliina was certain Joel had deliberately kept her busy all day. It was already after five when she finally managed to leave the office. She rushed home, changed, and threw a few shirts, jeans, and shorts into a backpack. She didn't need much. On the way, she'd stop to get some groceries.

Inside the store, Eveliina filled the trolley as fast as possible, willing people out of her way as she rushed up and down the aisles. The cottage called. Thankfully, her grandparents didn't vacation at their summer cottages in August, and her brother was up north at some Christian thing again. She'd have the place all to herself.

Cold meats, cheese, cereal, cucumber, tomatoes, eggs, and yogurt went into the moving metal basket. Two bags of ground coffee were next. She grabbed a packet of flour, a tub of butter, a few bottles of milk, and some cream. Already she could taste that fresh blueberry pie, made the way Mummo had taught her. She loved her grandma. She loved this time of year,

too, when forests were laden with a variety of berries.

At the toiletries section, Eveliina took a bottle of sunscreen off the shelf. SPF40. She considered the imminent fortnight in the sun, and grabbed a second. Rather too much protection than too little. Her skin couldn't handle the summer rays. She couldn't cope with the swarms of mosquitoes either—irksome little creatures. Three bottles of repellent landed in the trolley.

Last stop before checkout was the bread section for a few loaves of *ruisleipä*. This dark, sour bread was one of the many reasons Eveliina was glad she was born a Finn. That and ice cream.

She turned the trolley around abruptly. She'd almost forgotten the most important item on her mental shopping list. A Finn could do without a lot of things—ice cream wasn't one of them.

With the groceries packed in the trunk, Eveliina steered her car north-west down the E12. Twenty more minutes and she'd be there. Time alone surrounded only by Lake Sahajärvi. She couldn't wait.

2

Lord, why can't I connect with you? All day Adam's prayers seemed to disappear into the cloudless sky. Lack of sleep had a lot to do with his souring mood, but as much as he tried to put on the garment of praise, the spirit of heaviness seemed determined to stay. Doubts assailed like fiery darts. I should have remained in Zambia, continued with the work there. This has all happened too fast. Did God really speak to me from Jeremiah three or did I read more into the command to 'Go, proclaim this message toward the north,' than God had intended? Had He really meant this far north?

For sure, Satan was using his exhaustion to sow confusion on his calling. The last thing the devil wanted was a praying church, and Adam was here to teach the Finns more about powerful, effective prayer.

He tried his guitar. Worship songs didn't help. He read Scripture—one chapter after another. Nothing. His prayers continued to feel monotonous and empty. Perhaps it wasn't sleep he needed, but food. Jesus was sorely tested when he fasted. If Satan was there to trip up the Creator of the universe, to make Him weary, to make Him doubt, what chance did he stand?

"Lord, send an angel to minister to me like You did with the prophets and apostles of old, like You did with Your own Son." Adam breathed out the words toward heaven with a heavy heart as he sat on the edge of the forest beside a juniper tree. Only the quiet rustling of a breeze through the leaves of the

surrounding birch gave ear to his pleas.

Cabin fever—that's what it was. Adam smacked his hands against his knees. He'd had enough. A leisurely row on the lake would clear his clouded mind. But the canoe was back on the mainland. He grabbed his dwindling stick of insect repellent and a hat, and hopped into the small motorized boat.

It only took a minute to cross the distance between where Mikko's grandfather had built the cottage on the south-westerly side of the heart-shaped island and the spot where Mikko had dropped him off earlier that week. "Take care, my friend," he'd told Adam, "that's a special place. You may lose your heart there."

After tying the boat to the jetty, Adam raised the engine out of the water. On the other side of the wooden walkway, Mikko's sleek yellow canoe bobbed gently in the waves caused by the motorized boat. He strolled over to the shed the family had built not far from the water and grabbed the oars from inside. What a country this was—homes left unlocked, properties unattended, and nobody seemed to notice or care. It was like everyone respected boundaries; they didn't go inside other people's houses or sheds without their permission.

He untied the mooring line, climbed into the canoe and pushed away from the edge. Soon the long, pointed boat glided through the water as it traversed the lake. Tension melted from Adam's body as adrenalin surged through him. He should have done this a lot earlier.

As he neared the eastern side of the island, a shaft of light shone down from heaven, splitting its way through the trees. Adam watched, mesmerized, as he rowed the boat close to the water's edge. The light

beckoned up ahead, but before Adam could follow it, he had to first tie up the canoe.

Staring at the empty metal hook on the front of the canoe, Adam chided himself for his stupidity. What was he thinking? He'd loosened the knot tied to the boat and left the rope still looped around a wooden post back at the mainland jetty?

Adam looked around, inside the canoe and outside, to see what he could use as a makeshift mooring line. There was nothing. He scratched his head and stared at the ground. Kneeling suddenly, Adam pulled the dirty shoelace from his left sneaker, then the one from the right and tied them together with a reef knot. He fastened one end to the canoe, the other around a sturdy birch sapling that grew close by. Satisfied his transport was secured, Adam headed for the light.

The shaft moved ahead, luring him. But it remained out of his reach. He weaved his way on a path through the forest, and soon emerged on the other side. He was back at the cottage. The light was gone and his pre-boating frustration began to build once more.

Heaven just didn't want to connect.

With nothing else to do but build his usual evening fire inside the sauna oven, Adam set about chopping more logs into burnable sizes. He'd sauna, and then take a dip in the lake, repeating the ritual several times as was customary.

Mikko had gone to great lengths to explain the ins and outs of this important Finnish culture to Adam, and he had to admit, he was fast beginning to enjoy it. But, even though he was alone on the island, he doubted he'd ever be able to sauna in true Finnish

style—dressed in nature’s garb. Later, after he was done subjecting his body to the extremes of hot and cold, he’d move the daybed mattress inside the small room with its one tiny window. There wasn’t a thing going to keep him from getting a decent night’s sleep tonight.

It was nearly eight o’clock by the time Eveliina parked her car beneath the birch trees close to the jetty. Hoping to catch a glimpse of her favorite place on earth, she walked down the narrow wooden platform and peered across the lake. After all the years, she still hadn’t accepted that she couldn’t see her grandparents’ cottage from this angle. Further up, yes, but not from the jetty. Still, every time she came here, she tried. Perhaps it kept the little girl inside of her alive. And she desperately needed to do that. Lately she didn’t care much for the woman existing on the outside—the one who’d be in a relationship for her own personal comfort.

Excitement bubbled inside her stomach like a fizzy drink.

Almost there...

Eveliina quickly loaded her belongings into the boat. Four bags of groceries, backpack of clothing, her bag of paints, and a new stretched canvas she’d saved for just such an occasion. It had been too long since she’d painted a Sahajärvi sunset. Finally, she slid her laptop into a waterproof bag, and placed it safely inside the boat.

Before setting sail to the island, she grabbed a bucket and the berry comb from the shed, and headed

into the forest in search of blueberries. Time for metsä, a walk in the forest. How she loved the peace and seclusion—the aloneness—it offered. With each step, the stress and fears of the past weeks faded.

It wasn't long until she returned to the boat, bucket laden with the darkest, plumpest blueberries. Mummo's pie would be exceptionally good this year.

Ensuring the bucket was safely wedged between her other belongings so it didn't topple over, Eveliina lowered the motor and pulled the starter cord. The motor sputtered, and then stopped. She pulled again, but the engine refused to fire. After she lifted the cover housing the petrol tank, Eveliina unscrewed the tank's lid. Full. There was nothing else she could do but use the oars and row. With her mechanical expertise limited to checking the fuel level, she realized she may be rowing a lot in the coming days. She could call Joel—he'd be at her service before the sun set—but that would open the door to all kinds of complications.

If only Mikko were closer.

Eveliina gazed across the mirrored surrounds as she pulled the wooden oars through the water, thankful she'd changed out of her corporate clothes into jeans and a T-shirt before leaving home. It would be good to be out of high-heels and makeup for a while. By bedtime her painted face would be gone, and she'd just be plain little Evie from Lapland—the girl who grew up believing this island was enchanted. Perhaps it was the fantasies she'd lived—the fiery dragons she'd slain, the wicked witches she'd hidden from, the handsome princes she'd kissed in this

place—that had shaped her chosen career.

She decided to call her brother once she'd unloaded the boat, got her cargo inside, and lit a fire in the sauna. He'd be able to offer some advice over the phone on what could be wrong with the motor and how she could fix it.

Her breath caught in her throat as she rounded the corner of the island. It had been quite a while since she'd spent time at the summer cottage. The sight of that small wooden house with its twin patios on both sides and upstairs bedroom flooded her mind with childhood memories. How many times had Mummo caught her with her head out the bedroom window when they'd holidayed together with her parents?

"Evie," she'd say. "What are you doing up there, child?"

"Can't you see, Mummo? I'm Rapunzel."

Her grandmother would laugh. "Oh yes, I see. And what beautiful golden hair you have."

"It's strawberry blonde, Mummo," Eveliina would reply with a giggle. Then she'd prop her elbows on the windowsill and scan the forest for sight of her prince.

But that was then. This was now. Although Joel was handsome, she wasn't sure he was her prince.

As she neared the cottage, Eveliina noticed that the red pigment on the wood had faded. When last had Mummo and Ukki given the place a coat of paint? Her grandparents were getting old. She and Mikko really needed to step up, take time out from their busy schedules—her long hours at the office, Mikko's months in the mission field—for their grandparents. After all, they'd made themselves available for the last eleven years, rearing their two orphaned grandchildren.

The white canvas sticking out behind the grocery packets caught her eye. Maybe she'd make the cottage her holiday project, leave the canvas untouched.

Eveliina pulled the boat up against the small jetty. She threw the rope onto the wooden platform, grabbing it as she stepped out. After tying the boat to the post, she carried her belongings to the cottage.

She breathed in deep as she stepped inside, allowing the familiar smells to pile on the memories. It felt good to be back. She hadn't realized how much she'd missed being here until now.

But something was missing.

The smell of blueberry pie cooling on the windowsill.

Soon.

With the last packet set down in the tiny kitchen, Eveliina walked to the woodpile outside and loaded up a couple of logs, noting the freshly chopped pile. Perhaps Mikko had been out here recently, after all.

The moment she opened the sauna door and heat blasted her face, Eveliina knew she wasn't alone. It took but a moment for her eyes to adjust to the subdued lighting. Stretched out against the wall at the back of the bottom bench, she saw him. A dark-haired stranger—here in her sauna, here on her island. Her shriek thudded against the wooden walls and the logs fell from her arms. One collided with Eveliina's sandaled toes. She let out another yell.

Adam bolted upright, hitting his head against the wooden bench above him. He fell back down and rubbed his forehead. The first shriek had woken him.