

THE LAND THAT IS NOT

Film Synopsis 1997

A rarely employed Swedish speaking Finnish actress SARA A. GALLEN is leaving Paris for Helsinki with her son PASCAL. She has a short role in a television film called THE LAND THAT IS NOT. The film is based loosely around the Scottish traveller MRS ALEC TWEEDIE who upon a visit to Finland in 1896 wrote a book called THROUGH FINLAND IN CARTS. Sara is not so much reluctant to leave Paris as reluctant to return to her native country. Pascal's father still lives there. She arrives in Helsinki and plunges into the role as the character Mrs Tweedie. It is early summer. In the film, Mrs Tweedie returns to contemporary Helsinki and finds things a little strange, to say the least, a100 years on. She tries to recall her own visit and thoughts as she walks from the steps of the Lutheran Cathedral to the harbour. However, she cannot remember much of the country or the place she visited. In 1896 Finland was little known. She came to grieve the death of her husband and close family. After hearing about her past, we arrive in the once-famed Kappeli restaurant, now named *On the Waterfront*. It is full of strange types; a juggler, a woman with a ferret, New Age hopefuls plus the ubiquitous Digital Beings with mobile phones. There she imagines 'meeting' HELENE SCHERFBECK (Red Dot Painter) and EDITH SODERGAN (Cat-Poet). During the interval of a woman's conference called THE LAND THAT IS NOT, they are arguing with the Oriental couple who now run the cafe. Afterwards, they discuss their feelings for the city, women, the country and the century. They are alone.

Mrs Tweedie leaves saddened but wiser. Later that evening she meets Senor ANGEL GANIVET in the *Gourmet Restaurant* in The Palace Hotel. Spanish Consul in Helsinki in 1896, Ganivet wrote a book of his experiences called *Finnish Letters* and is now like Mr Tweedie also the subject of a film. They have dinner in the Palace Gourmet and discuss their experiences, women, and their "films". They agree. It might not be worth returning. Better off being forgotten. Better off dead.

That being the case, Mrs Tweedie remembers the time she died. 1940. The morning after the dinner with Ganivet, she is no longer Mrs Alec Tweedie who wrote about her favourite tablecloths. Instead, she is her 'real' self, ETHEL BRILLIANA TWEEDIE. Ethel is more assured. In death she has learnt about life. She thinks now of Finland this century, as *One Man's Land*, as a land of pests, of Russians, communists and intellectuals: *A Land that is Not*. She visits the herring market in winter and is 'interrupted' by a MARXIST-LENINIST CHORUS dressed in corduroy, black roll-neck sweaters and Mao-suits. These are the salad days of Finnish Maoism. She flees the Maoist Chorus for the refuge of the Uspenski Cathedral where she meets two blind men, nicknamed POPE and SAINT. These are two poets who have been wandering around the first part of this century nicknamed BAD BOY ARTIST and HERMES. Alarmed by their pessimism, their antics, their poetry and their nightmares about the country, she decides to leave the film early. She has had enough. She opts for a return home to Scotland via the Stockholm ferry, instead of taking the Suomenlinna Ferry as she should have done in the script.

This immediately presents SARA with a dilemma. Who is she? Why is she here? Why did SHE come back? It also leaves Sara the actress without work. She takes the ferry herself to Suomenlinna to sit and think. She returns and decides to go back early to Paris. On the way back, deep winter now, she meets Mrs Tweedie in the Market Square. A very cold evening. They discuss. They have become friends. They separate agreeing things are what you make them. Both have one last thing in mind. It is the same thing. Sara goes to meet her son Pascal in Ekberg on Bulevardi, now an On-Line cafe, just before they are due to leave for the midnight plane out to Paris (if the de-icer machines haven't frozen up!). Mrs Tweedie seems to be going somewhere specific. Both Mrs Tweedie and Sara meet up later that evening in the snow-swept Senate Square where, on the steps of the Helsinki Cathedral (the film's beginning), the Director is unreasonably furious at them for wasting his time. Hysterical, they both know something must be done about him.

Both Mrs Tweedie and Sara have in their possession a pearl-handled pistol. For security reasons, of course. And for entirely different security reasons, Ganivet sits on the steps of the Foreign Ministry. In his hand also a small, deadly pistol. He fights off the Saint and the Pope who have gathered to gloat at the final 'action'. Someone is due their comeuppance! History takes a deep breath and can no longer lecture us about this century. No one is saying goodbye. Roger Connah