

Spinning Compass

by

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For my father

... Väinämöinen was angry – he was angry and ashamed
And he stepped away, towards the shore of the sea
And there he started singing, sang for the last time –
Sang a copper boat, a coppery covered craft
And he sat down in the stern, he cast off on the clear main
And he uttered as he went, declared as he departed:
'Just let time pass, one day go, another come
And again I'll be needed, looked for and longed for
To fix a new Sampo, to make a new music
Convey a new moon, set free a new sun
When there's no moon, no daylight, and no earthly joy.'
Then the old Väinämöinen went full speed ahead
In the copper boat, the coppery punt
To where mother earth rises and heaven descends
And there he stopped with his craft, with his boat he paused ...

The Kalevala

As they reached a hill on the first mile, compassman Harvey Mellen noticed the magnetic needle of his solar compass spinning crazily. [William] Burt was both astonished and excited. As he moved the solar compass, he noticed the needle pointed opposite to where it should. [---] Burt called out, “Boys, look around and see what you can find.” They all returned with specimens of magnetic iron ore [...]. They had discovered a portion of the Marquette Range, the first of the Lake Superior iron ranges to be located.

-<http://www.geo.msu.edu/geo333/burt.html>, accessed 6

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Part One

I

The edge is getting closer all the time, Kalevero Suomalainen thought as he teetered along the cliff of the open-pit hematite mine. Then he censured himself with disgust. Closer to what? Me? God? Neither. Just closer. His right foot slid in the red dust of the mine's edge, which was eating away the east gutter of what used to Main Street of old Chisim, Minnesota. He imagined leaping off the cliff into the mine. He looked down, exhilarated, and pictured his long body lying on the floor of the mine three hundred feet down, leaking his life into the red clay soil. Then he stepped away, thinking of the bottles of moonshine whiskey waiting for him in the back room of the Deer River Saloon.

He rejoined the others, who were walking fast because they had paychecks in their pockets, talking about plans for the night playing cards or visiting girlfriends in the upstairs of the supposedly dry saloons. He squinted with bloodshot eyes at the bright dusk, the golden twinkling birch leaves, and the heavy dark blue sky. To his left lay the stripped building foundations and naked streets of old Chisim, which had been moved a mile south to make way for the mine. To his right gaped the vast canyon of the mine itself, running half a mile across and a third of a mile long. There weren't many things Kalervo contemplated anymore, but he did sometimes wonder what this place was intended to look like. Man had changed it drastically, shaving off the white pine, carving out mine-canyons in some places and stacking rectangular black mountains of waste fill in others. He'd heard that in Chicago engineers had turned around the flow of a river, and he thought those men should come up here to see how changing the natural direction

of a place is really done.

One of the other Finn miners, young Lasse Lindroos, said, “Car coming.” As they moved out of the way, the miners watched an over-loaded Model-T chugging along the south end of old Main Street. The car was moving so slowly it looked like the occupants were taking a sight-seeing tour through a town that didn’t exist anymore. It coasted up to the men, trying to shift into an idle but instead sputtering to death. A woman and two teenage girls, dusty and dismayed-looking, peeked out the floppy cave of the car’s roof at the miners, who stared back, too tired to be inhibited. The man in the driver’s seat, wearing a clerical collar, leaned across the lap of the woman next to him.

“Hello tere,” said the man as he fumbled with an atlas and compass. “We’ve gotten a pit turned around. Tis map says we’re supposed to pee in Chisim, and tis compass is spinnin aroun like crazy.”

Kalervo knew who the man was. Chisim’s Finnish Lutheran church had been waiting for its new pastor to arrive from out East and this man, with his outdated map and his car packed full of boxes and women, must be the one. For a few moments, the miners only looked silently at the man or stared down at their feet, each of them waiting for someone else to address the pastor. The pastor looked at the silent miners one by one.

“Do you speak English?” he asked, then a bit suspiciously, “Finnish? *Puhutteko Suomea?*”

Old John Laine said to the pastor in his quaky Finnish, “Yes, we’re Finns.” Another of the miners, Simeon Haapanen, turned and began limping on his twisted hips toward town. John Laine and another of the miners, Lasse’s cousin Aimo, looked at each other and then turned and followed Simeon. Lasse Lindroos, who was constitutionally

unable to be impolite, especially to a pastor, fidgeted next to the car as he watched the others walk away.

“*Pastori*,” said Kalervo Suomalainen, “your map must be a couple years old. This is where Chisim used to be, but they started moving the town a few years ago because the mine was getting so close. If you just keep on this road over that rise there, you’ll run right into Finntown. That’s part of Chisim.”

The *pastori* swiped his forehead with the sleeve of his dusty coat and looked through the windshield at the backs of the three men trudging away.

“What is this?” he asked. “Why are they so angry at a stranger, a fellow countryman?”

“The church and the miners here don’t get along too well,” Kalervo said. “It goes back a few years.”

The *pastori* stepped out of the car and Kalervo saw that he was an inordinately large man, taller even than Kalervo, who was quite tall for a Finn. The *pastori* watched the receding figures and shook his head. Then he walked around the car and held his hand out to Kalervo and Lasse. “August Rautavuori. I’m the new minister at the Evangelical Lutheran Church.”

“If you don’t mind not shaking, *Pastori*,” Kalervo said, holding up his red ore-stained hands. “Kalervo Suomalainen.”

The *pastori* looked at Lasse who, still discomfited by the exchange he’d just witnessed, managed, “Lasse Lindroos,” before snapping his mouth closed again.

The three women started climbing out of the car. The two teenagers, clearly liberated from a car in which they’d been traveling many miles, roamed around the

overgrown building foundations. The older woman stood next to the *pastori*, ineffectively fanning herself with her hand.

“This is my wife, Inkeri,” the *pastori* said, “and those are our daughters Sylvi and Annaliisa.”

Kalervo, red-stained, sweaty, and unused to the company of women, was relieved the two girls didn’t come over for further introductions. The younger of the daughters, Sylvi, crept to the edge of the mine, keeping one foot behind her as she peered over its edge.

“It’s the biggest thing I’ve ever seen!” she called toward her father in English.

“Is this it?” the older daughter, Annaliisa, asked as she sat on a set of cement steps leading to nowhere, a book in her lap. “Is this the town?”

“Just over that rise and we’re there,” August answered.

“Where do you come from?” Kalervo forced himself to ask politely because of the women.

“Brooklyn, New Yawk,” answered Annaliisa, loudly.

“Sylvi, get back!” the mother’s voice cracked toward Sylvi, who jumped backward from the cliff.

“What is this place?” Annaliisa asked. “It looks like some Roman ruin.”

“It’s the old town of Chisim. The town moved,” the *pastori* said.

“It’s so horrid,” Annaliisa said. “A ghost town.”

“Oh gosh, it’s not horrid. It’s interesting. Everything’s always so ‘horrid,’ or ‘beastly,’ or ‘a shame’ all the time. Why do you always have to give things those stupid names?” Sylvi bickered from near the mine’s edge, the days of sharing a backseat giving

her voice a quiver of rage.

“Mother, she’s starting on me again.”

“Sylvi, stop this instant,” Inkeri said, the phrase empty with repetition.

“Well, I guess we’ll be heading up to town then,” Kalervo said, thinking of the whiskey.

He and Lasse were already walking away when the *pastori* called out, “Kalervo, Lasse! Services start next week. Hope to see you there.”

Lasse and Kalervo fell into silence as they walked toward the Sampo Savings & Loan. It was Lasse’s first payday. He’d been living for this day since he had stepped onto the S.S. Savonmaa in Hangö, Finland three months earlier. Then, he’d had almost two hundred American dollars sewn into the secret pocket of his pants. The money began depleting instantly and relentlessly. Everything cost twice what Lasse had planned for. He was a farmer who knew how to survive off the land, and suddenly he had no land to live off of. During the idle hours and days on the steamship across the ocean, his unused physical energy turned toward the lightening bundle of papers and coins in the secret pocket. He debated every purchase and grieved every penny he was forced to spend. He counted his money over and over again while the men around him gambled away their savings on card games borne of the boredom. It was three long months since he had set off from Finland, three months he had lived in the world as a consumer with nothing produced. Until that Saturday.

When he and Kalervo arrived at the bank, he took the thin paper envelope carefully out of his pocket and held it by the corner with his dirty, red fingers so as not to smudge his name printed on the front. In line at the bank, the miners jostled and talked

loudly, making plans for the night. Lasse thought through, yet again, his plans for the money. First, he would pay his bill at the Aalto's boarding house, and pay Aimo back for the mugs of whiskey he'd shared. Then he would buy himself a new oilskin hat from the co-op to protect his neck and head from the cold water that dripped on him constantly down in the drift. Then he would take a little for himself, "mad money" they called it, to have a couple whiskeys that night with Aimo and Simeon. He had calculated over and over what his paycheck should be at his wage of three dollars a day for four six-day weeks, with deductions for various things, and his conservative estimate was sixty dollars. Buoyed by the miners calling greetings to each other, Lasse allowed himself to think the check might be more like sixty-two or even sixty-five dollars. He was going to let the bank clerk open the envelope so he wouldn't smudge the precious check inside, but he was unable to restrain himself any longer. Very carefully, he unfolded the envelope and eased the check out with ginger fingers.

The check was for twenty-eight dollars and fifty-four cents.

Heat pulsed up from Lasse's gut into his cheeks. He stared at the check, blinking a couple times, reading the check as much as he was able to. There had been a mistake. Lasse stepped out of line and walked over to a tall bench which served as a stand-up writing surface. He placed the piece of paper carefully onto the bench top, pulling each corner of it taut with thumbs and forefingers, and bent over it, trying to make sense of the foreign words and the impossible numbers. All he could think was that there had been a mistake, but nothing could be done until Monday when the mine's bookkeeping office was open, and he shouldn't cash this mistake check, so he would have to go the weekend without his pay. But telling himself this didn't stop his hands from shaking as they held

the piece of paper down.

“What are you doing over here? Studying?” said Aimo, walking up behind Lasse. Lasse couldn’t speak as he handed the piece of paper to his cousin. “Oh, yes, the first paycheck is always the worst. You have to remember, they deduct quite a bit for caps, candles and carbine. And then, let’s see, in the wet drift you make two-fifty a day –“

“Three dollars! It’s supposed to be three dollars a day!”

“No, Lasse. It’s two-fifty in the wet drifts, three in the dry.”

“But why, for God’s sake? In the wet drift we have to stand in freezing water for ten hours a day!”

“They put you less experienced miners in wet. When you’ve been here awhile, you can move up to the dry drifts.”

“Fine then, that’s, what? Sixty. Then say they take ten dollars for caps and carbines.”

“Say more like fifteen.”

“Fine then,” Lasse said, very controlled. “That’s forty-five. Where’s the other twenty dollars?”

Aimo scanned the check. “I don’t know, they never tell you exactly what they’re deducting … Of course there are taxes … Did you use a pick and ax from the mine?”

“Those are the mine’s. They’re dull anyway, and they belong to the mine.”

“No, now they belong to you. The mine considers that they sold them to you,” Aimo handed the check back to Lasse and gave him an open-palmed slap on the side of the head. “You should’ve asked us about that, dumb-shit. We would’ve told you to go to the co-op for better tools at half the price.”

Lasse looked stupidly at the piece of paper in his hand.

"I never said this was going to be easy," Aimo said.

Lasse looked up at his cousin. He thought but didn't say, Actually, you did say it would be easy. You said money sprouted up from the ground like dog shit in springtime. He shoved the piece of paper into his pocket and walked outside without saying a word.

So this is how it is, he thought over and over again as he strode down the wooden sidewalk. So this is how it is. Away from the men in line at the bank, his anger dissipated into hopelessness. His chest swelled and tears filled his eyes. He opened his eyes wide and sniffed violently, unwilling to allow that mine and the faceless men who ran it to affect him. But what could he do? How he could he live on such paltry wages? He turned toward the outskirts of town, unable to bear the crowds of people on the sidewalks. Instinctively, he aimed toward an open space where he could walk and think freely. The Aalto's needed a dollar a day for room and board, and his balance for four weeks was already twenty-eight dollars. That left him with fifty-four cents. Fifty-four fucking cents! He thought of the ten dollar bill in the secret pocket of his pants. He had to have a proper hat for working down in the drift. The cold water dripping on his neck gave him a perpetual shiver and he knew he would get sick if it went on much longer. He felt an ache as he resigned himself to parting with the last of his savings.

He looked around at the black, uneven soil of the farmland, at the farmhouses with their inhabitants who earned their living off the land. If he only had some land of his own, a small garden plot, a rifle and some traps, a tiny cottage with a little stove, a bed, a table and a chair, he could survive here. How did they achieve these things that he wanted so badly?

Lasse Lindroos made a decision on that walk that day. He could have those things. These people had them, they figured out how to get them. And so could he. He'd gotten himself across the damned ocean, there was no reason he couldn't figure out the next part, too. He walked for another hour, plans and ideas expanding in his mind. Then he jogged back to the bank just before it closed, cashed his check, and headed toward the boarding house.

As Lasse passed by the Deer River Saloon, Kalervo came out cradling two paper bags in the crook of each arm, and the two men again fell silently into step as they walked home. The boarding house where Lasse and Kalervo lived, the Aalto's, was in Finntown on Chisim's west end, bordering the railroad tracks. In the back yard, they rinsed their hands and faces in the icy water from the pump. The parts of their bodies that had been covered with clothing were white, while their faces, necks, and hands were stained a deep rusty red. In stocking feet, the two men went in the back door of the house. Lasse headed directly for the large dining room on the main floor while Kalervo climbed the wood stairs and went into the bunk room he shared with four other miners.

Kalervo knelt down by his cot, in a prime corner spot due to his being there longest, and pulled a cardboard suitcase from underneath. Inside were all his worldly possessions: an extra pair of long underwear and socks; a revolver won in a card game; a *puukko* woodsman's knife; a Finnish Bible; and a couple decks of cards. He put one of the whiskey bottles in its paper bag inside the suitcase, closed it, and pushed it back under his bed. Then he popped the cork off the other bottle and took a long drink as he stretched out on his cot. He stared up at the ceiling, not moving except to bring the bottle to his mouth. He could feel his stomach rumbling, but it seemed to come from far away

and it was easy enough to ignore it if he kept pouring whiskey in his mouth. He'd been losing flesh. Once he had been a huge man, and he was still tall enough that his feet drooped off the end of the cot. But his shoulders had shrunken inward like there was a socket tightening inside his chest, and he had to tie a rope around his pants to keep them up. He took drink after drink until the black behind his eyebrows started to turn into a more tolerable shade of gray.

Downstairs in the dining room, Lasse squeezed onto the end of a bench at the long table where twenty other boarders were eating a dinner of roast beef, potatoes, green beans, and bread. There were also dishes of that slippery red fruit called tomatoes, cut up so their guts glistened. The miners had to eat fast since other boarders were standing behind them, waiting to take the vacated spots at the table. For Lasse this was no problem. In these first weeks in Chisim, he had been in the particular state of ecstasy of a man eating his fill for the first time in his life. He drained four glasses of milk and still Hilkka, the hired kitchen girl Lasse was too shy to address directly, brought out more full pitchers.

After dinner, Lasse went out to the front porch where his cousin, Aimo, and some other miners were lounging around on wooden chairs. It was a warm Indian summer evening, but the mosquitoes had been mostly killed by a night frost a few days earlier. Someone was burning leaves close by. Next door was an Italian boarding house wedged incongruously into the middle of Finntown. Lasse couldn't help staring at the dark-haired Italian miners who waved their hands around as they talked, getting louder and louder as they tried to speak over each other. The porches of the two houses were so close the men could easily pass something between them, but Lasse thought you couldn't

find two more different types of people, the quiet Finns with their normal ways and the boisterous, strange Italians. And yet here they were, all red-stained and working together down in those mine drifts, them and the Austrians with their unpronounceable names. It all sounded like gibberish to Lasse, the other languages bouncing around the mine drifts. He couldn't convince himself those people understood the nonsense coming out of each other's mouths.

Tapani Aalto, the owner of the boarding house, and his daughter Eeva came walking down the wood-plank sidewalk. The girl had been running forward, pulling her father by the hand, but as they mounted the porch where the men were sitting, she shied back behind her father's leg. She reminded Lasse of his little sister Oili from back home with her full moon face and her yellow hair showing streaks of the dark it would soon turn to, like most Finnish children's hair. Lasse made the face that always brought out a giggle in Oili, bugging his eyes out and waggling the flesh of his cheeks with his fingers so they made a funny sucking sound, but Eeva just stared at him from behind her father's leg.

"Evening," Tapani said, leaning against the porch rail and taking tobacco and papers out of the breast pocket of his flannel shirt. He rolled a cigarette and lit it, folding his arms across his chest. He stood there in silence for a few minutes smoking, then said, "Payday, isn't?"

"Some payday," shot out of Lasse's mouth. He hadn't intended to say anything to anyone besides his cousin about the paltry paycheck because he was somehow embarrassed about it, but now he couldn't help it.

Tapani looked at Lasse. "Not what you were expecting, Lasse?"

“I’ll be able to pay my room and board,” Lasse said.

“I’m not worried about that,” Tapani said, putting out his cigarette on the bottom of his shoe.

“I’m used to working hard, long days on the farm back home, but I thought here you were supposed to get a fair take for your work,” Lasse said, trying to cover the quake in his voice.

In the corner of the porch old John Laine grunted behind the cob of his lit pipe.
“Deductions from your pay for caps and candles, no wage increase since the war.”

“Well Lasse, if you’re feeling that way, I think you might be interested in a small happening tomorrow evening,” Tapani said. “John, maybe you could bring Lasse along with you tomorrow night.”

John grunted his assent.

“Is Kalervo upstairs taking a drunk without any supper?” Tapani asked.

“I suppose so,” John said.

“Wonder if he’ll skip sauna again,” said Aimo, picking at his teeth with a sliver of wood. “I just don’t feel clean myself with that shit-ass stinking up the bunk room.”

Impi Aalto, Tapani’s wife and the proprietress of the boarding house, opened the screen door and leaned out. “There you are,” she said to the little girl. “Want to help me roll out bread?” Eeva rushed from her father’s leg to her mother’s skirt.

“Impi,” Tapani said, “Kalervo’s upstairs taking a drunk again without eating anything. Send Hilkka up there with a plate of food for him.”

Impi glared at her husband.

“Well, I suppose you’d have all the men thinking room service was included in

the price of room and board," she said, loudly, making sure the men on the porch knew she was talking to them, too. "I run this house cleaner than most, meaning food's not allowed upstairs."

Tapani took a drag of his cigarette and regarded his wife with eyes narrowed against the smoke wafting up from his mouth. All the men on the porch looked at the ground or out at the street, pretending they weren't witnessing this battle of wills, but Lasse was curious enough about who really ran this place that he snuck a couple glances at the husband and wife. Tapani didn't say anything. He just looked at his wife, who looked right back. Then she turned and went into the house, letting the screen door slam behind her. Tapani snorted out one chuckle and shook his head, following her.

Aimo pulled a flask of bootlegged Canadian whiskey out of his coat pocket, set his empty coffee cup on the floor, and filled it with whiskey.

"I'd pay a quarter for a cup of that," Simeon Haapanen said. He swallowed the last of his coffee as Aimo slid the flask along the slats of the porch floor toward him. Simeon fished a quarter out of his pants pocket and tossed it to Aimo.

Lasse's eyes flickered over the amber liquid filling the cup and his cousin noticed him watching.

"You want one for a quarter, too, Lasse?" Aimo asked.

Lasse shook his head, not trusting his voice, and snapped his head to look away from the others.

"You gonna be a teetotaler now, like John over there?" Aimo said tauntingly. "At least John's got a reason, he sends all his money to his wife and daughter. What's your excuse?"

Suddenly, an explosion from the mine curdled the air, rattling the glass in the window pane behind Lasse's head. Pebbles and stones rained down on the yard and the roof of the house, detritus from the explosion over a mile away. As Lasse watched, a stone the size of a man's head sailed through the air and landed with a thud square in the middle of the lawn.

"Jesus Christ!" he said, standing up from his chair and clasping his hands to his head. Across the porch Aimo, watching him, laughed and laughed.

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Upstairs in the bunk room, Kalervo was lying on his bunk in the corner with his undershirt jerked open at the neck and the hand not cradling the whiskey bottle thrown to the side. Tapani appeared in the doorway with a plate of food and a glass of milk, and he stood there watching Kalervo until he brought the whiskey bottle to his lips, the only signal that he wasn't passed out already. Tapani sat down on the cot next to Kalervo's.

"Kalervo, I brought you a plate."

Kalervo's eyes opened, fastened to the ceiling for a moment, and then rolled toward Tapani. He rolled onto his side, propping himself up by the elbow.

"That's kind of you," he said. "I don't want to be any trouble."

Kalervo ate mechanically, putting the food into his mouth one bite after another until it was gone. Then he drained the glass of milk and handed the empty glass to Tapani, who handed the bottle back to him. He took a long drink of it, as if the ordeal of eating required it.

“Thank you very much,” he said, closing his eyes and laying one arm across his forehead.

“You’re welcome,” Tapani said gruffly, standing.

“The new minister came into town today,” Kalervo said. “We saw them on the road in the old town. They got lost because they had an old map and a useless compass. He’s got a wife and two daughters.”

“I’ll send the welcoming committee right over,” Tapani said, smirking. Kalervo didn’t smile. “Sauna will be ready soon, Kalervo. I think it’d be a good idea for you to get cleaned up.”

Kalervo brought the whiskey bottle to his mouth and drank deeply.

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In the dressing room attached to the sauna, Impi, Eeva, and Hilkka took off all their clothes. When Hilkka untied her head scarf, her short hay-colored hair frizzed out like a broom whisk around the base of her skull and jaw. Already in the humid dressing room the week-old smells lifted off their skin and wafted out of their hair. They hurried into the hot sauna and poured ladles of warm water over themselves from the large wooden bucket next to the stove. The two women washed their cracks from end to end with soap so they would be clean enough to sit on the sterile benches. Eeva turned and spread her cheeks to her mother, who sloshed soap and water over her. The two women sat on the top bench high above the stove, where it was hottest, while little Eeva sat on a cooler low bench. Impi threw a few ladles of water onto the stove’s nest of heated rocks.

The rocks sizzled as the water condensed instantly into sauna steam, *löyly*, which swept around the wooden room, searing the tips of their ears.

At first the women discussed household matters, such as how many of the circular dark rye Finnish bread flats they would bake the next day, and how they would organize laundry day on Monday. But soon the sauna got so hot from the *löyly* flowing around the room like blistering currents in a river that they were unable to speak. Finally the heat penetrated deep enough into their bodies that the sizzle of the *löyly* and the crackle of the fire drowned out the noise in their brains. Then they were nothing but animals at the most basic level, conscious only of physical sensation.

After a few more ladles of *löyly*, it was time for the women to vacate the sauna so the shifts of men could start coming in. Impi bustled around, checking the level of the hot water boiler next to the stove, topping off the huge warm water barrel, bending and turning with buckets and ladles in each hand like she was in the kitchen preparing a complicated supper. Hilkka bathed Eeva.

“I know, little mosquito, we’ll get out as soon as you’re clean,” Hilkka murmured to the girl as she poured warm water over her head, her hand running over the girl’s hair to squeeze the soap out of it. Eeva fidgeted as she closed her eyes against the chaos of stinging soap and water cascading over her face. Impi managed a smile as she watched her daughter resist the urge to open her eyes too early, keeping them squeezed shut until Hilkka rubbed a rough towel over her face. Then the two women bathed by soaping up and pouring warm water over themselves to rinse. Out in the dressing room, they dried their pink, warm skin with rough towels, got dressed, and went back in the house.

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Lasse and the other men from the front porch trooped into the house and up the stairs to the bunk room. They knew the rhythm of the house like farm animals: that fifteen minutes after Impi, Hilkka, and Eeva went to sauna, it was time for them to get ready. In the bunk room, Lasse stripped off the underclothes he'd been wearing for that week, and he stuffed the soft, rank bundle into the burlap laundry sack Impi had left on Simeon's bed. Kalervo was curled on his side on his cot, cradling the half-empty whiskey bottle to his chest. His lips were slack and one eye was pulled partway open in the throes of rubbing his dirty face against the pillow.

"He looks more like a dog than a man with his lips hanging open like that," observed Simeon. "Wonder what would happen if I thumped his ribs."

Aimo, stripped naked, stood over Kalervo's head and began clapping loudly and jumping up and down, so that his penis swung around in an absurd circle.

"Get up! Get up you shit-ass! Sauna!" he yelled into Kalervo's face. "What are you, an Austrian? You like passing out in your own stench?"

"Let him be," Old John said from his corner of the room, but Aimo continued clapping, cupping his hands to maximize the volume. Kalervo's only reaction was to roll onto his other side, somehow balancing the open bottle as if its lip was attached to the ceiling by a string.

"Men! Your turn," they heard Impi call from the bottom of the stairs.
"Hell," Aimo said, tossing his hands over Kalervo in disgust. "Stinks up the whole damn room."

Lasse, John, and Aimo trooped out of the room, Simeon limping behind on his twisty hips out along the planks of wood laid down as a pathway from the back door to the sauna, and into the dressing room, where they hung their towels and clean underclothes on hooks. The Aalto's assigned sauna turns by bunk room and that night Lasse's room was first. That was good on one hand because there would be plenty of water, but bad on the other since they would have to hurry through their sauna to make way for the other boarders waiting to get in.

In the sauna, which was hot with hours of heating and now these four large bodies, the men poured water over themselves and washed their crotches. Water splashed off their backs and onto the sauna rocks so that Tapani, who was already in the sauna, had to stop throwing *löyly* or be blistered off the top bench. Lasse lathered himself from head to toe right away, anxious to be clean of the red stain. He scrubbed at his skin with a rough brush and ran his fingernails around his neck, imagining four white stripes. He doused himself with water and, though he couldn't see much by the lantern shining through a window between the sauna and the dressing room, he imagined that the sudsy water running off him was red like foamy blood. There was not enough room on the top bench for everyone, and since Lasse had lingered at the water barrel, he had to sit on a cooler low bench like a woman, child, or old person. Annoyed, he threw a brimming ladle of *löyly* and enjoyed the angry sizzle of the rocks. For awhile the men were all quiet, listening to the stove fire crackle and focusing on breathing through the invisible shrouds of heat.

“Kalervo passed out?” Tapani finally asked from where he was settled meditatively in his corner.

“Yes, and I think we need to institute a new rule,” Aimo said. “Every boarder must sauna once a week for the comfort of his fellow boarders. Shall we vote?”

Lasse took this opportunity to ask a question that had been bothering him. The weeks since he’d left his village on Finland’s west coast had been full of revelations about how people in the rest of the world lived. However, none had been as shocking as the fact that no one among the immigrants in the mine seemed to bathe except the Finns.

“How do these people get clean?” he asked.

“Who?” Simeon asked. “The Austrians down in the drift, where no air moves and you can still smell the barn they slept in back in the home country?”

“Piece by piece,” Aimo said. “That’s how they wash. One week they wash their hands, the next week their neck, the next week their face ...”

“What about the important parts?” Lasse asked with innocence, looking at the sweaty men steaming on the bench above him.

“Once a year they pull down their trousers and sit themselves off the end of a dock,” Simeon said.

“On the Fourth of July,” Aimo added. “That’s how they celebrate.”

The two men chuckled together. Old John grimaced disapprovingly and changed the subject.

“What happened at the meeting?” he asked Tapani who, as Lasse had recently learned, was the business manager of the Sampo co-operative general store in Finntown. Many of the miners belonged to the co-op, and Aimo had recommended to Lasse that he join, too.

Tapani reached for the ladle in the water bucket and threw searing *löyly*.

“We’re still losing money but at a slower rate than last month,” he said.

“How much this month?”

“Four hundred thirty-two dollars.”

“Oh-ho. That’s still a lot.”

“Did you vote on whether to stop extending credit?” Aimo asked.

“Yes.”

“So?”

“It was defeated, four to three.”

“How did you vote?”

Tapani didn’t answer right away while he threw more *löyly*.

“I voted to keep extending credit,” he said finally.

“Good,” John said.

“The hell that’s good,” Aimo exclaimed. “Good if you want the co-op going bankrupt and closing down.”

“I don’t know how you or anyone else could get a start in this town without being able to run credit at the co-op,” John said. “We have to think communally, Aimo, helping each other. It’s the only way we’ll survive in this country.”

Tapani climbed down from the bench and started to lather himself. “I’m done if you want to go up,” he said to Lasse, who scrambled up to the top where the *löyly* was the hottest and most searing.

“The new *pastori* came into town today with his family,” Tapani said as he rinsed himself.

“We saw them,” Lasse said. “I think they got turned around and ended up in the

old part of town.”

“Ministers are nothing but trouble,” John said.

“At least he had the consideration to bring a couple of daughters along,” Aimo said.

Tapani chuckled. “Aimo, what are you doing looking at a minister’s daughters? I thought you were saving to bring a nice Finnish maiden over here to marry.”

Aimo leaned back against the wall with his hands laced behind his head, grinning. Lasse knew there was a stack of newspapers under his cousin’s cot full of advertisements for young Finnish ladies seeking a husband in America. Aimo had told him he’d exchanged letters with five or six of them.

“There’s no harm in a glance now and then,” he said as Tapani creaked open the sauna door and stepped outside.

The four men only had a few minutes left of their sauna shift to wash and dry themselves and get dressed in the dressing room. Lasse bent down and wrapped his fingers around the ends of his toes to check them for warmth, his test of a quality sauna. They were ten hot little furnaces, emanating their own heat. Good. Back in the bunk room, Lasse organized his few possessions in the trunk under his cot. Simeon and Aimo were leaving for the strip of “dry” saloons on Third Avenue, which were known to sell whiskey in coffee cups. On the corner cot, Kalervo was roused enough by the men’s ruckus to lift his head. He observed them for a moment out of slit eyes before taking a long drink of his whiskey and letting his head fall back onto the pillow.

Hours later, Lasse woke to a crackling sound like a fire starting. There was a loud bellow and the violent rustle of a man leaping out of bed.

“*Satana!* Light the lamp! Someone light the goddamn lamp! He’s pissing on my bed!” cried out Simeon’s disembodied voice. Finally the lamp was lit by Simeon himself – the others being too groggy or annoyed to follow his instructions – and there stood Kalervo, pissing in beatific drunkenness on Simeon’s wool blanket. In fact, Kalervo had just finished his piss as the light revealed to the confused, drunken man as much as he was able to comprehend about his error. He was reeling backward already when Simeon’s fist connected with his bleary right eye socket and sent him spinning onto the bed of John, who was trying in vain to sleep through this event. Lasse was surprised Simeon, with his crippled hips, could land such a hard punch, but then he thought the huge, drunken Kalervo was probably an easy target right then. Aimo got up to peel Kalervo off John, who was struggling and cursing under Kalervo’s weight.

Tapani came into the room and demanded, “What the hell is going on here?” before seeing Kalervo on the floor between John’s and Lasse’s beds, his lolling head cradled in Aimo’s lap. Tapani knelt down and pulled Kalervo into a sitting position by the collar of his shirt. He gathered Kalervo’s head in the crook of his arm and saw the closed eyelid quickly expanding, hardening, and darkening in color.

He looked around the room and, seeing Simeon shaking out his right hand, demanded, “You hit him?”

“He pissed on my bed!”

“I’d punch you if you weren’t a fucking cripple,” Tapani shot back. “Help me get him up to bed,” he said to Aimo.

“Tapani, he’s pissed on himself, too,” Aimo said, indicating the wet crotch of the drunken man’s underwear.

“Oh, hell,” Tapani said. “Let’s get him out to the sauna. Lasse, help me.”

The two men supported the tall, stringy drunk man between them down the stairs and out to the sauna. In the sauna dressing room, they stripped the underclothes off Kalervo, who was semi-conscious from being shuffled around. In the still-warm sauna Tapani and Lasse propped him on the lower bench and Tapani woke him further by throwing ladles-full of icy water over him. Kalervo let out a yell and careened his arms around so wildly he knocked the bucket out of Tapani’s hands.

“Kalervo,” Tapani said sternly. “You’re dirty and you pissed on yourself. You have to wash.”

“Tapani?” Kalervo croaked, blinking with one good eye through the ice-water rivulets cascading down his face. “I’m blind! The moonshine’s finally blinded me!” He began to giggle, but then he winced and touched the hardened bulb of his eyelid. “I’m hit!” he cried out. “Tapani, am I blind or am I hit?”

“You’re hit. Now wash.”

Lasse handed him a bar of soap and Kalervo began automatically running the soap bar over his skin, often squeezing it out of his grasp so it fell on the wood planks and Lasse had to retrieve it for him. Meanwhile, he talked in slurs.

“Tapani, it’s hard. It’s hard. It was always hard, do you remember?”

“I remember.”

“Back home. You remember?”

“I do.”

“Home, there were some good things. Here, there are none. I ain’t a man, Tapani. I ain’t a man.”

“You’re a man, Kalervo.”

“I ain’t. I’m an animal. A stupid, dull animal. Made for work, created for work. You don’t understand, Tapani. You got a wife and a family. A normal man’s life. I got a cot in a room full of men, and that’s all I ever had. Oh God,” he cried out, rubbing his face with his hands. “It’s not dignified. It’s not how a man should have to live. Tapani, you know I ain’t ever had a woman I didn’t pay for? Did you know that?”

Tapani was silent.

“Tapani, you remember back home in Seinäjoki, and we learned our catechism and we studied the Bible. And you and I memorized that verse from Matthew. I always used to think of that verse. Do you remember it? Can you say it now?”

Tapani remembered the verse well, mostly because his old friend made him recite it when he was drunk. And so he began to speak as he continued to throw water over Kalervo. “Christ says, ‘Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, what you shall wear. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than clothing?’”

Kalervo listened raptly, his eyes closed and his face screwed up. Then he said what he always said after Tapani finished.

“I thought it meant there could be some joy, when I was young and back home. But here, I thought of it, and I think it means I am the meat. I am the animal to be worked and then eaten, that’s what I think now.” And then Kalervo’s tears began to mix with the warm water Tapani poured over him to rinse the ore and piss and dirt and soap away, leaving nothing but the naked, drunken, sobbing man underneath.