

WALTER MEETS A MACK

by

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A Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Education: Natural Science and Environmental Education

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

August 2005

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Teacher's Guide

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Author's Note

In the year 1900, Minnesota was a colorful region bustling with activity. The Downtown Gateway district of Minneapolis was a street fair of small business commerce and a crossroads for pinewoods and prairie travelers and city slickers. The natural resources of the region were being developed yielding riches for investors and giving jobs to workers. Demand for labor attracted countless European immigrants and others of all backgrounds seeking a better life. Sometimes they found it, but issues of economic justice persisted. Moving around the upper Midwest with the change of seasons these hard working folks were the engines that cut trees, harvested wheat and dug mines. However, with this development came the displacement of indigenous Ojibway and Dakota people. This history is the legacy of the present state of Minnesota.

The environment of the region changed dramatically. North woods lumberjacks witnessed the end of old growth pinewoods. Visit some of the restored warehouses in downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul and look at the exposed structural timbers used in turn of the century warehouses. Today trees this big survive only in tiny protected reserves like the Lost Forty in Itasca County, a stand of massive red and white pine trees, some centuries old.

A unique juxtaposition was occurring. The natural order that had stood for thousands of years was changing at the hands of a largely immigrant, seasonal work force. Human historical drama and the transition of the ecological status quo gave me the idea for Walter Meets a Mack.

In this modest first novel I'm hoping young readers will think about the implications of past natural resource use decisions Minnesotans have made. In my

research I discovered a wealth of people stories and many issues that parallel the contemporary world. I also hope that they have fun reading it and enjoy the adventures of Walter Myllamaki as he finds his way.

My ancestors were Minnesota prairie pioneers on one side and north woods homesteaders on the other. One hundred years ago it is likely that I myself could have been one of the army of migrant workers working the land. As I began talking with people about my ideas I discovered that this is a common history for many Minnesotans.

The Bowstring River, Northstar Lake and the Suomi Hills are real places in Itasca County. Finnish homesteaders really did settle on land clear-cut by logging in the Suomi Hills. In the same area, Scenic State Park has a distinctive ice-age esker and old growth pine trees. In Scenic Park, tramping across a frozen lake one day I happened on a deer's bones and hide torn apart in a wolf kill. Exploring the lakes and woods around highway 38 north of Grand Rapids, a lot of natural beauty and history can be discovered. With the right lens the same is true for all of Minnesota.

In 2005, we have a new population of recently arrived Minnesotans and our own natural resource use issues. Thinking about who we are, the work we do and our attitudes towards interacting with the natural world are timeless questions. In this book it is my goal for young people and other readers to continue the discussion.

I had been camping at Scenic State Park a couple of times and happened to mention this to Dahlia Spivey, a neighbor. Dahlia is 86 years old and grew up on a homestead, on clear-cut land, north of Bigfork in Itasca County. She became excited and began recalling memories of her childhood. In my Minnesota County Atlas, using a magnifying glass, we found the exact spot of her family farm near the tiny town of Wirt. I learned about how

she had to work picking rocks from the fields and how her father used to blow up old stumps with dynamite. Hearing these stories and others marked the beginning of my research.

Dahlia inadvertently helped me to find my way in finding an idea for Walter Meets a Mack. I chose a specific part of Itasca County as the setting for my story as a result of exploring in the area and further research that revealed a fascinating natural and human history. Because the scope of a novel can be opened ended, it was helpful to focus on one place.

Another neighbor, Kathy Matalamäki, a storyteller and speaker of Finnish, helped me with resources in using the Finnish language. She shared stories of how her ancestors arrived from Finland and about growing up on a farm in Floodwood, Minnesota.

Elizabeth Dwight, a colleague at Emerson School, helped with insights on how to make the story clear to young readers and to overcome my allergy to properly placed commas. Mary Foster helped with encouragement and suggestions on story and history. Polly Fry Phd is from the College of Natural Resources at the University of Minnesota and one of the producers of the excellent series, History of the Land. I thank her for her positive feedback, helpful critique and knowledge of Minnesota history.

The staff of the Audubon Center of the North Woods, passionate and knowledgeable about the natural world, helped me greatly in forming my ideas. Many details about geology, birds and Minnesota History, learned at the Audubon Center, came to rest in my work.

Most of all I want to recognize Renee Wonser Phd at Hamline University's Center for Global Environmental Education. Renee had the vision to believe in my idea that

history, natural science and environmental education could be blended into an educational story for young people. The Natural Science and Environmental Education Master's Program at CGEE was flexible enough so that I could create a work for my students that fits in well with curriculum. At CGEE my passion for teaching and history found an outlet in a student-centered project.

The book The Other Minneapolis by David L. Rosheim (1978), describes wonderfully the amazing history of the Minneapolis Gateway District. Kohl's Dime Museum, Foster's Flop House and saloons that offered free lunches as an incentive to drink were all real places. I am indebted to Helmi Mavis: A Finnish American Girlhood by Mavis Hiltunen Biesanz (1989), for insights into Finnish immigrant culture and language. Pines, Mines and Lakes: The Story of Itasca County, Minnesota by James E. Rottsalk (1960), relates town by town, the names and places from the history of the county. Information about Indian burial mounds, logging camps, hardscrabble homesteaders and characters like Bungo Dan and Sam Christy all came from this source. Walter O'Meara wrote The Trees Went Forth (1947), about his experience as a lumberjack in 1906. Many details on how a lumber camp operated, the personalities of the workers and the ecology of clear-cut logging came from that book. The Forest for the Trees by Jeff Forester (2004), explains how logging ice-roads were prepared in the summer and is an excellent source on the history, ecology and how the north woods has changed through logging. They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups by June Drenning Holmquist (1974), tells about how many Finnish people came to Minnesota to avoid conscription in the Imperial Russian Army. There is a wealth of resources available about Minnesota history. Pioneer life on the western prairie is

documented in On the Banks of Plum Creek by Laura Ingalls Wilder (1937). I recommend The Checkered Years: A Bonanza Farm Diary 1884 – 1888 by Mary Dodge Woodward (1989), to learn about daily life in the Dakotas near the turn of the century. The Minnesota Historical Society is a marvelous source. An especially good website titled Forests, Fields and the Falls, www.discover.mnhs.org/ConnectingMN/, provides first hand accounts of the seasonal work force that once moved through the state.

My Mother grew up in Minneapolis. She remembers the Gateway District and traveling by electric streetcar. She also recalls drinking fresh, warm milk and taking saunas while visiting the Finnish side of the family on her uncle's farm. My Father's passion for history is infectious. His own research into, for example, the railroad coming to his hometown of Mountain Lake, Minnesota and about the grasshopper plagues of the 1870's helped spark my imagination.

The end result of all this investigation is Walter Meets a Mack. I'm hoping that in this book young readers and others will get turned on to history, learn about change and enjoy a good story.

Chapter 1

Balance

Walter Myllamaki was learning that in *Ameriika* there was really no such thing as a free lunch. Sure that was what the signs outside the taverns along Washington Avenue advertised. Inside there was the long buffet table groaning with dishes of ham and sausages, baked beans, potatoes, bread, pickles, salty fish and cheese and other goodies. Walter knew the word free. It was one of a handful of words in English he'd learned. But, just like English had all kinds of words that said one thing and meant another, a free lunch was just not the case.

Inside the Sourdough Tavern he had just heaped his plate high with food when a smiling young woman insisted that he buy a glass of whiskey to go with it. Walter politely declined. He was too young to drink and would have preferred a glass of lemonade.

"Free lunch please," he told her.

He sat down with his food, sharing a table with a man with his hat on sideways who was wobbling side to side in his chair. The man turned, looked past Walter and fell on the floor. The nice lady came back with a grimy glass of brown liquid.

"50 cents." She pointed to a sign over the buffet table that Walter couldn't read. It said: All Patrons Must Purchase a Beverage.

"No thank you," he told her.

The next thing he knew he was out in the street on his rear end. Luckily he avoided one of the many piles of horse manure decorating the cobblestone road. Unfortunately his

suitcase that came flying out after him did not. Around him he could hear the guffaws and ridicule of passersby.

“And stay out!” punctuated the bullyboy in a bowler hat who delivered him out the door.

The bell of an oncoming electric streetcar clanged a warning. He picked himself up from the middle of Washington Avenue. Great. He had just lost his job. He had mustard and pickled herring all over his shirt. His suitcase needed cleaning. He couldn't speak much English. Again he wondered why he was here, what he was doing so far from home. It had been a week ago that he'd arrived after a long journey from Vaasa in southern Finland. He'd made it across the wild Atlantic in steerage, in the confines of the belly of a steel ship. His stomach had pitched and rolled for two weeks. He would never forget the smell of his fellow passengers' vomit sloshing around in buckets that were only emptied every other day.

From New York City to Chicago he'd suffered on hard wooden benches on cramped, smoky trains. In third class, window seats were quickly claimed and he'd not seen much of this new land. Across a place called Wisconsin that seemed as big as all of Finland he had glimpsed pastures and fields, a promise of the farm life he had known. Now here he was down and out in Minneapolis, Minnesota, bewildered and confused. He was from a family of farmers and knew the countryside, not this hostile city where they tossed you into horse dung for trying the promised free lunch.

Still, his family back in Finland had to pay the owner of the land for the right to farm and there was little left after every season. Walter's father had inherited only a small plot of his own. He'd had to share with three brothers what was left of family property and it

was not enough to support a family. Then the Czar's recruiters had come sniffing around his village talking about conscription into the Russian Imperial Army. Walter was a lanky lad with room to grow on his narrow frame. Although he was taller than his parents and strong in his arms, he was only sixteen. The Myllamakis didn't know much but they knew that no son of theirs was going to serve a Russian master. No way was young Walter, happy go lucky good son Walter, going to serve as cannon fodder for the Imperial Army. With little prospect in future farming and the Czar breathing down their necks, a decision had to be made. Scraping together what little money they had, they'd written down the name of Uncle Emil Aho who'd come over to America several years before to cut down trees. Beer River, Minnesota was the place from the last letter they'd received some six months ago. Walter was to go and find his Uncle in far off Minnesota, seeking something better than could be offered at home.

Walter, as tall from head to toe as he was wide from outstretched hand to hand, shook his shaggy head of brown locks and brushed off his clothes. He could swing an axe, build a fence, butcher a hog, plow a straight furrow and look at the sky to know the weather but here; in the crazy hectic bustle of Minneapolis, things weren't so clear. Was the lunch free or not? He sighed, collected his battered suitcase and wiped it off on the curb.

Three days ago Walter had been outside the Milwaukee Road Depot, sitting on his suitcase with his hand on his fist. During the night in the train, a thief had relieved him of his money that he'd thought was safely stashed in his boot. It could have been any of the shifty crew sharing the compartment, dusty fellows not unlike him, on their way somewhere. When he reached into his boot and found only a foot his heart sunk to his

stomach. Frantically he searched the floor around his bench. Nothing. What to do? The money had been hard earned and represented his start in Minnesota. How disappointed his parents would be. Looking around at the faces of the other passengers he had seen only strangers, just like all the unknown faces now passing by. There was a stink on the breeze, like dead fish, lots of dead river fish. After many days of travel Walter knew that he stunk too. He had no money. He was hungry and lost and no one could speak Finn. He was a dead fish on the river of life.

Wandering aimlessly, he ended up outside the depot. His suitcase became a bench to have a sit and a think.

Just then he'd looked up and a stern face gazed into his.

"Can you wash dishes?" A lady with a face like a pie and a large rear end, her gray hair pulled back in a bun, was talking to him.

"Yes?" was all he could manage.

"Well come on then young man, there's a pile waiting for you."

The next thing Walter knew he was across Washington Avenue and through the doors of the Rock Island Buffet and Hotel. His new employer moved fast despite her girth and Walter sensed that he was next in a long line of dishwashers. Past the dining room and into the kitchen Walter's belly let out a loud grumble at the lovely odors of fresh baked bread, bubbling stew and roasting meat.

Walter's savior directed him to a table, where he was treated to a platter of the most delicious food he'd enjoyed since leaving his Mama's kitchen back in Finland.

However, his new Mama was not so nice. When he'd only just sampled his soup and bread she yanked him by the ear and pushed him towards a double sink of hot sudsy

water filled to the top with greasy breakfast dishes. Crusty, dried egg yolk was staring at him from a tower of filthy plates.

“You’re the new pearl diver! Here’s the deal: 50 cents a day or room and board.”

Mrs. Sigrist, his new boss played charades to get him to understand. Walter, who was not as slow as he appeared, chose the room and board.

Room turned out to be a pallet on the storeroom floor among sacks of flour and beans. Board was three meals, but Mrs. Sigrist, a prudent Norwegian, strict in spite of Walter’s charming boyishness, closely watched the portions as if the fate of her establishment rested on her employee’s powers of consumption. He stayed hungry. Mountains of dishes and tin silverware came in three waves: breakfast, lunch and dinner. The grimy pots and pans of Otto the cook followed these. He worked with sleeves rolled up and wrinkled, wet hands.

Still Walter had at least made a start in the new world while he mulled over his next move in his quest for Beer River and Uncle Aho.

One the third day he decided to have a little fun. He got Otto to slip him extra morsels of food by dazzling him with his balancing tricks. Feeling the center of gravity in inanimate objects was one of Walter’s talents. When he was a boy his Uncle Emil taught him to place sticks, his father’s boot, rocks, his mother’s teapot and all sorts of things on his chin and balance them. Having just scrubbed clean the largest cast iron skillet in the place, Walter placed it on his chin with the handle pointing straight up. In this way he delicately crossed the kitchen returning it to an amazed Otto. He followed this feat by balancing a teakettle, a three-legged stool, a heavy chopping cleaver and the fattest,

longest carrot in the larder. Otto applauded all these triumphs by madly clapping, fat cheeks bouncing on either side of his bushy soup strainer.

The smell of the burning beefsteak ignored by an entertained Otto brought Mrs. Sigrist running back into the kitchen. She certainly did not share the joy of the huge carrot extending skyward from Walter's chin. At first sputtering and speechless, with her hands on her hips she at last found her voice.

“Dats enough of dat! You got one more day here and then you'll be on your way!”

Although Walter understood few of the words, her meaning was clear. He had his pride. If it meant no longer suffering her abuse and meager meals then he'd be leaving now. He retrieved his suitcase from the back room, balanced it carefully on his chin and left. Except this time he went through the packed dining room and out the front door with the wild cheering of an astonished lunch crowd at his back.

In the street, lacking lunch and once again lacking a plan was when he'd gone in search of a free lunch and instead landed on his rear end.

During three days of dishwashing he'd seen little of Minneapolis. So, after his hasty exit from the Sourdough Tavern he made up his mind to have a look around. Looking south on 2nd Avenue he caught sight of what looked like a castle from a children's book. Irresistibly drawn, he gaped at the high turrets and fancy designs on the red stone building. “Guaranty Loan Building 1890” was carved in the facade. People were coming and going through a spinning round door. Walter had to watch to see how it worked. Inside was a wonder of light for the roof twelve floors above was made entirely of glass. The open walkways that belted each floor of this palace were also of a milky glass. Iron cages on either side of this palace were lifting people up and down. Important looking

gentlemen discussing important ideas with each other leaned over the balconies. In the corners of the lobby rose tall palm trees. Walter's mouth hung open and he let go of his suitcase. This was the fanciest place he had ever seen. It would not have been a surprise if a genie had appeared and flew around on one of the rich carpets decorating the polished marble floor. Walter, dirty and rough looking from traveling and three days of sleeping on a floor, was a fish out of water.

“What is it you'll be needing son?” a man in a blue uniform was asking him.

Walter could only open a hand in resignation and shrug. Hanging around this fantasy building was not a choice for him. The man, sensing his doubt, kindly pointed the way out.

Walter kept walking. This time he headed towards where he knew the Mississippi River to be. This was also the source of the clinging smell of dead fish and smelly water that came when the breeze was right. A set of round concrete towers dominated the riverfront. Dull, thumping noises were coming from them. A white dusty cloud capped each tower. Workers striding purposefully from the area were also covered with white dust. Walter knew that this must be the grand Pillsbury Flour Mill that even back in Finland was well known. So enormous were the elevators and mill ... where did enough wheat for these giants to feed on come from? Walter knew wheat because his family grew a couple of acres back home, enough for their own bread and some to sell to the local mill. Back home, the mill was two round rocks powered by a donkey walking in circles. This mill would need thousands of Walter's farms to supply the wheat.

He headed north back up Washington past the train station, following the river. At a place where all the city's traffic seemed to meet, two avenues formed a triangle around a

triangular stone building. There was a westerly breeze that day and above the smell of the river Walter thought he caught another more familiar scent. Pine. His Uncle Aho was working as a logger. He cut down pine trees. Where was it coming from?

A big steel bridge spanned the river. Walter thought he'd get a better look. Following his nose he headed out on the north side of the bridge. From here the design of the place was clear. The river had been channeled and directed into a V shape so the flow was concentrated into a narrow passage and into a great waterfall. As the water descended more walls divided the flow into individual sluices and tunnels. These must supply the power to grind the grand quantity of wheat. The water acted with the force of thousands of donkeys in the tiny mill back home.

Looking north, beyond another, bigger train station, Walter found the source of the piney smell. Extending for a great distance up and down the bank was a giant lumberyard. A big pond had been formed in the river. Floating in the pond were hundreds of huge logs. Here were the trunks of an endless woods waiting to be cut into the boards for a million houses. A huge claw grabbed a log from the pond and snagged it onto a conveyer belt. Chains hauled logs up to the sawmill at a rate of about one log every minute. The distant buzz of big saws whined in his ears. Along the banks, stretched for a good ways, were tall, square stacks of boards laid neatly crosswise.

"Nickel to cross young fellow!" An angry man was approaching with his hand out, pointing at a sign: Toll Bridge. No nickel to pay, Walter went on his way.

He made his way back to the triangular building near where all the streetcar lines of the world seemed to cross. There in the square facing the bridge Walter resumed his vigil, rear end on suitcase, head on his fist. In this place where the natural riches of a

region converged and all the world passed by, surely a change of fortune might come his way.

Perhaps wishing made it so for within a short time a fortunate man stopped and regarded the sad looking Walter. The man's good fortune was shown in his ample, well fed belly, fine black suit and shiny shoes, gold watch and chain and fancy cane with an ivory elephant head for a handle.

"You're that balancing fellow, ain't you? I saw you come through the café with that suitcase on your chin! Say, show me that trick again!" He pointed at Walter's suitcase and tapped his own chin.

Walter, a friendly and helpful fellow, was glad to oblige. He placed the corner of his battered valise on his chin, spread his arms wide and, for good measure, stood on one foot.

"That's a swell trick! What else can you balance?"

Walter deftly returned his suitcase to earth and to please the gentleman balanced his fine cane straight up into the air. A crowd was now forming. Rising to the occasion he balanced on his chin a lady's bolt of calico, a plank from the shoulder of a passing carpenter, a large potato plucked from a maid's bag of groceries and even, to the delight and pleasure of the crowd, a newsboy's bicycle. With the cheers and applause Walter's grin grew wider now than at any time since arriving in Minnesota.

So began the next phase in Walter's adventure. The happy fat man turned out to be Jonus Kohl, proprietor of Kohl's Dime Museum of Attractions not a block away on the corner of 1st Avenue and Washington. Walter soon found himself treated to a heaping platter of pork chops, applesauce and sauerkraut. With the help of a Finnish waitress

who translated, Jonus made his offer. Walter was to stand outside the museum and attract customers with his balancing tricks. In return he'd get 50 cents a day and room and board, double the offer from the stingy Mrs. Sigrist. He was moving up in the world!

It was late afternoon on a Saturday, a busy time for the museum. This was payday for many workers and some got off earlier than on weekdays. The streets were busy, and Walter started work right away. Outside the entrance to the museum he stationed himself. Passing citizens of Minneapolis were amused by the wooden chair he balanced on his chin and many lingerers were lured into the Dime Museum. Mr. Kohl was pleased and showed it by rubbing his hands together in greedy glee.

However, the act of balancing was best done in short bursts, a minute at a time, and it was hard to maintain an indefinite equilibrium. One leg of the chair pressed its weight on Walter's chin, down his straight back and on through to his firmly planted feet. Balancing was a trick he had done now and again back on the farm and sometimes in the village. His neck was out of condition. As the night wore on Walter had to balance for a minute and rest for two.

The lurid signs outside the museum boasted a view of a Human Skeleton, Fat Woman, Dog Faced Man, Siamese Twins, Tom Thumb the Midget and a Bearded Lady. Balancing was merely an appetizer. Customers paid a dime to a sour looking man with slicked back black hair named Henry for a ticket inside. After a short while the people emerged shaking their heads in wonder. Naturally Walter wanted to see these attractions. He got his wish later in the evening when Mr. Kohl steered Walter by the elbow to his rooming house.

“Well done my boy, why we had our best night yet. Come on then, let’s see to your quarters.”

At the corner of 2nd and Hennepin was a building, which housed among other establishments, Foster’s Nickel Flop House. Mr. Kohl, it seemed, had an arrangement with the owner. They walked past big rooms already filling with the residents of the flophouse. The guests were rough looking men who gave them hard glances as they passed. There was bucket in a closet in the hallway. Walter’s nose told him what it was for. There were no beds to be seen. These guys would be sleeping on the floor with only a blanket if they had one.

Members of the Dime Museum Troupe, however, had their own rooms to share. In a back room Walter became acquainted with the Human Skeleton and Tom Thumb the Midget, his new roommates.

“George, pleased to meet ya,” greeted the Human Skeleton in a thin voice. George must have been seven feet tall and maybe, maybe weighed one hundred pounds. His forearms seemed like they would snap from shaking hands. Walter did so gently. George coughed, his ribs visible through his thin shirt.

“Bruno” boomed the shorter man, who barely came to Walter’s knee, in a surprisingly deep voice. He frowned in a bemused way, bug eyes goggling upwards.

“Walter Myllamaki. How are you?”

“Walter Whatsamaki? Millermackme? Mackeymymy? Blackety Mack Jack me?”

Bruno began making fun of his name. “Walter Whatever Make Me, listen, that was some fine balancing you did tonight! But, nobody can say whatever you said your name was.

Can you abide with Walter Mack? Would that moniker suit you? Could you handle that handle? Walter Mack ... yeah that oughta do ya!

George and Bruno nodded in agreement. Walter nodded in agreement. Walter Mack he became. The two turned out to be friendly and did their best to understand Walter's saga of his journey from Finland and quest for his Uncle Aho in the logging camps of Beer River.

“Beer River? Weeel there's a place I'd sure like to take a dip!”

“What kind of fish can you catch in Beer River? Pickled Pike?”

Seated around a rough pine table they chatted and joked by candlelight. Bruno shared some card tricks. So it went through the night until it was time to turn in. As performers in the theater, their beds in Foster's Flop were fine burlap sacks stuffed with straw, and to Walter it seemed like a cozy down mattress dressed in soft linen. He slept soundly, dreaming of drunken fish threading their way through a foamy river full of floating logs.

For the next couple of days Walter had the luxury of his mornings free. After eating breakfast around the corner at the Jumbo Restaurant, where Mary Harten, a kind Finnish waitress worked (what a relief to be able to talk in one's own tongue!) he was on his own. Exploring the city on foot he was astounded by the number of hotels, bars, restaurants, clothing stores, Chinese laundries, cigar shops, theaters, why anything a person could want was here. A thousand signs for a thousand businesses decorated the avenues in all directions. The Bijou theatre on Washington boasted a vaudeville show. From the poster Walter supposed this was a show with clowns, acrobats, men who threw knives and women who sat on pianos and sang in their nightgowns.

This Gateway district was one stop shopping for those on the move and Walter had figured out that this region needed workers in every part of the state. Cutting trees in winter and harvesting wheat in summer, each job done in its season, men would go where the work was. On Nicollet Avenue he saw a guy dressed in a plaid shirt carrying a shiny new axe over his shoulder. On their way from here and there, traveling by rail, many would pass right through Minneapolis. All needed supplies, entertainment, lodging, meals and other things could be had right here within a few square blocks.

Through the afternoon and evening Walter resumed his post outside the Dime Museum. He'd been allowed in to see the sights. Each human attraction had a booth where they could be gawked at. The Fat Lady reclined on a red couch, her rolls of blubber spilling over the edge. A small boy in balloon pants and a turban had the job of cooling her with a wide peacock feather fan. The Dog Faced Man, with improbable whiskers, barked at the visitors. The Strong Man, eyes close together, nose crooked, bald head shining, grunted as he lifted a large round stone above his head. The Bearded Lady just sat there looking bored, twisting the end of her curly dark beard into a braid. Walter's new friend Tom Thumb hurled insults and abuse at the people while sitting at his own wee table and chair, sipping tea from a tiny cup. George, the Human Skeleton, could suddenly suck in his cheeks, bare his teeth and bug his eyes out so his face looked exactly like a skull. This scared the ladies and not a few of the men too! *Hyvänen aika!* Good heavens!

But, Walter felt no joy at seeing the attractions of the Dime Museum. What else could these people do? They were there because the world offered them few other choices it seemed to him.

Outside on the sidewalk his neck was getting sore. Extended periods of balancing were taking their toll. Many of the workmen passing by had the annoying habit of spitting out great streams of tobacco juice. Those with a lump of tobacco in one cheek were sure to let loose with a stinky brown liquid projectile. One obnoxious pest had hung around the entrance of the museum, aiming for Walters' shoes just as he was balancing the chair on his chin. This caused a loss of balance and the ruffian had to be chased off. But he hung around a short distance away, heckling Walter and throwing off his concentration. Walter was beginning to think there was little future in professional balancing.

It was on the second evening while stretching his sore neck side to side that he had a chance to observe Henry the ticket taker in action. Henry was quite the dude with his slick black hair, polka dot bow tie and red suspenders. He stood behind his booth and collected a dime from and handed a ticket to, each museum visitor.

Walter watched while two giggling girls, excited at the novelty of the freaks inside, each paid a dime. Henry however, did not give them a ticket; he just waved them on in. More people entered and received tickets. Then three more and no tickets. Henry caught sight of Walter just as he was counting out some coins from the till and slipping them into his pocket. They locked eyes and in a flash Walter knew he had caught a thief. Henry calmly held Walter's gaze and slowly opened his coat revealing in an inside pocket the handle of a long knife. With narrowed eyes he put a finger to his lips and then drew the same finger across his throat. Walter had been warned: keep quiet or else!

What to do? His short career as a balancing attraction seemed even more in doubt. That night he wrestled with telling George and Bruno. What if they were friends of

Henry's? He could tell Mr. Kohl. Would he believe him? A policeman? He'd need one that spoke Finn. Feeling even more alone in the world he tossed and turned on his straw bed.

The next morning, over a plate of eggs and toast, he revealed his secret to Mary.

"Don't say nothing!" was her advice. "Listen, it's dog eat dog in this place. Don't end up a dog's dinner. What do you care for Kohl? I've got a friend I'm going to send your way, a Finn like us. Look for him tonight."

The third night of balancing for the museum was a nervous one for Walter. Henry kept staring daggers at him. Walter's neck was sore. Between the tobacco spitters, the evil Henry and his tired neck, balancing was not going well. However, he rallied, for Walter was a hard worker and always tried to do his best. Then Mr. Kohl came out of the museum with a reluctant looking Bruno in tow.

"Walter, my boy, I've got an idea! Why, you can put Bruno in a chair and balance him, sure you can!"

Bruno gave no sign that he wanted any part of Mr. Kohl's risky plan. Walter folded his handkerchief into a pad to protect his chin. With a shrug of resignation to Bruno he placed him in the chair, showed him how to sit still and slowly raised him into the air. With feet planted firmly, chair leg set against his straining chin, Walter carefully removed his arms.

Bruno was getting the best view of his short life high above the growing crowd. This had never before been seen in the grand city of Minneapolis! Walter's chin ached from the added weight. Mr. Kohl beamed and beckoned folks towards his museum.

“Come in good people! Even more fantastic sights await you in Kohl’s Dime Museum!”

Just then the tobacco juice spitter from the night before made an appearance. He aimed a stream of vile brown liquid at Walter. Still Walter kept Bruno, who began heckling the spitter, safely aloft.

“Where’s your manners? Go back to the woods ya lumberjack! Ya dirty Swede! Stinking to high heaven, lice jumping off yer head, ya ingrate fool!” Bruno let loose a verbal barrage at the spitter.

Walter could feel the dangerous Henry behind him. He broke his concentration for a second to locate the tobacco spitter. His neck was throbbing. The chair tilted crazily one way and then the other. A terrified Bruno could not sit still and began waving his arms and screeching. The crowd roared with anticipation of the delightful disaster about to unfold.

The chair went sideways, Walter just catching it. Bruno went flying through the air. Time seemed to stop as all eyes watched the airborne little man. He landed right into the arms of a tough-looking fellow in a wool plaid shirt, work pants and heavy boots.

“Walter,” the man said in Finnish, “I’m John Saari. Mary sent me. I think I know how we can find your Uncle.”

“Ya can put me down now ya no brain woodchopper!” Bruno yelled.

Chapter 2

Chow Mein

The man called John Saari gently set the sputtering Bruno down. Walter, still dizzy from the hardest balancing he had ever tried, took a moment to realize that he was Mary's friend. John pointed his thumb away from the dime museum.

"Come on, lets get out of here."

First there was the matter of Walter's wages.

"Why he's upset my Tom Thumb and he's a washout as a balancing act!"

Mr. Jonus Kohl didn't want to pay Walter for his three nights of balancing. His gold watch bounced on his big belly as he angrily made his point.

But, with John at his side, Walter was soon three dollars richer for the customers he'd attracted into the Dime Museum. After all, business had been temporarily much better.

Walter, feeling grateful for the first money he'd earned since arriving in Minnesota, decided he'd inform on the thieving Henry. John Saari translated and Walter let Mr. Kohl know that his ticket taker was robbing some of the ticket money. Henry watched from his post with a malevolent stare. Walter's last view of Kohl's Dime Museum was of Mr. Kohl confronting Henry, Henry's hands up in protest.

Walter and John, after retrieving his suitcase from Foster's Flop, headed down the Avenue. John steered him into Jumbo's café where the loyal Mary served them pie and coffee.

"Mary's a good friend of mine. She said you were in a tight spot. Why don't you tell me about it?"

John was a patient listener. Walter told him all about his parents back home and his Uncle Aho. John's sunburned face, the mark of a man who worked outdoors, crinkled at the corners of his eyes as he took in Walter's tale.

"*Vai niin?* You don't say?"

He chuckled at Walter's description of being a dishwasher for Mrs. Sigrist and raised his eyebrows upon learning the details of the Dime Museum. He gave Walter a warning.

“Maybe we should’ve let that Henry fellow alone. You don’t need someone like him remembering your face. This city is full of crooks like him. They say that even the police chief is in with the robbers and cheats, lets em’ operate in Minneapolis in exchange for bribes. We should get you out of here.”

Walter told him about the journey from Finland to Minnesota with John nodding in understanding.

“Ten years ago when I was about your age I made a trip just like yours! Beer River? Never heard of it. If there were a logging outfit in this territory on a Beer River I’d know. My farm is near a Deer River. I’ve got an idea.”

John paid for their food and had a brief, quiet talk with Mary.

“Mary is my fiancée. I want her to marry me and come back with me to my farm.”

So John was a farmer! This was good news to Walter. They strolled down Washington Avenue. They stopped by an office where there were signs with place names like Dakota, Missoula, Montana, Duluth, Aitkin and many more. This was an employment agency, John explained. Three guys wearing the dusty work clothes of a traveler lounged out front. One, in a black cowboy hat, clenched a corncob pipe between his teeth. Many agencies here in Minneapolis hired workers for the logging companies, wheat farms and mining companies throughout the state John explained. Workers were needed everywhere. They stepped inside and talked to a man behind a desk.

“Beer River!” The name made this man smile too. “Well, I’ve never heard of it! You’re mistaking the town of Deer River, Minnesota! That’d be my guess.”

The man, with an unlit cigar parked in the corner of his mouth, peered through spectacles perched on the end of his nose. He ran his finger down a list.

“I got a need for a road building crew with the Zumbro Logging Company out of Deer River starting right now.” He took a closer look at Walter, sizing him up as a worker. “You look like you might know how to swing an axe.”

John talked it over with Walter.

“Why don’t they cut down trees in the summer? Isn’t it too cold to work in the winter?” asked Walter.

“You bet. But a guy don’t overheat in the winter. And no biting bugs to bother you.”

“Then, why do roads get built in the summer?”

“All in the timing. When there’s snow it’s easier to move big, heavy logs. Imagine you had to slide a big rock down the street. If you greased the street with butter wouldn’t it be easier? Ice and snow make things slick and easy to slide. Your job will be to cut and hack through trees and move rocks that block the way. Come winter the roadway will be covered in deep snow and logs can be moved out on sleds. You’ll see.”

“I’ll make you a deal,” John continued. “I’m heading back to my farm tomorrow. It’s right in the area of Deer River. This fellow is offering you a job. I’ll guide you there, help you find the Zumbro outfit and ask around for your uncle.”

They walked over to a map that almost covered a whole wall. Here were the places that went with the advertised jobs, explained John. Giant Montana was out to the west. Wheat for the flourmills was grown in the Dakotas. John showed him where Minneapolis was. He showed how the Mississippi was like a water highway for timber to travel on, leading to sawmills like the one Walter had seen. Lines like veins showing the

railroads traced all the way to Deer River, Minnesota and to most of the rest of the state too.

“Look, the train can take us almost all the way. The Zumbro has logging rights to the area north of Deer River. Why come winter I myself might work for them. I’ve cut down trees every winter ever since I got here.”

Walter, in his week in Minneapolis, had had too much fortune coming and going between good and bad. If he could get clear of the big bad city, have a chance to find his uncle and have a guide along the way, he figured he’d better take it. He looked up at John Saari and felt a wind was blowing him in his direction.

“Why not?” They shook hands.

After talking with the agent Walter soon had a piece of paper that said he was an employee of the Zumbro Logging Company for a dollar a day plus room and board. A dollar plus room and board! With each new job his wage kept doubling. The paper, explained the man, was also his pass for a train ride to Deer River. After that he’d have to find his own way. Walter couldn’t read what he was signing but if John said it was ok then he’d trust him. A man from his own country, *omanpaikkasia*, John Saari seemed a trustworthy fellow.

Walter and John exited the office. John nodded at the three men hanging around outside.

“Those fellows are deciding what job they might take. By next week they could be a thousand miles from here, building a railroad bridge or driving a team of horses.”

“It must be great to be so free. Anybody with two strong arms can make a go of it here can’t they?”

“That’s true Walter but a little word to the wise. Working in this territory can be dangerous. Your boss will be concerned about getting the job done first, the horses and mules second, and you third. I want to show you something else.”

Next to the employment agency was another storefront with a display in the window. Walter rubbed his eyes to make sure he was seeing right. The shelves in the window carried rows of wooden arms, legs and metal hooks.

“Sure Minnesota is a land of opportunity. Be careful. Cutting down trees, harvesting wheat or working in a mill is hazardous. I’ve seen workers lose an arm, leg or a life. You do have one advantage over a horse though. If a horse breaks a leg he’ll be shot. If you lose a leg you might get one of these.”

He pointed at a wooden foot and leg assembly in the display window. Just then the door to the store opened and a miserable looking fellow clumped out. He was leaning on a cane and hobbling on a wooden peg leg.

Walter, John and the three traveling workmen watched him pass by.

“You’ve had a big day. Why don’t you bunk with me tonight?”

John’s room turned out to be at the very same Rock Island Hotel. For an extra twenty-five cents paid to an astonished Mrs. Sigrist,, the two shared a room. Walter, for the first time since leaving Finland, enjoyed a thorough wash up with real soap and hot water from a basin. That night he drifted into sleep on clean white sheets.

Early the next morning Walter rose suddenly, heart pounding, unsure of where he was. The sun coming in from the eastern facing window colored the already dressed John orange and red, a bright promise of the day to come.

“Hyvää päivää! Good morning!”

Walter quickly dressed. On their way out he gave Mrs. Sigrist a polite wave. She scowled in return. They headed to the Jumbo where Mary served them a hearty breakfast of pancakes and baked beans with pork. She packed some sandwiches and pie in a burlap sack to eat on the train. Mary was busy working and didn't have time to talk. John pressed a note into her hand before leaving.

“I want Mary to be my wife, but right now my farm doesn't pay much. She'll keep saving money working in the city and I'll make a home for her up north. When we're ready, we'll marry.”

The two fellows were walking to the train depot but first they had one more stop to make. In a used clothing store Walter traded his worn but well made suitcase and the rest of his money for used canvas work pants, leather boots, a wool blanket and a couple of worn wool shirts. He tied it all up in a cloth sack.

“Later we'll find you a good stick to carry it with,” John told him.

Inside the high arched railroad depot Walter was once again glad to have John as his guide. Everybody except for Walter seemed to know exactly where they were going. Here were families sitting on benches, the children sleeping with their Mother's heads for pillows. One family had all their belongings in the world arranged around them. A giant steamer trunk (how did they carry that thing?) served as the kitchen table for a breakfast of bread and slices of salami. Their wide-eyed tiny daughter, with curly dark hair, stared at Walter, breadcrumbs sticking to her lip. Walter delighted her with a quick game of peek-a-boo and was rewarded with a happy grin. Well-groomed businessmen waited in a café in a nicer part of the station. They slurped coffee and smoked stinky black cigars.

Walter was sure they wouldn't be riding in the same railroad car as the family. He remembered his passage from Finland on the steam ship. On the ship, those without much money had a berth in the depths of steerage. Rich folks had comfortable cabins in first class. Were people separated that way everywhere? The businessmen waiting in the café didn't look like they'd be washing dishes anytime soon. In any case, whether rich or poor, the world was on the move.

John moved forward to study the train timetable. A couple of guys dressed in workmen's clothes joined him and Walter noted the small helpful way they exchanged information on the trains. Walter leaned against a massive wooden beam thrusting upward where it fit into a cast iron T and joined the equally massive wooden joists. He ran his hand over its smooth surface. Did this piece of wood come from one tree?

"Walter, here's the plan. We'll head north to Duluth and then catch a westbound train to Deer River. There's a train leaving in an hour. As an employee of Zumbro logging you've got free passage. I'm gonna go get a ticket. Wait here."

Walter enjoyed the sights and sounds of the station.

John soon returned. "Let's find our train."

They walked out on the long platform and found seats on hard wooden benches in their third class compartment. The family struggled with their trunk towards the same car. Walter gave them a hand hauling it up onto the train and stowing by the exit. The father's bushy black moustache curled up in a smile of thanks.

Soon, with a lurch and a blast of the engine's whistle, they were on their way.

Out of the depot the train snaked slowly by the bustling flourmills.

Across a high curved bridge of yellow stone, the train passed. Walter took in the fishy garbage stench coming from the jumbled river. Below the falls, tangled masses of logs and blasted rock crowded the river. On a flat area of the west bank was what looked like a small village of wooden shacks. There were gardens, a cow and some chickens. Why would people choose to live there?

Walter felt a sudden sense of joy. He was far from home but he was free and ready for what may come. Wanting to share his feelings he turned to John who had already pulled his cap over his nose for some more sleep. Instead he cast a long wink at the little curly haired girl and got another smile in return.

The city faded away. Neighborhoods gave way to open fields. The train passed by woods of maple and oak and over swamps and lakes. Walter kept his eyes glued to the window. A big blue heron flapped slowly over the train. Some men in the back of the car were playing a four handed card game. One man won and jeered at the others who looked disgusted. Soon the rocking motion lulled him into a midmorning nap.

Later, sunlight on his face woke him up. Looking out the window something didn't seem right. The land was open and had a newly bare appearance. Then he realized no trees. So far he'd been passing through a place of woods here and there, where they hadn't been cleared for farms. Here in every direction there were no trees at all! The sign at the station said Hinckley. It was a new town. All the buildings were freshly painted or still showing their fresh yellow lumber. Alongside the tracks was a strange sight. A weird sculpture of rusty, steel railroad tracks lay abandoned. They were bent and curled and reminded Walter of a dripping candle. What had happened here?

A waking John stretched out his arm and bumped Walter across his face.

Walter asked him about what he was seeing.

“Oh ...” John’s brow went up in thought. “I remember that time well. It was only six years ago in 1894. It had been a hot and dry summer. Little rain. We’ll see later when we get up into timber country how the dead wood nobody can use gets left on the ground. Loggers, when they cut down the trees, they trim off the branches and let em’ lie. Can’t sell that wood. Too much bother to haul it out. So for miles around there’s nothing but firewood on the ground. You’ll see. One day in early September the wind picked up. Nobody knows how, but from somewhere came a spark. Well that fire caught and spread with the wind, so hot it made its own wind. It destroyed everything in its path, hot enough to melt those steel railroad tracks you saw! Over four hundred people died. I met a man who said he survived by lying for hours in a pond with a wet blanket over him. A hundred miles away in Deer River we could see the black smoke rising. That night orange flames painted the sky... Why, we thought that maybe it was the end and hell was here on earth! For the folks who lived here I guess it was.”

Later that afternoon the train was slowing into a small town. Willow River said the sign at the depot. “River” was a word that Walter knew. A willow, John explained was a droopy tree that mostly grew by rivers and lakeshores. The train stopped at a small station to fill the boiler with water. More passengers got on. Walter went to use the bathroom and was surprised to be looking through a hole in the floor right over the tracks.

Whooo...Whooo! ...went the whistle. The train lurched and Walter had to grab the brass handle bolted on the bathroom wall for balance. This time the train moved only at a crawl out of town. Soon they passed right over a wetland that was a mile wide on each side. Reeds with what looked like brown sausages growing from the tops grew around

the edges in thick clumps. A loud honking noise was getting louder. Then, open water was revealed blanketed with an amazing display of geese. The sight and noise of so many birds in one place had everyone's attention. The card players stopped their game and the father of the family talked with words and hands, showing his children the wonder in the lake. Walter went out on the platform between the train cars to get a better look. The train pulled slowly through a bend so the forward cars were visible. It came to a stop.

There was a brief moment of silence. The engine released a gradual hiss of steam.

From the first class cars a few men in vests and rolled up sleeves began to get off the train. They were laughing. A bottle was passed around. Two porters followed carrying long guns, bent with their breeches open. The porters attended to the guns, loading them and leaning them against the train. Walter, understanding was what was about to happen, felt a knot in his stomach.

The men began blasting away at the crowded community of birds. Boom! Boom! Boom! A man would shoot, without having to aim it seemed, and pass his gun back to a porter for reloading. Alarm spread across the wetland. The noise of the birds rose to a deafening scream as the panicked flock took flight. A shadow, cast by thousands of frightened geese on the wing, allowed only fleeting shafts of sunlight to pass. Still the men shot. Wounded birds were spinning out of control, landing with a splash. Fallen geese thrashed their mangled wings in pain, or lay still. Men laughing, guns blazing, birds screeching until finally the flock was dispersed and all the geese that could, had escaped out of range. The water was dotted with the floating corpses of dead geese.

The men passed the bottle around again. The last man to take a drink threw it up high over the water as another shot it, scoring a direct hit sending broken glass flying.

A ragged cheer went up. The porters collected the guns and all the men got back on.

A shocked silence ruled among Walter's fellow passengers. What could be said? Who could explain what they had just seen?

When the train was moving again Walter finally asked John, "Are they just going to leave the dead birds? Will someone go back and get them?"

"Probably not."

"Then why ... ?" the question hung in the air.

"Those men shot those birds because they could. They call it sport. They think they were hunting."

Walter knew hunting. Back home many a fat goose had been enjoyed for Christmas dinner at his family's table. What he had seen was not hunting.

Was there such plenty here in this place that dead geese were left to spoil and good firewood was left on the ground to burn? Thoughts like this occupied Walter as the train continued.

They passed through the mill town of Cloquet. There was another huge pile of logs in a pond waiting to be milled and a giant lumberyard of stacked boards waiting to be shipped. Everything was made of wood. Small houses in neat rows, buildings, stores, even the sidewalks were of wood. Were they worried about fire here?

The train snaked past a long rounded ridge of gray rock pushing out of the ground as if the earth had shrugged. Walter had a funny thought of an underground giant shrugging his shoulders and tossing everything around on the surface like toothpicks. Maybe the

giant would be mad at the men shooting all the geese. Perhaps this giant could toss them into the water with the geese and see if they could swim! John opened the bag of sandwiches and pie that Mary had packed and they ate quietly.

As he was wiping his mouth on his sleeve they entered a steep river valley, the St. Louis River John told him. The air was changing. Through the open window a fresh, cool water smell came. Northward, the train slowing on the downgrade, they continued. Gradually a blue sliver on the horizon opened and what looked like a great blue sea appeared. The port city of Duluth hugged the steep hillside.

“You know, if you’re having second thoughts we could get you on a boat home,” joked John.

This was Lake Superior, one of the places he’d studied on a map back in Finland. Walter remembered tracing blue sea from the port of Vaasa, Finland to the Baltic Sea, westward across the Atlantic Ocean, up the St. Lawrence Seaway and across the Great Lakes to Duluth, Minnesota. He’d come a long way from his parent’s potato and hay farm! The giant ocean-going freighter in the harbor that they passed seemed to fit the scale of his journey.

Duluth was like Minneapolis, filled with the same kind of cafés, saloons and stores, only smaller. The downtown was crowded into a narrow strip between the lake and steep hillside. Streets went straight uphill. The saloons teemed with riotous, drunken yells and they avoided the rowdy men spilling into the streets. It was summer and these men had probably finished up a log drive and had money in their pockets to burn.

“Nothing to do in the woods so they do it here!” John explained.

John treated him to a meal that night in a Chinese restaurant, Walter's first. The chow mein was cheap and filling, the tea hot and refreshing. Walter practiced "please" and "thank you" in English with the surprised Chinese waiter.

Later, sitting on a rock by the clear water of the harbor, John smoked his pipe and Walter watched the stars emerge in the east. After dark they snuck into a lumberyard. A tall stack of pine boards laid crosswise to dry made a good ladder. To save on the cost of a room they slept on top, sharing Walter's blanket. His packsack and balled up clothes made a fine pillow and Walter mostly slept well.

Chapter 3

Turtle Eggs

With tin plate in hand Walter seated himself on a pine log. It had been about a week since he'd bid farewell to John Saari. They'd come together all the way from Minneapolis to Deer River, Itasca County by train. Walter remembered passing by the big open pit iron mines of the Iron Range. Machines called steam crawlers loaded with iron ore, circled up a spiral ramp. Far below they looked like a wooden toy Walter once got for Christmas. That would be a good place for a long wet spit he remembered thinking! Many men in Minnesota had the habit of chewing tobacco and letting loose with regular streams of stinky brown juice. At least, here in the woods, most in the work crew preferred a pipe.

Walter and John arrived in Deer River on a rattling, swaying boxcar. John found the office of the Zumbro where a slightly cross-eyed man carefully studied Walter's paper from the employment agency in Minneapolis.

"All right then," he'd been told with John translating, "You'll be joining the Camp 37 work crew. They left yesterday up the tote road bound for the west side of North Star Lake."

The Zumbro boss wrote a note explaining that Walter was now an employee.

"Catch a train going north as far as Little Bowstring Lake. From there, take the south shore trail east until the Bowstring River. The trail follows the Bowstring River to where Camp 37 will be. You'll find the boys. Mister Dawson is the boss."

John, speaking English for Walter, inquired if the boss knew of an Emil Aho, Walter's uncle.

"Can't say I have." The man returned to his paperwork and Walter understood that he'd been dismissed.

John Saari was returning to his homestead in the Suomi Hills.

"I'm just a few miles south of where you'll be. Some other Finns have farms there too. Come by and see us when you can. I'll ask around for news of your Uncle."

Then, pack on back, he'd disappeared up a trail heading northeast. Walter was on his own. He sat on his bundle with his fist on his chin. Deer River, Minnesota was the last place his Uncle had written from. A storm last night had turned the dirt road running down the middle of town into a mud puddle. He followed wooden plank sidewalks past shops and saloons. Nearly all the saloons offered a free lunch. John and Walter had eaten a good meal in one. John had downed his whiskey in a quick motion. Walter tried the same trick and had nearly choked at the fire in his throat. John had to pound his back and get him some water. He had no time for saloons now. At least he knew what direction north was. It was easy to find the railway spur heading north. Acting like he belonged, he got on a rickety train car carrying cedar wood rail ties for a track being built somewhere down the line. The car had removable metal arms on the sides sticking up to hold the cedar logs in place. A man inspecting the train didn't seem to mind Walter hitching a ride.

"Where ya' headed?" he asked.

"Little Bowstring Lake."

The man nodded. Walter had no idea how he'd know where Little Bowstring Lake was. He also had to wonder about the pine trees he was supposed to help chop down. There had been trees here, once. Huge stumps, some five feet across, were everywhere. Saplings that didn't look like pine trees stood around in crowds. Dead wood was everywhere and in some places small fires were smoldering in spite of last night's rain. Startled jackrabbits and deer jumped around as the train passed. Walter was hot, here in this place of no shade. He was grateful for the wide brimmed hat John had given him.

"You'll need this for the bugs, sun and rain," John had told him.

His hat was the only shade here in this place where tall pines had once sheltered a cool forest.

After two hours or so of bouncing on the train Walter noticed they were approaching a wooden bridge. The train blew its whistle. The conductor was leaning out of the engine and waving a red flag at Walter. He pointed at a lake to the east they were about to pass. Walter understood that he was supposed to jump off. The train slowed a bit and Walter tried to aim for a nonexistent soft spot. Luckily landing feet first in gravel he tumbled on top of his packsack, posterior first. He opened his eyes. Was he alive?

The train disappeared northwards into the distance. He was alone by the shore of Little Bowstring Lake. At least he hoped that's where he was. He sat on a big pine stump. By the sticky sap still oozing he could tell that the roots were still alive. Undecided on a course of action Walter watched a big horsefly slowly circle around and land on his thigh. Yow! The horsefly bit him right through the thick canvas of his workpants.

That did it. He got up. The Camp 37 work crew was supposed to be a day ahead of him to the east following the river. Walter, who could tell directions by the sun, looked to the east and spied a scraggly track along the lakeshore. A fresh pile of horse manure was hosting a party to which hundreds of hungry flies had been invited. Walter stepped around the obstacle and was on his way.

As he hiked he thought about his plan. Work. Save some money. Look for Uncle Emil. He wondered how his parents were doing without his help around the farm. When he could he'd send them money. Maybe they could have a farm of their own near John Saari. A piece of his Mother's sweet bread, *pullaa*, would be so good right about now.

Hours later it was growing dark. The trail had led to a skinny river and continued. He'd stopped only to eat some crackers and to drink from the river. In many places it looked like the loss of trees meant more gravel and dirt were washing into the water. He found the clearest place he could to drink. Following the river reassured him he was going the right way. In one place he thought he'd found Camp 37. A clearing revealed several log buildings. On closer inspection he saw they were abandoned. It was an old logging camp for the crew that had cut down all the trees in the area. Someone had carved the number 36 by the door of a long narrow log building.

Logically, Camp 37 should be next, assumed Walter.

About a mile later the orange blaze of sunset backlit the woods in horizontal light. The work crew must be far ahead. He was sure he would have to go back and take shelter in the old camp, all alone, with no supper. Then he heard music. A sad, slow whistling tune beckoned. Following the lament Walter soon sniffed wood smoke and stumbled

right into a camp. Surprised faces looked up at him. A big bearded man put down his plate and wiped his hands on his pants.

“I’m Dawson, boss of this crew. And you?”

Walter pulled out his now sweaty and stained paper from the employment agency. A short red headed guy about Walter’s age who had been playing the sad music came over. He blew a quick, much happier tune on his tin whistle and stuck out his hand.

“Patrick Gage. What’s your name?”

Remembering that most folks couldn’t say Myllamaki he replied, “Walter Mack.”

This was the Camp 37 work crew. Walter, a new employee of the Zumbro Logging Company, had arrived just in time for supper.

With one last push of the long iron prybar the big rock pulled free from the ground and went rolling downhill, crashing through the brush. Walter had pushed the rock so hard that the sudden release almost threw him head over tail, knocking over Patrick.

“Watch it, clumsy!” cried Patrick Gage.

“Sorry!” apologized Walter.

Walter’s knowledge of English was growing.

“Sorry” was an all purpose word for mistakes and misunderstandings. Sometimes it seemed like the only word he needed. “Careful!” served for dangerous situations like when swinging an axe or handling dynamite. Cold, hot, thirsty, hungry, tired, sore, bloody, itchy, dirty and sweaty were all adjectives useful in describing how he’d been feeling lately.

None of these words seemed to apply to Patrick. Nothing bothered him. Patrick was waving Walter over to see something. Grinning widely he pointed to a hole in the southern-facing bank of the pond they were working around. Scattered around the entrance were a few eggshells of some recently hatched critters.

“Turtle eggs!” said Patrick. As Walter’s self appointed English teacher it was his duty to teach new words. Patrick flopped on his belly, drew his arms in towards his shoulders like flippers and scrunched his neck in like a turtle. He made his eyes go buggy and pursed his lips.

“I’m a turtle!”

“You are not a turtle. Come. Mister Dawson is walking here. We should work.”

Patrick scrambled up and joined Walter up on the rise where they were working on clearing rocks and brush. The two pretended to be studying a large boulder they would have to remove.

As his boss came striding up the path, Walter removed his work glove to inspect a large blister forming on the palm of his hand. Working on his father’s farm in Finland had prepared him for his labors with the Zumbro Logging Company Camp 37 work crew. The rough calluses on his hands were evidence. But, he’d never had to move around big rocks around before! Some of the rocks here looked like they’d been in place since some ancient force had laid them down to rest. Yesterday he’d seen an ox size round boulder lying in a flat place. Where was the hill it had rolled down? And what about the deep scratches on the open faces of granite that showed themselves in these woods? From the serious look on his face he sensed that Mister Dawson wouldn’t care much for questions like these.

Mister Dawson made them work hard, dawn to dusk. The road must be prepared for the teamsters to sled the logs out this winter. The Bowstring River must be prepared with dams and ponds so the logs could be floated to the railroad. The workers, horses and occasional stick of dynamite of the Camp 37 work crew were the muscle power that would make this happen. Mister Dawson pushed the crew hard but even so he was not a bad boss.

“Time for lunch, boys,” he told them.

Camp was a five-minute walk away. Cookee Larson was serving the midday lunch of pork and beans, stewed prunes, bannock bread and strong black tea. This was food that Walter had had to get used to and now couldn't get enough of.

Oh the wind she'll be blowing sweetly through the trees,

My good cook may I have some more beans if you please!

The men lining up for food snickered at the little song Patrick had invented about the delicious beans. Cookee Larson regarded Patrick's straight face like he couldn't decide if he was complaining or not. Complaining about the food would not be a good idea if you wanted to eat. Patrick liked to sing his songs but he was also the first to help with extra work like gathering firewood for the campfire. Cookee gave him another scoop. Plenty of food was the rule in this camp.

Being a polite young man, Walter didn't want to bring up his dollar a day salary.

The “room” part of room and board was soon clear. Room meant a bedroll in a canvas tent shared with 3 other workers; Patrick, Sutton a Yankee logger from the east and Frankie a black eyed French-Indian. Mister Dawson and Cookee Larson shared a larger tent. Head to toe was the arrangement. This meant that you didn't get a sour, bad

breath, snoring wind in your face. Everyone snored fiercely and Walter supposed that he did too. Sometimes however, the first sight of the new morning was a stinky foot in your face. Sutton and Frankie, being older and larger, usually grabbed the sides of the tent for a bed space. Walter and Patrick got squeezed in the middle. But, the guys knew how to make a camp bunk. The tent was pitched tightly so it wouldn't leak. Over the dirt floor they laid parallel, round logs three or four inches in diameter. On top of those were placed a thick layer of sweet smelling balsam boughs with soft rounded needles. This made a comfy, pleasantly aromatic bed above any water that might trickle in below. Walter soon found that he was so tired after a full day of road building that stinky feet and snoring failed as distractions. A string was tied across the top of the tent to dry out wool socks and it was home.

The "board" of room and board was three camp meals a day. Cooke Larson ruled the camp with his long tin spoon scepter and his bugle, the Gabriel, used to rouse the boys in the morning. "Turkey in the Straw" blasting from the shiny bell of the bugle, stuck into the tent at dawn, that was a sure waker upper! Beans, fry bread, salt pork, dried pea soup, stewed prunes, tea and coffee were foods easy to pack in and preserve. He also could bake a fine cherry cobbler in a Dutch oven buried in hot coals, knowing exactly when to dig up the cast iron pot so the crust was golden brown. Tin dishes were boiled clean, but still greasy to the touch.

This was a plain diet, but it kept a hungry person happy. Sometimes fresh fish were added to the menu. Sutton had the knack of "tickling fish", with a piece of balled up bread for bait. He'd patiently wait, hand in shallow water, bait held between thumb and forefinger. When a curious bass approached and began to nibble Sutton would gently

stroke its belly. Pleasantly lulled by a personal massage and a tasty snack it must have been a cruel surprise to the fish when Sutton snatched him up and cast him thrashing in protest onto dry land. In this way he could provide a fried fish dinner for the camp.

“Fish up here ain’t learned yet to mistrust people. They’re still innocent fools.”

Walter thought that might be true but he had no luck at all tickling bass. Playing tricks on fish was not a special talent of his.

On Walter’s fourth night with the crew, after a fish dinner, a black bear was lured to camp by the smell of fried fish. Cooke Larson and Mr. Dawson were alerted to his presence around twilight. The silent, barely visible dark shape of the bear lurked 100 yards away or so. Mr. Dawson made ready his rifle. He let the fire go out sooner than usual. After the crew was sleeping and snoring (why didn’t that racket keep the bear away?) there came a single shot waking Walter and Patrick so suddenly they rose up and bashed heads.

The next morning they helped Mr. Dawson tie the bear’s front paws together. Rosie the mule was terrified at the prospect of dragging the dead bear away from camp where Cooke Larson would butcher it. She only followed when Mr. Dawson offered a sugar cube just out of reach. That night they dined on roasted bear meat.

Sutton had the thought that this was still territory with a whiff of wildness left to it.

“Why that old bruin maybe had no experience with men. We’ve had plenty rain and this woods is full of berries, nuts and roots. I don’t know why he’d want ours. Just hadn’t learned the fear yet I suppose.”

“Critters sure ought to know better then to trust the likes of us. Bass gets a tickle and a taste of bread and next thing he knows he’s swimming in hot oil! Bear gets a whiff of people food and he ends up as the main course,” added Patrick

“Mr. Bear, Mr. Bear he’s humble, he don’t boast

Cooke Larson turned him into a mighty tasty roast!

Walter was happy to be eating well while still feeling a little sympathy for the animals they devoured. That morning the bear had regarded him with a questioning, dead, glassy eye as if he were saying, “Thanks a lot human!” He speared a hunk of the tough lean meat and chewed.

“That’s a summer bear. Not much fat on him yet. Bear’s better eatin’ when its gettin’ nice and fat for a long winter nap,” Sutton informed them.

Frankie just grunted, not being the talkative sort. Walter was sensing that all had their reasons for working for the Zumbro Logging Company. Frankie, he felt, had a reason for being in a remote place where he’d be little known and could lie low. Better not to ask why.

Patrick had worked during the winter in old Camp 36. He’d been a road icer. Mr. Dawson often asked his opinion about what the road might be like in six months when it would be buried in snow. Patrick noticed details like where the sun hit the ground. That could be a place the ice road might melt and soften.

Sutton had also worked during the winter as a sawyer cutting wide tree trunks to length, half of a two-man cross saw crew. He’d come from Michigan, a logger and loner for twenty-some years. After spending all his wages in town he’d come back to work for

the summer. With no family to miss, so he said, he figured he might as well work. Most of the old Camp 36 crew was out west on wheat farms but he “preferred the pine.”

Each man was responsible for his own knife and spoon. Noticing that Walter lacked both, Mr. Dawson presented him with a blue enamel tin spoon and a bone-handled sheath knife.

“Let’s say three dollars for the two,” he’d said. He made a note in a leather bound ledger that he kept wrapped in a waterproof oilcloth.

“Mr. Dawson I cannot pay now. Please when are wages paid to me?”

The Boss spoke slowly so Walter would understand. He pulled out a calendar from his pouch.

“Walter we’re in the middle of August. You get paid when Camp 37 finishes up cutting all the logs it can, hauls them to the river and transports them down to the sawmill in Deer River next spring. At the end of March or April, 1901, next year, you get paid a dollar for every day you worked. Minus 3 dollars for the knife and spoon you just bought. Counting the work you did in July that should be over \$200 dollars. Didn’t they explain that to you in Deer River?”

Walter had to let the news sink in. \$200 dollars was a huge fortune. He could send it to Finland. Or buy a farm. Next spring was so far away. Apart from coming to Deer River to find Uncle Aho he had no actual plan of action. He thought maybe the work crew would be a way to make some money until he learned news of his Uncle. However, way out here in the woods he wasn’t likely to get any new information.

Being stuck on the work crew but also liking being a part of a team gave him mixed feelings. Maybe he'd stick it out and see what might come. Was a door being opened for him?

Patrick came over and patted him on the shoulder. "After the log drive when you do get your stake is what to remember. Then you'll have money to look for your Uncle." He pulled out his whistle and played a merry song. Then he played a few more.

"It's a weeeeee known fact that the bear he can't stand a tin whistle. No bears will be sniffing around camp tonight!"

That night around the campfire Walter demonstrated for the first time how to balance. He balanced a long-handled axe. He balanced a hatchet too and surprised himself when he snatched it from his chin and hurled it at a big pine tree ten paces away. Whack! A perfect strike! The hatchet buried itself dead in the center of the tree. Even silent Frankie had to cheer for that throw.

The crew was working its way northeast from the Bowstring River. The uneven terrain in this area reminded Walter of a sea sponge his Mother had once bought from a peddler. The surface was pitted with holes that filled with water when soaked and spiked with rough points that dried out. Higher ground where tall white pine trees grew alternated with low swamps of black spruce, cedar and tamarack bogs. Networks of streams and wetlands connected lakes, both big and small. The Camp 37 work crew had the job of building a roadway through this patchwork land that when covered in snow, would serve to sled the huge logs out. High and dry, wet and low, the ground changed around every bend.

They were here for the big white pine trees. At the edges of Camp 36 cutover areas, baking in the sun, surrounded by stumps, a few stately survivors remained.

Then like a wall descending, the crew entered the grand pines of Camp 37. In the green shade the world breathed a cool sigh. Sun squinty eyes relaxed. Without thinking everyone lowered voices.

Mr. Dawson roamed the woods seeking the best route for a road. He and Sutton, who was an unofficial manager, often argued about the road. Sutton liked to blast with dynamite any stumps, rises, rocks or trees in the way. He favored the straight-line road. Dawson favored looking for the path of least resistance that snaked in and out of little valleys and hills. A gradual descent meant less work for the teams of horses and oxen pulling the sleds.

Low swampy areas didn't have many rocks and trees to clear. They did have to be filled in. Across a quarter mile wide cedar swamp, that in places turned to tamarack bog, the crew set to building a corduroy road. A thick stand of tall cedars shaded some low ground. Little sun passed through the curtain of branches. Walter's shovel struck chunks of still frozen swamp. A north-country winter must be a cold one, he thought. Patrick broke off a piece of the old ice to put under his hat.

Building the corduroy was brutal work requiring the downing of countless small trees, cutting the trunks in equal length and laying them parallel to form an elevated path. In the winter this would help form a wide stable surface to sled logs. Rosie hauled bundles of wood to the work site on a trailer built of poles called a travois. For man and mule in the summer sun, it was best to sweat in the early morning and late afternoon.

Cooke Larson delivered a mid-day meal. Walter licked his plate of beans clean and belched. A small bee land on a fleshy, greenish-pink, bell shaped flower growing from the bog. The bee was attracted by the bright color. Slowly it slid down into the bell. Walter leaned over and saw the bee trapped by sharp hairs pointing downwards. An insect eating plant! He turned to share this discovery with Patrick and Sutton. Frankie had his hat pulled over his eyes and was enjoying a pipe. Then Walter noticed movement out on the swamp.

At the edge of the swamp a group of people moved forward and then stopped. The group continued in a staggered advance. They got closer. Walter counted three boys, a girl and a woman. The family was crossing the swamp with three long planks. They laid them down in a skinny bridge pulling up the rear planks and moving them forward. They approached the crew's corduroy road, making signs asking permission to cross.

"Hey Mack," Sutton called to Walter, "Thems some Finns homesteading north of here. Talk to them."

"Hello!" Walter hailed the group.

The family looked up surprised to hear Finnish.

"Hello?" responded the oldest boy, "May we cross your road?"

"*Joo*, Yes." Walter ventured out on the wet hummocky ground to help them connect the plank bridge up with the corduroy road.

"We're the Hyttinen family! I'm Erik Hyttinen. So who are you and how are you here?" asked Erik, who looked to be about fourteen. The family was on its way to Deer River for some supplies. They were cutting across the swamp as a shortcut to the railroad. Walter realized he was staring at the daughter who appeared to be close to his age.

Walter presented himself as Walter Myllamaki and explained about his adventures. The Hyttinens had been to Minneapolis and remembered the Dime Museum.

“Do you know an Emil Aho?” asked Walter, “He’s my uncle.”

The mother’s face brightened. “Why I know an Emil Aho, though my husband Paul knows him better. He visited our place for Christmas last winter. He was working for the Itasca Lumber Company logging camp. He walked twenty miles to have Christmas with us.”

“Did he do this?” Walter balanced a saw on his chin. It had been Uncle Emil who had first taught Walter how to balance. If this was the Emil Aho who balanced objects on his chin then there could be no mistake.

“Yes! He had us all laughing despite the cold and snow outside. I think Emil went to Dakota to work on a wheat farm this summer. Exactly where I don’t know. We should ask Paul.”

So! Emil had been here! Beer River was Deer River! Walter felt a circle starting to close. He made plans to visit the Hyttinen place to talk to Paul Hyttinen. Mr. Dawson was giving him an appraising look like he was thinking Walter might quit and join this family.

“All right boys! Break’s over. Let’s get across this swamp.”

Walter and Patrick, stepping carefully on the bumpy wooden path, followed the Hyttinens out to cut and load another load of wood.

A couple of days later the corduroy road was finished. On the other side of the swamp they found a stand of the biggest trees Walter had ever seen. Joining hands, it took four of the men to encircle the trunk of one granddaddy white pine. The trees on this rise had won a centuries old competition for sun and soil. In a few places ancient giants

had fallen and allowed some light to touch ground. In these pockets of sun, birch and balsam saplings were vying with young white pines for control of space.

“Trees got their territory just like wolves and other critters.” Sutton observed. He pointed at the blackened, twisted bark on a few trees. These were fire scars. “Soon as the white pine is big enough it’s more fireproof than them others. A fire will clear out all but the big pine.” He scratched his head. “If we didn’t cut ‘em all down that is. What you’re looking at is lumber for about two hundred houses!”

Mr. Dawson was already scouting the route he wanted his ice road to follow. He walked ahead making blazes with his hatchet, exposing bright white wood under thick pine bark. These marks showed the direction he wanted the road to follow. He’d found a ridge that snaked along like an upside-down riverbed. His road would be on top of this ridge. The crew followed and found him regarding an even oval round mound right in the middle where the trail should go.

A white pine towered from just off center. The mound gave a view of a wide wetland unevenly divided by a snaky creek. A distant bull-moose shoulder deep in water shook aquatic vegetation from his grand rack of horns. A bald eagle on a high branch was spreading its wings in the sun, soaking up heat in its dark feathers. Taking wing, it soared away to survey the marsh for a meal.

“Sutton, bring up some TNT. Looks like you’ll have your fun. Boys, let’s dig some blast holes to drop the dynamite in.”

Sutton brought several sticks of dynamite. He carefully placed the sticks of explosive in the narrow holes the men had dug. Everyone waited a safe distance away.

Then Sutton came charging down the ridge and took cover behind a tree. He covered his ears. The others followed his example.

“She’s gonna blow!”

Blam! Blam! Blam! The charges went off firing rocks, dust and dirt into the air. A fist-shaped dust cloud collected high above the explosion until it caught the breeze and began to drift off. The crew approached the blast site. The white pine that had been on the crest of the mound was cracked and lying on its side. Edges remained, showing the perimeter of what had been the mound. Looking down into the crater the men had their gaze returned by a half buried skull. Then another and another skeleton could be seen, yellowed bones in red dirt.

“Well I’ll be. This here’s an old Indian grave,” said Sutton stroking his chin.

“How long has it been here, do you think?” asked Patrick.

“Long time, long time. Probably the Chippewa ‘round these parts don’ even know. Whoever built it they didn’t have no shovels. Must have been somebody important for all that trouble.”

Walter couldn’t believe his eyes and gaped with amazement. Frankie leaned on his axe and wore a frown. The easiest way forward was right through the middle of where the mound had been.

“Bring the shovels. Lets flatten it out,” Mr. Dawson instructed.

It took the rest of the afternoon to make the area into a level surface suitable for a sled to cross. The dirt, so carefully carried and shaped into the mound, so long ago, was tossed by the spade-full down the side of the ridge.

That night they camped in the pinewoods. On higher ground there was a breeze that brought some relief from mosquitoes. Patrick played sad music on his tin whistle accompanied by far-away howling wolves. Walter thought he could see faces in the firelight reflected off the high branches of the pine trees. Later he drifted off to sleep thinking about the mystery of the mound.

Chapter 4

Oma Tupa, Oma Lupa!

Walter owned four pairs of wool socks, two pairs of pants wool and canvas, two wool shirts, two long-sleeve cotton shirts, a black wide-brimmed hat, a sheath knife, a tin cup and a blue enamel spoon. A heavy wool blanket made a warm bedroll. Tie it all up in a burlap bag, hang it on a stick and that was a lumberjack's suitcase. His ankle high leather-work boots were finally broken in. For days he had suffered bleeding blisters like candles burning in his socks. Finally they had healed and grown into tough calluses protecting his feet. A big red bandana made a good tablecloth and washcloth. Tied around the face it was a guard against mosquitoes. Walter cleaned his teeth with a pine toothpick and shaved with his knife.

The Zumbro Logging Company supplied everything else. Mister Dawson gave him a hatchet and whetstone. Many evenings were spent around the campfire sharpening tools. A sharp hatchet meant less work when hacking off branches from a downed tree in the way of a logging road for the Zumbro Logging Company.

The Camp 37 work crew had things down to a routine. Mister Dawson and Sutton scouted ahead looking for white pines. They marked the trail of where, come winter, cut logs could best be sledded. Cooke Larson chose a campsite near where roads would be built. The crew pitched tents, built a fire pit and set to gathering firewood and hauling water for cooking and washing up. Mister Dawson no longer had to give orders. The chores seemingly did themselves and the crew traveled here and then there, never too far, moving camp to be close to where the work was.

Tents, food, kitchen gear and everything else could be packed on Rosie the mule. Cooke Larson wrestled the canvas saddlebags onto her with a red face, cursing a blue streak. Rosie always resisted, at least at first, until she remembered that she was a mule. Cooke Larson was either praising or cursing her. He was known to talk to her sweetly in mule language (gentle “hees” and “haws” which the men sometimes heard him speaking in his sleep) while slipping her a lump of sugar and stroking her flank. He could also deliver a savage kick to her backside with foul, angry words in his native Norwegian.

Walter got the task of measuring at least 100 paces away from camp, tying a birch pole (no sticky sap or needles!) between two trees and digging a privy pit beneath it. He’d learned to find a breezy place to keep down the bug bites on the rear end. Somewhere with a good supply of pinecones. The privy was a good place to think.

Patrick had thought up a new song while on the privy this morning.

I’m a long, long way from my country my land,
Here in the north I’ve come to cut pine,
For the Zumbro I’ll work, I’ll labor not whine,
Goodbye to the giants so stately and grand!

Farewell to my people across the big lake
There are no more trees in dear Ireland
I'll sing, sing, sing with nary a band
Little money, hard work, give me all I can take!

It was late September. The crew had thoroughly explored the area north of Grave Lake and south of Northstar Lake. Around and across the swamps and little lakes a rough network of level roads and ramps had been prepared. A level spot, centrally located to where the trees would be felled, was chosen for the winter camp. Everything, buildings, wagons and sleds, would be built from the surrounding lumber. A few big red pines had been downed for construction. Walter had his first taste of the ear-splitting boom of a centuries old tree crashing to the ground. A greenhorn, he didn't know enough to get away quickly and got a face full of flying splinters.

"That'll learn ya!" was the advice from Mister Dawson. He was pleased with the progress the Camp 37 work crew had made and happy with Walter's work too.

Between the two bigger lakes were the smaller Dead Horse and Little Dead Horse lakes. Sutton claimed that last spring they'd pushed their luck on some rotten ice. A team of horses pulling a load of logs had broken through and drowned along with the teamster driving the sled.

"Right in the middle of that pond the sled began a-sinking. Then the whole outfit sank into a bowl and filled up with water. Slow they went. The horses were tied and that poor devil of a driver couldn't swim. Eagles and ravens had quite a convention feeding

on them dead nags after the ice broke up. We never did find the teamster... but of course the logs were still floatin'. Careful next spring or you'll be drowned too!"

Walter and Patrick exchanged looks. Yesterday they'd had a swim in Dead Horse Lake washing off the dust and grime of working in the woods. The lake had a southern facing sand beach where in the shallows the water was warm and clear. It had been a favorite swimming hole of theirs. Walter had enjoyed a soothing soak yesterday, minnows nibbling his toes.

Between Northstar and Grave lake was a steep, hilly area. The surrounding slopes and ravines were thick with white pine groves. Because of the challenges of getting the logs out, this was one of the last places with old growth trees still uncut. Sutton and Mister Dawson had spent much time studying the grade of the land and discussing just where the road should go. At the highest point, the round multicolored gravel and rocks of the hill had eroded, leaving a steep face bare of trees. Walter liked to climb to the top for the view of the swamps and woods draining into the Bowstring River. From the summit, dark green trees gave way to scrubby spruces and golden autumn tamaracks. Passing clouds cast oval shady shapes that tinted purple and gray the soft colors of the trees. To the west the cutover zone appeared yellow and dry. Every season the cutover zone spread further like a spilled can of paint spreading outwards. Walter thought about the endless stacks of freshly cut pine he had seen in the lumberyards of Minneapolis.

He'd been having a recurring daydream in which he was a goose like one of the many now on the move, flying south. Long V's of birds had been passing low overhead so close the "whish, whish" of wings could be heard. In his vision the world unrolled beneath him like thread from a spool.

Tomorrow the crew was heading west to check on the system of dams and sluices on the river. Next spring, melting snow would make the high water needed to float the logs cut during the winter. Dams built by the crew would control the water level and allow the loggers to float the big timber along the river out to the railway.

After that the men would be free. Free until October when it would be time to build Camp 37, prepare for the logging crew and make ready all supplies for the winter operation.

Mister Dawson had made them an offer. He'd give them an advance on their yearly salary, for a fee.

"I'll pay you \$30 dollars now, in advance from next spring's pay and you get to keep \$25," he offered, hanging his head sheepishly.

All the men needed money and accepted the offer. What could they do?

"Now boys, ole Dawson ain't the owner. The Zumbro puts the squeeze on him so he can squeeze every dern nickel out of us!" reminded Sutton.

"It ain't right! The company, at a dollar a day, gets twenty days of free work from the four of us," added Frankie doing a little quick math.

Frankie was still sore from getting accidentally whacked on the nose with a mallet on the backstroke of a swing from Patrick. Blood had spouted everywhere from his bent nose.

"Blast it Paddy! You've busted my nougat!" Clutching his crooked nose Frankie had screamed at Patrick.

Walter was the quick thinker. Like a flash he jammed a finger up each of Frankie's nostrils and gave it a twist to straighten it out. The nose, apart from being bruised and red,

looked like it had before. The crew was dumbfounded by his act. All in all they had begun to appreciate each other's talents.

“Wait until there's a camp full of fifty of 'em!” Sutton told Walter, pointing at the other two. “Ever seen a zoo? Think of a mob of monkeys all throwing stinking socks at each other. That nose doctoring might come in handy again!”

During the break Patrick was heading down to Minneapolis to “see some friends and part company with my money!” Sutton was only going as far as Deer River where he'd “drink some whiskey” and help Mister Dawson with ordering supplies for the winter. Cooke Larson was doing the same. Frankie revealed nothing, as usual. He just might disappear into the woods. Walter was anxious to take the Hyttinen family up on it's offer of a visit and maybe learn more about his Uncle Aho.

“Everybody is welcome back come the end of October,” reminded Mister Dawson. “Meet me in Deer River on October 15 at the Zumbro office. Or if you're late, why find your way to the camp and we'll cut some trees!”

Inviting the crew back to work was as close as the rough Mister Dawson came to a compliment, Walter sensed. He planned on returning, having grown to like the outdoor life of the work crew. Also there was the matter of the rest of the summer's wages. He'd get that money and all the money for logging in the winter, next spring. Then he'd be staked for his next Minnesota adventure, whatever that might be

On the night before the crew was to disperse he'd had a walk by himself to think. In a nearby cedar grove was a place where several animal trails came together. Twice before he'd surprised black bears here. Now he approached cautiously. No bears this time. At the intersection of several well-beaten trails, high up on the tallest cedar were

wide gouges made by sharp claws. For some reason the animals came here to leave their mark. Many of the marks seemed old and faded. How many years had bears been coming here? One mark was a foot higher than the others. Was this the tallest bear advertising his height to the others? When all the trees were cut down where would the bears have their meeting?

The following day the outfit got moving downhill towards lower ground. They came upon the remains of the mound they'd blown up with dynamite. Off to the side of the mound somebody had placed a small pyramid of three rocks. Next to the rock pyramid was a pouch of Peerless pipe tobacco. The crew regarded this mystery. Sutton examined the still fresh and dry pouch of tobacco. He made a move to put it into his pocket but Frankie stopped him.

“This is here for a reason. Leave this offering be. The people, the people who live around here know about this place. Tobacco is a way to talk to them that was buried here. When the smoke from the tobacco goes to the sky a spirit hears the prayer.”

Sutton hesitated, tobacco in pocket. He puffed up his chest, ready for an argument. Without thinking Walter and Patrick stood next to Frankie. Mister Dawson and Cookee Larson were ahead, out of sight. Sutton returned the tobacco, ending the small stand off.

“If you say so you crazy frog! It's a waste of good Peerless if you ask me! Come the end of winter and you ain't got a smoke don't be asking ole Sutton!”

Soon they were at the edge of Camp 37's territory. Again Walter noted how the trees ended and stumps began. Here the land was like a no-man's land in a battleground. Brush and chopped off limbs lay rotting on the ground, dead soldiers left behind. The

temperature, once they left the cover of the pine forest, rose sharply. Looking back at the tall columns of the white pine forest Walter was reminded of a cathedral he'd once visited. The shady coolness, quiet beauty and massive columns had been the same.

In the open sunlight the ground was dry and scratchy instead of damp and spongy. A hawk soared on the hot air rising from this wasteland, maybe finding good hunting in the open turf, Walter thought. A few scattered, lonely tall pines remained in this zone, escapees from last winter's devastation. There was no doubt that this winter they would fall to the saws of Camp 37.

On the corduroy road across the swamp, Walter found the path north to the Hyttinen place. At the edge of the swamp a white blaze was slashed in a tree trunk to mark the way. He'd thought that the goodbye to the crew would be awkward, but workers coming and going turned out to be routine. The guys gave him a wave and Cookee Larson pressed into his hand a package of bread and salt pork.

"We'll see you on the bye and bye, yes we will!" Patrick said in a song. Rosie snorted. Then they continued west towards the Bowstring River to check on dams and sluices. Later, in Deer River, they'd go their separate ways.

Walter gingerly made his way across the swamp, walking from hummock to hummock, wetting his feet a couple of times, but keeping the trail blaze in sight. When he stopped to dry out his socks the crew was already out of sight.

He continued on the scraggly trail through older cutover land. Drier, rotting wood lay strewn on the ground. Around huge circular stumps skinny young aspen saplings stuck straight up in a weird forest of toothpicks. It was like walking through the bristles of a brush. Soon there were signs of people present. Here was a hayfield. There on the

border of the field was a fence made of old stumps lined bottom up, their twisted roots pointing in crazy directions. A pile of rocks (Walter's back gave a painful twinge just thinking of the work) guarded the trail. A section of low, wet ground was the home of a black spruce woods. Walter came face to face with a brown cow, tail swishing back and forth swatting flies.

"Here Moomi, Here Moomi, Moomi," came a girl's voice. Moomi moved away, not wanting to be found. A brown-haired girl in a long cotton dress, muddy around the hem, appeared, a bonnet on her head.

"You're not Moomi," She said, disappointed.

"Well I could be if I tried," Walter said making his best cow noise. "Moo, moo?"

The girl showed her disgust by her lack of reaction. So Walter dropped on all fours, grazed a mouthful of hay and swung his head back and forth in a cow-like fashion. This earned him a small grin, which was not worth, he decided, getting all the straw out of his throat. Being a *hulivili*, a merry fellow, usually others were highly entertained by his comedy. He made a promise to himself to try again with this one.

"Are you a Hyttenin?" he asked in Finnish, sputtering out hay.

"Yes. I'm Selma Hyttenin. You're that Myllamaki from the loggers aren't you?"

"Good memory!"

"Well we don't see too many new folks around here. I suppose you want to see Father and Mother. Help me catch Moomi and I'll show you the way."

Soon the fugitive was captured. She followed submissively back to the Hyttenin place. The clanging of Moomi's bell caught the attention of a man and a boy working in a field. Shovels in hand they looked up, surprised to see Walter. Walter recognized Erik

Hyttinen. The man must be his father Paul. The two were digging up what looked to be a bumper crop of potatoes and loading them onto a cart. A big ox watched without much interest as Selma herded Moomi home.

Introductions were made and Walter found himself shovel in hand helping to dig up fat potatoes. Paul Hyttinen seemed pleased at having an extra worker although he didn't say much and Walter felt he didn't know where he stood. Had visiting unannounced been a bad idea? Walter hoped that a bed and some dinner were part of tonight's plan.

They were. Five minutes walk around a swamp the Hyttinen homestead showed itself. As they walked Walter learned that yes, Emil Aho was known and had been a frequent visitor. He'd helped build part of the log cabin of well-fitted logs in the center of the clearing. The rack of a bull moose was mounted over the bright blue painted door. Sheets and underwear hung drying in the afternoon light. A bordered path of rocks was arranged around a vegetable garden. Moomi mooed from a small log barn and three hogs sniffed the air from their muddy pen. Several sheep grazed in the yard. Best of all there was a small sauna bath behind the barn. It had been a long time since Walter had enjoyed a sweat in a real Finnish sauna. This was a home that reminded him of home.

Inside Mildred Hyttinen scolded Paul for not sending Walter ahead and instead making him dig potatoes. They washed up from a ceramic basin and sat down to a meal of *pujaa*, fish stew, carrots and fresh bread and butter. Everybody began to eat, enjoying the novelty of having and being, a guest. Later, belly happy, Walter made the children laugh with an unintentional but satisfied, belch.

"Excuse me!" he apologized, wiggling his nose and ears.

Selma frowned at him.

“That’s all right,” soothed Mildred. “Now tell us your story Walter.”

He did. The saga of Walter from Finland to Minnesota was told. They all laughed about the Dime Museum and raised eyebrows at Henry the thief. Walter showed them balancing, placing one of their sturdy hand-made chairs on his chin. They knew all about the Zumbro Logging Company.

“The white pine trees that were once on this land were cut by the Zumbro. I worked for Camp 36 for a spell last winter. Mildred helped cook at the camp now and again. Dawson is a good boss. Be ready to work. He’ll push you but he’s fair. “

Paul was warming up to Walter. Helping to dig potatoes all afternoon had helped his appeal as a houseguest.

“Walter, why don’t you stick around and help with the farm until October?” he offered.

“Thanks Paul! I was hoping you’d offer. Can you tell me anything about Emil?”

“Sure, sure. I met your Uncle Emil in Deer River three or four years ago. Us Finns have a way of finding each other you know. He’s been a logger for some years now for the Itasca Lumber Company. Spends his winters in the woods and summers out in Dakota working in the wheat fields. That’s where he is now. I expect he’ll turn up in a month or so. He’s a good man and a hard worker. Tries to be a *hulivili* like you!”

Paul told him about his own adventures.

“I came to Minnesota some fifteen years ago. Back home I marched in St. Petersburg along with some Poles and other Russian subjects. We’d hoped that Czar Nicholas would hear our pleas against being drafted in the Russian army. The Czar had

his men turn their guns on us. Many died on that day and I vowed I'd serve no master! Ever. But, in America the workingman has little choice. I learned that lesson working in the iron mines of Virginia, Minnesota. We worked in a hole in the ground choking on bad air and dust. To get to the easier veins of iron ore the boss wanted a bribe. Those who didn't want to pay got sent to the deepest most dangerous parts of the mine. Finally I had saved enough to send for my family. We lived in a flimsy wood shack surrounded by more of the same. The streets were nothing but red mud! Poor Mildred didn't know if I'd come home from work each day. I had friends who were buried alive in that mine! We tried to form a union but the company brought in scabs to take our place. That was no way to live. Life's not easy on this farm, digging out stumps and pulling potatoes but at least I'm my own boss. You'll find that out someday too, Walter. You're young yet."

After dinner Selma fired up the sauna and sang:

Kukapa sen saunan lämmittääpi...?

Who will heat the sauna

If not I your only girl...?

In the wooden sauna there was just enough bench space for five and an iron stove in the corner. As men, Walter and Paul took the first turn. The fragrant smell of cedar wood and the intense heat eased all the worries out of Walter. Soon sweat was streaming from his body. When the heat was unbearable he and Paul poured buckets of cold water over themselves. They stepped outside to cool off some more. In the brilliant clear air the night sky was alive with lights. A pale half moon hung in the east. Stars above like countless grains of sand blinked and twinkled. Above it all, in the ceiling of the world, bands and belts of red and green northern lights pulsed and danced. With nothing to say,

both men watched the amazing sky until a small chill was felt. Then, they went back in the sauna for another heat treatment.

Paul considered himself a free man. For Paul there was no Mister Dawson, no boss to tell him what to do. Not that there was a shortage of chores, far from it, Walter soon discovered. There was the potato and rutabaga crop to get out of the ground. Paul hoped to sell most of that to Camp 37 to help feed the logging crew through the winter. A large portion was also kept for the family. The next few days were spent digging and hauling potatoes to the root cellar. With Walter's help this was accomplished sooner than expected. Digging in the rocky, sandy ground, he had to wonder how many seasons of potatoes the thin soil could produce.

Fall was in the air and crinkly morning ice on mud puddles held the promise of the coming winter. In the northland you couldn't have enough firewood. Walter and Erik spent a day in cutover land near the swamp, clearing out downed wood. The outline of where a big tree had fallen was traced by the pattern of where its sawed-off branches lay. These were sawed into manageable lengths and hauled back home where they were split into firewood. Clearing out deadwood, explained Paul, created a firebreak so a fire would find no fuel if it ever approached the house.

A day was spent hacking triangular shaped strips of wood to patch and pound into any cracks between the log walls of the house. Mud was then squeezed in to make a tight seal. Inside the cabin, swamp moss was pushed into interior cracks. Mildred swept the plank floor every day with a homemade straw broom. The house would be tight and snug this winter.

Mildred and Selma stayed busy with meals. Most food came from the farm. Chickens supplied fresh eggs. Buckets and jars of preserved and dried blueberries would share their summery taste all winter. Flour and sugar for delicious breads and pastries came from Deer River. The twin boys, Arni and Snarni, had lots of ponds and streams to fish in, and fresh fish was often on the menu. Moomi the cow contributed milk for butter and cheese. New to Walter, wild rice was traded from some local Indians. It was delicious cooked up with butter and some honey. One day Paul shot a fat goose right out of the sky right from his front yard. The family also tanned cowhides for shoe leather and knitted socks and mittens from wool from their own sheep.

Beautiful baskets and boxes, strong and light, were sewn from sheets of birch bark and deer sinew. They were used to hang wild rice and other foods from the rafters, safe from mice. Walter spent an evening fiddling around with a piece of birchbark and produced a sorry looking basket that Selma shook her head at.

The Hyttinens it seemed were their own bosses. Walter thought about his friend John Saari and how he too wanted a family and farm. Paul knew of John.

“He lives south of here about twenty miles in the Suomi Hills. A group of Finns have farms close together so they can share the work. They pool their money to get a better price on tools and supplies. I hear they’ll have a church and a school before long.”

“Wouldn’t you rather live close to other folks like them?” Walter asked.

Paul thought about that.

Grinning through a front gap tooth he answered, “Wouldn’t they rather live close to folks like me? *Oma tupa, oma lupa!* One’s own cabin, ones own freedom!”

Paul was a free spirit and determined to get along on his own. This was not easy. The man walked with a stooped back. Also, Walter noticed how in the morning with the help of his wife he had to slowly unfold his legs, stretching his sore body before he could move about. Hard physical labor was the price of Paul's freedom. But in the early evening light, sitting in his front yard smoking his pipe and watching his children play Walter could see the gleam of satisfaction in his blue eyes. At such times the spirit of the woods seemed to live in the family.

A month or so passed with Walter helping around the farm and getting to know the Hyttinens. His bed in the hayloft was warm and soft. Selma woke him every morning when she came to milk Moomi. After milking expertly Moomi, she'd always offer Walter a taste of fresh milk.

"Drink of *lämmiä*?" She held out a tin cup.

"Why thanks, Selma!" Walter would say, eyes groggy and only half awake.

"Then get your lazy rear end out of the hay, worthless one!" Selma would then withdraw the offered cup. This was a game they played every morning. One morning he changed the rules.

"Drink of milk?" Again the cup was offered.

"No thanks. Moomi's milk is sour. I don't think so."

Caught off guard, Selma hesitated.

"Sour eh?" She poured the milk over Walter's head. "Get out of bed you good for nothing no brain! How's that for sour?"

When a wet and stringy haired Walter appeared for breakfast Selma informed the family, "He's already had his morning milk!"

One clear cold morning Paul, Erik and Walter set off to inspect Paul's trap lines. The county paid two dollars for wolf pelts. One had taken a sheep from the family's yard that summer. The day before, Paul had set out some poison-baited traps and wanted to check to see if any wolves had been caught. He was planning a trip into Deer River soon and was hoping to make some extra money. Walter knew there were wolves around. Howling was often heard at night, the wolves talking to each other from afar. Sutton did a fair imitation of a howl. One night he and several distant wolves had a conversation until they figured out that it was only a mean people trick. The crew had also come across a kill. An old moose with a broken antler had been torn apart by a hungry pack. Bones and bits of hide lay scattered about. Ravens waited in the trees for the crew to leave, their feast interrupted.

Patrick had been a bit afraid of wolves.

"Wolves don't like beans!" Sutton had teased him. "Cepting of course the human bean! Are you Irishers full of beans?"

Walter knew that wolves didn't attack people and didn't worry. Still, when approaching the first trap, Walter was alert and tensed himself. The stiff body of a skinny grey wolf was something of a let down. Whatever he had expected, it wasn't this sad leftover of a wild animal. The wolf had tried to free itself by chewing through its own paw before dying from the poison in the bait. Paul cut it loose. It took only a few minutes work with his big sharp knife to skin and claim the pelt. He had done this before.

They were several miles from the homestead on a peninsula where the family came in August to pick blueberries. The three or four acre berry field faced southwest and was on a rise where it caught plenty of sun and moisture from Northstar Lake. Smooth, grey

scattered surfaces of rock laced with deep parallel scratches poked out of the berry field. The far side of the lake was where Camp 37 would be cutting down trees this winter.

“This is an old Indian burn. Ojibway people came here every season to burn out the bushes so the berries could grow. Thanks to their work we pick plenty of berries. A few of them are still living around here,” said Paul. As if agreeing with Paul’s explanation, trees at the base the peninsula showed fire scars.

Sure enough as the three tramped west near the creek leading out of Northstar Lake, “Potato Creek” Paul called it, a handful of low log cabins could be seen. Thin trails of wood smoke coming from tin stovepipes were the only sign of life. A few dogs, sensing their presence and maybe the smell of the wolf pelt, set to barking an alarm. They kept walking. Walter craned his neck hoping to get a glimpse of some Indians. Besides some old snowshoes, sleds, a woodpile and the barking dogs little could be told about the inhabitants.

“Stick around these parts son. You’ll meet some Indians. One fellow name of Bungo Dan trades with us and with the logging camps. He’s hard to miss.”

On that day two more wolf pelts were collected. Six dollars in all were earned for the Hyttinens, more then a week’s pay for Walter, working for the Zumbro Logging Company.

Chapter 5

Swamper!

After spending a month with the Hyttinen family, things started changing for Walter. The ceiling of the world came crashing down.

Walter was taking a walk among the unspoiled giants. Last night he had a dream that little men were treading on the gnarly feet of the huge white pines. High up on the rough corky bark faces formed. The tiny men had finally gotten the attention of the ancients. The midgets made their plans and laid their scratchy roads. They swarmed the woods with sharp cross saws and horse-drawn wagons and sleighs. In one season they would fell scores of trees that had taken centuries to grow. High above, wind blew through the canopy and tree branches waved the question: why?

Walter knew why. He'd seen the lumberyards of Duluth, Deer River and Minneapolis. People across the great land needed fine, strong, and light white pine wood

for countless homes, stores, churches and all manner of buildings. He had come to Minnesota as his friends Patrick Gage, John Saari, the Hyttinen family and many, many more had come for a better life, for something more. In old Europe lack of land and opportunity was squeezing folks out. Wars, famine and other hardships had finally spilled the people pot over. Into the open space of America they spread out like a thousand headed monster claiming the natural riches of a continent.

Even monsters miss their parents. Walter was writing a letter home:

Dear Mother and Father,

I'm fine. I'm working near Deer River (not Beer River!) in a logging camp for the Zumbro Logging Company. I'm saving money to send you. Here in the woods there's nothing to buy except in the wanigan, the company office, where anything I need to work in the woods can be purchased. I needed a heavy wool coat and rubber waterproof pack boots with warm wool felt liners. The company sold them to me. The clerk marks it in a book against my final pay I'll get next spring. When I can I'll send you money. I miss Finland. There are Finns here who have helped me. Uncle Aho is somewhere near. A man, Paul Hyttinen, who has a homestead in this area, knows of him. I lived with him and his family for a while and they were good to me. Uncle has worked for another lumber company and should have returned from the wheat fields in the west by now. When I can I'll look for him. Uncle is one of the army of homeless men who roam from mine to farm to logging camp. They are the worker bees that provide the muscle that is changing this place. I myself am beginning the wandering life. Come spring I don't know where I'll be.

Walter put down his pencil. A clean pine wood smell, from the newly built bunkhouse wall he was resting against, was fighting a losing battle against tobacco

smoke, hay-filled mattresses and fifty unwashed bodies. Fifty pairs of sweaty wool socks and long woolen underwear hanging to dry added to the fragrant mix. Dry clothes were important if you wanted to stay warm in the woods. It was only November. What would the stench be like in March? Walter had a lot on his mind. His second language, English, had improved greatly but still he didn't think he could explain all he was thinking. Writing to his parents helped clear his brain.

His friend Patrick didn't have such worries. With great skill Patrick was playing a complicated jig on his tin whistle. His fingers flew up and down the holes of his whistle. Several men tapped their feet.

An older logger with a scarred face named Sam Christy raised his head from his bunk.

"Hey don't you know I'm trying to get some shuteye?" he boomed across the bunkhouse.

"I surely don't. Hum a few notes and I'll see if I can play it," replied Patrick seriously.

The men around him grinned. Patrick kept a straight face and the slower Sam couldn't tell if he was being fooled with or not. Sam would not be someone to provoke. It was rumored that once in a fight, acid had been thrown in his face. The man also had a knife scar running diagonally across his neck. If he survived these battles what happened to the men he fought? It was not hard for Walter to imagine this man as a killer.

Sam grunted and rolled over in his blanket. It was time to turn in anyway so Patrick put away his whistle. Walter carefully folded his letter to finish later. Sending letters was a service the camp clerk, known to all simply as Clerk, took care of. Mister Dawson, the

boss, knew that happy loggers would be good workers. Staying in touch with home, even if letters took months to arrive, kept the men happy and focused on the business of cutting down big trees.

This was a business these men knew well. Two months ago Walter, Patrick and the other men of the work crew had laid out the rough paths that would make ice roads when the deep snow came. Mister Dawson had selected a little valley with protection from the north wind for the camp. In late October when the workers of Camp 37 had begun gathering, he hadn't had to say much. He had simply stuck a stick in the ground. After counting 40 paces he had placed another. Two more sticks and he had staked out the corners of a rectangle.

“Bunkhouse!” he announced.

A smaller rectangle became “Mess Hall,” and three squares became “Wanigan,” “Stables,” “Smithy and Wood Butcher.” The “Dentist Office” had a southern face for skylights so the saw filer could see to sharpen the saws. Once all the buildings were located the men had gone to work. Some began felling big Norway pine trees. Others hacked off branches and cut the downed tree trunks to the needed size. The walls of the bunkhouse were as long as a mature pine tree was tall. Logs were notched at the ends and laid together horizontally eight logs high. Walter was good with an axe and got the job of cutting the notches so they fit snugly. Cooke Larson made do with a big canvas cook tent and put out three hardy meals a day. As more men kept streaming in, the pace of the work increased. It was only a matter of days until Zumbro Logging Company Camp 37 took shape.

Frankie turned up driving a wagon loaded with cast iron stoves, metal stovepipes, salvaged window glass and tar roofing paper from old Camp 36. It turned out he had been hanging around old camp 36, hired by Mister Dawson to recycle usable building materials and guard anything valuable. All the metal parts and fittings for tools, sleds and wagons were in his load. The carpenter would make everything over again from trees cut around the camp.

Sutton was back working as Mister Dawson's right hand man. The men were recreating the same logging camp they had worked in for many winters in Michigan, Wisconsin and now the woods of Minnesota. It was just in a new location. Sutton was one of the old timers who could see clearly in his head just how it ought to be.

“Gee! Haw! Back it up, worthless! Why they let any old stupid cuss work in the dern woods! Old Dawson ain't too per-ticular who he lets into his camp!”

Sutton let his good-natured abuse fly at any man or horse that crossed his path. He was in charge of hitching the horses that pulled the heavy logs up ramps into place to form walls. It was dangerous work if a rope slipped and a log rolled back on top of you.

The camp was soon finished. With perfect timing it began to snow and snow and snow. The swampers had the task of shoveling paths between the buildings of the camp. “Grub Street” was the name they gave to the path to the mess hall. In a logging camp all roads led to food. The main road leading to where trees were being cut got dubbed “Hard Road”. The path to the latrine had several names. “Stinky Alley” was the nicest. A daily coat of fresh snow covering the pit under the latrine helped matters. Here a handful of snow was cold but useful. Enough snow had fallen that in places on either side of the

paths it was shoulder high. Walter had trouble remembering the peaceful little valley he knew from last fall.

Logging began right away with out so much as a “Let’s get started!” or “Time to cut wood!” Just as Dawson knew exactly where to place the camp buildings, the lumberjacks knew their various jobs. Sutton was an undercutter. He’d approach a white pine tree scratching his head, examining it from all angles. Noting the way it leaned, direction of the wind and the steepness of the slope on which it grew, he cut a deep notch. This marked the direction the tree would fall.

Next, the tough sawyers, in teams of two, began cutting through the tree with their long two-handed saws. This was grunt work and sawyers had their own rhythm. One pulled while the other pushed, letting the sharp teeth of the saw do the work. Now and again one pulled out a metal flask of kerosene to clean sticky pinesap from the steel blade. Through the thick trunk, towards the undercutter’s notch on the other side, they sliced through the white wood. As the cut advanced, they pounded in wedges to help push the tree apart. Before long the giant tree was connected to its base by only inches of wood.

The sawyers ran for their lives. Despite the skill of the undercutter the tree could fall sideways or kick straight back, aiming deadly revenge at the men.

A gradual lean began. Then, slowly building, a tremendous ear splitting crash pierced the woods as the immense pine tree came down. “keeeeeeeeeRACK!” Branches clawed at neighboring trees in a vain effort to stay upright, to no avail. Foot-long sharp slivers shot from the cut. In a white storm of exploding snow the vanquished tree settled with a descending roar to its final resting place.

“Hah! Lookee there!” Sutton bragged. He loved it when the tree fell exactly where he’d planned. Swinging his two-edged axe he cut a v-shaped wedge out of the trunk. Walter had seen him drive a stake into the ground with a well-aimed tree. Sutton lovingly stroked the white pine they’d just felled.

“This’ll make some clean lumber! There’s nary a branch on the lower trunk. No knots or burls. By God I hope the carpenter that works this fine grained pine ’preciates good wood!”

Walter and the other swampers stripped branches from the tree, marking it with a measuring rope in 18 ½ foot lengths for the sawyers who cut it to size. Their weapon was the two-bladed axe. Nights around the bunkhouse were well spent grinding and sharpening the edge. A good swamper could lop off a stout branch with one swing. The end products were the logs Walter had seen in the big Mississippi river holding ponds, down by the sawmill in Minneapolis. In this future cutover zone the snow hid all the dead wood on the ground. These were the “tree bones” that would be baked and bleached in the sun next summer.

Logs were grabbed with iron pinchers hitched to cables and ropes that horses pulled out to the ice roads. The serious top loaders, focused on their hazardous work, used a clever system of log ramps and long ropes powered by powerful oxen to heap logs onto transport sleds. This had to be done just right, the load perfectly balanced and secured with massive chains. Incredibly heavy, the loaded sled was carefully pulled by straining oxen to the Bowstring River. There, logs were unloaded and left to be floated out to the railroad next spring, when the river had thawed and was running fast and full with melted snow.

Roadbeds leveled by last summer's work crew were filling with snow. A giant contraption loaded with tanks of water called an icer, patrolled the roads at night using kerosene lanterns for light. The icer, pulled by a team of horses with spiked iron horseshoes, spread water on the road and dug ruts for the transport sleds. In the chill of night the water froze, forming an ice road good for sledding the heavy logs.

This was Minnesota logging, a routine the men would work at all winter long. By the end of November, Camp 37 was in full forward mode. Work happened from dawn to dusk. Sometimes the lumberjacks trudged out to the woods before the light of day. They'd light jugs of kerosene with rags for wicks and hang them from tree branches. On a windless, cold morning it was an eerie sight to look through a hanging cloud of your own breath at the smoky yellow lights in the trees. The icer returning from a night of sprinkling the ice roads resembled a dragon, horses blowing steam from wide nostrils and kerosene lanterns like golden eyes. Everyone stepped aside to let it pass.

Mister Dawson, who rarely relaxed, seemed more content. When he didn't say much, things were going well. Walter looked up from trimming branches to see Mister Dawson beckoning to him. Clambering over the downed tree he went to see what he wanted.

"Mack, I gotta special job for you!"

Walter had a reputation as a hard worker. He was clever and was quickly learning many of the skills needed around the logging camp. Anything that needed doing, he was willing. Continuing his letter home later he explained the special task:

Today I got an easy job. It was a very cold but sunny day. The guy who checks the ice road to make sure it is fine for the sleds is called the Road Monkey. He was sick today

and I was Road Monkey for a day. When a fully loaded sled comes to a downhill grade it must slow down. Too fast and it will overtake and crush the teamster and the horses. Straw must be put down as a brake. Then after the sled passes, the straw has to be cleaned up or it will soak up the sun, get warm and melt that section. No good for the sled. Dark colored horse poop will melt into the ice too. There's a special shovel for horse poop. The name for this shovel is not polite. Also, in the night wolves pass on our ice road and they leave poop full of hair and bones. The shovel works for them too!

One day Walter was working on a downed pine tree when Sutton called him over. A barrel-chested man who Walter had never seen before was standing a few feet behind Sutton. He wore a coat of brown shaggy fur that Walter later learned was buffalo skin. His leggings and all other clothes were animal fur. He walked on snowshoes like the ones Walter had seen last summer outside the Indian cabins. From a lined brown face brown eyes seemed to look just past a person. A squat nose rested between them. Peeking out from under his fur cap was black hair in tight curls. Young Walter had never seen such a face. Walter was nothing special to the man because he ignored him. Even Sutton who was having a conversation with him seemed secondary.

“Mack and I will follow you out to where you left the critter. We'll haul him in and get him to camp.”

The man gave a slight nod.

“What about my scrip?” he asked in a quiet voice.

“Well I'll send a note with a ten dollar order ya' can cash in at the Zumbro store in Deer River. That work for ya'?” Sutton offered. “Next time ya' head in to town stop by and ya' can credit ten dollars supplies.”

The man nodded and headed off into the woods in a shuffling walk on his snowshoes through the deep snow. Walter followed Sutton to a supply sled pulled by a team of horses. They climbed on behind the teamster who held the reins in his lap waiting to go. Their feet dangled and bounced from the back. Walter was glad for his warm felt-lined boots. It had been a cold night and the icer had been out. The sled flew easily on slippery ruts. Off in the woods the mystery man could be seen going in the same direction. They arrived at the furthest reach of Camp 37 at the edge of a small frozen lake surrounded by hills. The teamster driving the sled carefully steered out onto the lake. He aimed for places where the snow had been cleared by the wind. On the far side of the lake a pack of dogs had been tied and began howling upon seeing the sled.

The back end of the sled fishtailed on the ice and Walter almost fell off. They stopped a short distance from the dogs. It was a windless day and the sun reflected off the lake like a mirror. Solar heat warmed the back of Walter's dark wool coat. Sutton and the teamster produced their pipes and fired up. The horses snorted and pawed the ice, unhappy to be around the dogs.

"C'mon ole Dan! We ain't got all day!" exclaimed Sutton.

Wishing made it so for soon the man called Dan appeared, beckoning to them.

"Grab that rope Mack!" ordered Sutton. Walter hoisted a long coil of rope and followed. They walked carefully on slippery ice and now Walter could see the huge carcass of an animal close to the dogs. It was a bull moose. Walter and Sutton tied the rope around the moose. By the time they climbed back into the sled Dan had already hitched his dogs to his own sled and was off, disappearing into the woods. The lumberjacks dragged the moose behind them all the way back to camp.

“Cookee Larson’ll butcher that fella, chop him up and put him in the beans,” explained Sutton.

Later, old Magnus, the bunkhouse bull in charge of keeping order in the bunkhouse, told the story of Dan. Magnus was a lumberjack who walked with a limp and could no longer handle the hard work in the woods. He’d been around Itasca County a long time.

“Bungo Dan is his full name. His Indian name I don’ know. That guy has been here trapping fur since before any white man ever cut down a tree in this territory. He speaks French and Chippewa and English too I suppose! Anyhow it’s said that his father was an escaped slave who ran away to Itasca. Probably came up the Mississippi on one of the first steamboats from one of them slavery states down south. Well, town life wasn’t to his likin’ and he made his way to the north woods. Married into a Chippewa band and Bungo Dan is his son. Dan is a fur trapper and makes a little money supplying logging camps with moose meat and fish. They say good luck comes to camps that do business with him.”

Walter had seen the cutover zones of Itasca. Someday the valuable white pine trees would be gone. Would the animals that Dan trapped and hunted for a living go away too?

Walter was glad for different jobs to do because otherwise the days seemed the same. Before dawn Magnus gave a blast on the Gabriel horn rousing the crew. A parade of men hurried up Stinky Alley to the six-hole bench that hung over the pit Walter had

helped dig last fall. This was rush hour in the camp. Cracks in the privy walls leaking in cold fresh air were a good thing Walter decided.

Breakfast was hearty. Guys stuffed themselves with all the pancakes, bacon, beefsteak, baked beans (always the beans!), fried potatoes and coffee cake they could eat and washed it down with plenty of tea and coffee. Talking was against the rules in order to hurry the men along and discourage complaining. If they could talk, Walter would like to tell how he had helped dig the very potatoes they were eating. While the camp was being built Paul Hyttinen had delivered a wagonload of potatoes and rutabagas. Paul had been busy talking with Mister Dawson and Walter had only a brief chance to catch his eye and give a wave.

After breakfast the men headed out to work. Woodcutting continued until lunch, which was brought by the “swing-dingle,” a horse drawn-sled loaded with big tin cans of food. The cans were placed by a fire to warm. The men hurriedly downed more beans, potatoes, coffee cake, doughnuts and bread.

Logging all afternoon.

Supper was always the same hearty filling food as the other meals. A seating chart was assigned by unspoken rule. Mister Dawson sat at the head of the long table. Sutton and the other managers were by his side. Teamsters after them, followed by the sawyers and last the lowly swampers. This was also the order in which men got served as well. Walter was reminded of the first and third class cars on the train. Everyone had their place it seemed.

Meals were a symphony in tin. Sixty-some tin knives and forks clanged against an equal number of tin plates. Nobody noticed when one night Patrick began tapping out a

rhythm on his plate. Lempi Lampi, an older Finn and a neighbor of John Saari looked up and smiled. He joined in. Another swamper called Tom Mackenzie, Walter, and everyone at the end of their table began to play along. The musical tin-tapping stopped when they all realized that the entire table was staring at them. Cook Larson was not pleased. All the swampers got runny pancakes the next morning.

Truly the camp had music of its own.

After lights out the stove was stoked so the metal chimney glowed red hot. It creaked and popped as it flexed with rising heat. Later it would make a steely *ping!* as it cooled. Then *bang!* Magnus would cram in a heavy tamarack log to get the fire going again.

Soon the snore cycle began. A logger, from deep inside his wool blankets would let out a heavy nose buzz, flapping his lips in a cheery raspberry.

SSSSnnUUoorreeee...SSSnnUUoorreeee it sounded, only louder. Then, his bunkmate would catch the snore and begin. Then his neighbor and his and so on around the bunk until all fifty men were sawing the big noisy wood. Such racket roused the original culprit. He gave his bunkmate a kick to stop his snoring. Then the kick traveled around the bunkhouse until everyone stopped the racket. This pattern might repeat itself several times a night.

Bang! Into the stove Magnus chucked more firewood.

Sometimes the stove pulsed with such heat the bunkhouse became too warm. A warm sleeper might sneak over to the skylight to jack it open, letting in cold air.

“Dang it! Who in tarnation opened the dern window?” a disgruntled cold sleeper would complain. He closed it. Open. Shut. Open. Shut. This little dance was another featured bunkhouse attraction.

Walter, who shared a bunk with Patrick, had secretly poked a hole through a crack between two logs. Through this mini window a snatch of sweet cold air snuck in and Walter could listen to the soothing sound of wind blowing through the pines.

During logging the constant hum of saws echoed through the woods. Staggered whacks of the swampers' axes kept time. Even the horses and oxen wore jingly brass bells. The cookee blew a brass horn to call men to the swing-dingle. Sometimes Patrick sang:

The trees went forth in a grand design

Ruling the north woods with pride.

But men with axes claimed the pine

To fell them, they'd not be denied!

I tell you boys who work this land

Never seen no more the trees

By arm, by blood, by sweat, by hand

We'll say thank you if we've not said please!

All the sounds stopped when a big tree fell. Even a veteran like Sutton gave pause when the huge KEEERACK! came and a twenty ton white pine tree snapped off at the base. This was the thunder drum of the woods broadcasting for miles the change in the natural order of the north.

In December John Saari turned up to join a sawyer crew.

"*Voi!* Surprise! How you been Walter? You're looking like a real woodsman!" John gave Walter an appraising look and his arm a squeeze. "My! This logging work is making you a big boy!"

John filled in Walter with the latest. His fiancée Mary was still in Minneapolis working at the Jumbo Café. They hoped to marry in the spring and be together at John's homestead in the Suomi Hills. Nobody had heard from Walter's Uncle Emil Aho.

"I went to the office of the Itasca Lumber Company in Deer River and left a message where you were. If he shows up they'll let him know. Sorry Walter."

Walter was let down that Uncle Emil was not to be found. But John was here, his friend Patrick too, and he could talk Finn with Lempi Lampi. The lost boy who arrived in Minneapolis last summer was a real lumberjack, swinging a full size axe, leaving his mark up on the world.

On Saturday night the men held the weekly talent show. This tradition started years ago in one of Mister Dawson's camps during a winter so bitterly cold loggers were forced to stay indoors for days on end. On these days the air could burn your lungs and freeze eyes shut. Mister Dawson had the only thermometer. If the loggers knew how cold it really was they'd refuse to work. To keep from going crazy the bunkhouse bull organized the talent show.

In Camp 37 this fun usually started with music and dancing. Patrick played his whistle for all. Walter, Tom and other younger men put on aprons and took the part of girls in pairs of dancers. Walter found that "accidentally" stepping on his partner's feet in his heavy boots was a way to get out of this duty.

Next came lying contests. Sutton was the reigning champion.

"Last winter it was so cold that all our words froze in the air and fell to the ground like ice cubes. When spring came we had to thaw 'em out so we'd knowed what we'd

said all winter! The winter before that, why it was so cold that fires had their flames froze like yaller daggers. We fed 'em to the chickens and they cooked their eggs right in their bellies! We ate hard-boiled eggs 'til spring!"

One of the teamsters could blow three smoke rings, one inside of the other. He required absolute silence and still air to pull it off. All fifty lumberjacks held their breath. Puff. Puff. Puff. For a perfect moment the rings hung in the air. Poof! They were gone and fifty men cheered.

Sam Christy could turn his scarred face sideways and rest a raisin in a dimple. Then he'd snap his neck, toss the raisin in the air and catch it in his mouth.

Clerk came to visit sometimes. Given a three-digit number he could predict the sum when four other numbers were added to it. He'd write down the answer beforehand. A volunteer would make up the other numbers. There the answer would be just like he said it would. Because of this trick no one ever questioned his accounts.

Walter was a hatchet-throwing star. From ten paces he and a sawyer named Axel were evenly matched at planting the edge of a light hatchet right in the center of a wood target nailed to the door. After Mister Dawson opened the door and entered as Axel was preparing a throw, the target was moved to the back wall.

Walter was also the only man in camp who could balance. A chair on his chin brought an appreciative silence followed by wild lumberjack applause. Many tried but none could equal this feat.

Nobody expected it one Saturday when Frankie called for attention. He pointed to the woodstove. Retrieving three burning sticks from the fire he held them before him. Then with a flip of a wrist he was juggling smoothly all three. Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh

the burning brands cut even arcs through the air leaving trails of sparks. Higher still Frankie tossed the sticks, now making them do double flips. Behind the back, reverse flips, and under the leg Frankie sent his fire sticks through a routine of moves. He caught one between his legs and bowed.

Sticks back in the stove, Frankie then did a back flip with a perfect landing. This was no ordinary lumberjack talent. The quiet Frankie had shown them a circus type performance. Nobody could top that. The talent show was over for that night. Walter was now sure that Frankie had a secret past that had chased him into these far away north woods. What was it?

Sunday was a day of rest. On Sunday some of the men read their Bibles. Some did not. Most took advantage of the opportunity to sleep and do a little laundry. Outside a fire was lit and a big iron cauldron set to boil. Filthy clothes could be sterilized and persistent body lice killed in boiling water. Sopping wet wool clothes were wrung out by hand and hung to freeze dry in the cold winter air. This happened by seniority and lowly swampers got the last of the boil-up water when it resembled mud stew. The other men got a big kick out of this fact and never failed to rub it in.

“Should be ripe enough for you!”

“Is it soup yet? Har, har, har!”

“Add a pinch of salt. That’ll make it tasty!”

The swampers had the choice of using the filthy water or pitching it and hauling fresh and waiting for it to boil.

One Sunday Patrick turned the tables. All Sunday long Cookee Larson sent over big pots of black coffee. This stayed warm on the bunkhouse stove and anybody who wanted

could help themselves. Patrick volunteered to bring over the coffee. On the way he added a few ladles of the filthy boil-up water. All the swampers decided not to drink coffee that Sunday. The undercutters, sawyers and teamsters drank it all day screwing up their faces at the taste. Only Magnus had the nerve to complain to Cookee Larson. He got runny pancakes at breakfast the next day.

When the holidays arrived Walter's thoughts returned to his parents. A logging camp Christmas meant good eating and a bit of free time:

Mother I miss your kitchen and wonderful food although here in camp I'm not exactly skin and bones. Over Christmas we had a break of two days. Cookee Larson cooked roast goose for everyone. Mrs. Hyttinen came to bake pastries and cakes for the men. For this meal we were allowed to talk with each other and eat slowly. Mrs. Hyttinen brought me a pair of wool socks knitted by her daughter Selma. I've got plenty credit now so I went to the wanigan and bought some gifts for her to take back. All the boys got wool mittens, Mrs. Hyttinen and Selma sewing kits with buttons, thread and thimbles, and Paul well I sent him a new pipe and a package of Peerless tobacco. Clerk will count it against my spring wages. We had a chance to sleep, play cards and relax. I'm learning a game called cribbage. Its not so hard if you can keep in your head all the numbers that add up to fifteen. On New Year's Eve Mister Dawson broke a camp rule and brought over a cask of whiskey for everyone. I don't drink and neither do some of the others. For once Mister Dawson stayed for our talent show partly to keep an eye on who was drinking how much whiskey. Sutton had more than a drop. He went to the edge of camp with a few sticks of dynamite to help celebrate the arrival of 1901. Mister Dawson put away the

whiskey after that. We work so very hard and must have some fun sometimes! Anyway, I promise I'll keep safe. In the spring I'll send money and keep looking for Uncle Emil.

Your loving son,

Walter Myllamaki

The daily routine of work, eat, sleep, work, eat, sleep broken only by Sundays and Christmas break, made time fly. Walter was in the wanigan one day and realized it was the middle of January. A grumpy mood was spreading in the bunkhouse. Being packed together liked sardines didn't make them grouchy. The same food everyday wasn't a problem. Days so bitterly cold that the horses were kept in the barn but the men still worked were not a concern. A population explosion in the colonies of lice that lived in the hair and all the filthy nooks and crannies of a lumberjack's body provided an evening's distraction. Lice races, contests in which lice found their way out of a circle on a piece of paper, were popular. Many plugs of tobacco changed hands in these contests.

It was all these things together that made the lumberjacks cranky.

Sutton was helping Magnus to break up a fight between two bunkmates.

"Now fellars it don't rightly matter who put their socks to dry where now does it?" reasoned Magnus, Sutton at his side.

The two sawyers nodded in agreement. Blows had almost been exchanged when one had refused to relocate his smelly socks. Both were only wearing long woolen underwear. One had a pipe hanging out of a corner of his mouth and the other a dribble of brown tobacco juice leaking down a lip. Their hair was matted; noses red and unshaven faces framed sullen expressions. Most of the other men were sharpening axes or playing cards, ignoring the quarrel.

“By first light tomorrow the two of you gonna be pushin’ and pullin’ that saw and forgettin’ all about them silly socks. Am I right?” Magnus continued.

“Sorry Bill,” one of the sawyers apologized.

“That’s alright Fred. Why it’s a dang honor to have your lousy, dirty socks hanging in my face!” said Bill with a smile.

The tension was broken. Walter was realizing that this might be the low point of the season. Yesterday two sawyers had announced they’d “had enough” and were heading out to look for other work. They’d visited the clerk, gotten their pay, and left on a supply sled heading towards Deer River. Two empty bunk spaces reminded the rest of the lumberjacks that they had options.

Walter was helping Tom Mackenzie with a splinter lodged under the nail of his pinky finger. An angry infection had begun, yellow pus swelling under the nail. Using a rag dipped in boiling water, Walter tried to gently squeeze and dab the bad stuff out. The sliver was buried out of sight.

“Yow, EEEyowww!” Tom couldn’t take the pain.

“Had the same trouble myself one winter some ten seasons ago!” Sam Christy was watching. He held up his left hand. Two fingers were missing.

“I can still pick my nose and cut down trees! Doncha’ have no worries!”

From across the bunkhouse Sutton’s voice came clear.

“Every dang blasted year it gets to be mid-winter and the boys go stir crazy! They forget all about last fall when they hadn’t a penny. Spring is too far away to make sense, and they can’t remember what a flower looks like. Beans every day is backin’ up in their bellies and comin’ out their ears!”

Mister Dawson was worried about the defections and came to the bunkhouse to give a speech.

“I guess it’s a free country and you can do what you want. You’ll not find a better Camp in Itasca though! Them boys took a cut in pay for their early cash out. Paid for a ride out on the sled too. Come talk ta’ me fore ya take ta’ leaving. “

Cooke Larson butchered one of the hogs and the next day the crew enjoyed a favorite: roast pork, for dinner. Mister Dawson also announced that there would be a free one-dollar credit in the wanigan for everybody. Walter was in the wanigan trying to decide between maple sugar candy and pipe tobacco. Just then the supply sled pulled up returning from Deer River.

Mister Dawson met the sled and was talking with the teamster. Two new workers had arrived to take the place of the two that had left.

“Clerk! Sign these boys up! These here are two new hands!”

Two more lumberjacks was a good thing.

“Names?” Clerks asked, spectacles on the end of his nose.

“Alfonso Martin,” replied the first.

“Henry Smith,” answered the second.

Walter put down the tobacco and candy on the counter. He retreated into a corner behind the mens’ backs. This was Henry, the dastardly thief with the long knife from last summer at Kohl’s Dime Museum.

Chapter 6

Nose Hair

After a week in the employ of Zumbro Logging Company Camp 37 Henry was showing no signs that he recognized Walter. Without the exhausting labor of working in the woods Walter was sure he'd be having sleepless nights waiting for Henry's revenge. Maybe causing anguished worry was part of Henry's evil plan. Or maybe Henry wanted to sneak up on him with his wicked knife. Or maybe, or maybe ... he should stop this madness and confront Henry himself! Having an enemy was a new experience for Walter.

Walter was trying not to look at Sam Christy's disgusting half-inch long nose hair. He was tending to Tom Mackenzie's bad finger, which had worsened. The infection had turned his hand swollen and red past the wrist, not a good sign. Sam was trying to help but the nose hair was a distraction.

"Let's soak her in some hot salt water. Does she sting?" he asked, after Walter had squeezed some more yellow pus out. Tom grimaced in pain and groaned. He continued working as a swamper but it was getting harder to swing an axe or even tie his own boots.

The lumberjacks all had aches and pains. But, it was considered “soft” to complain and Tom wanted to be tough.

The men were all grizzly brutes with bushy red, black and brown beards. Magnus’s beard was streaked with white and gray. Some had curly hair on their knuckles and sported wild untrimmed eyebrows hanging like ivy from their foreheads. Sam’s beard grew patchy on his pitted face but he made up for it with his nasty nose hair. Most everyone had given up shaving way back in December. Only Patrick Gage kept up appearances and carefully shaved every Sunday with soap, razor and a tin plate borrowed from Cooke that he had polished shiny like a mirror.

Sutton was giving him a ribbing for being so proper.

“Why ya’ young pup! Ya’ can’t grow a beard so what’s the point? How’d ya’ git hired on to cut trees in the north woods anyhow? Did yer Mommy write a note giving permission?”

Unknown to Sutton was the fact that Patrick was an orphan. On his own he had made his way to Minnesota from Ireland at the age of fourteen. In his five years here he’d already worked all over the territory; logging, building railroads and harvesting wheat. A little kidding from a gruff Sutton was easily managed.

“Well yes she did! And she taught me to be nice to ugly fellers like you who otherwise would remain friendless. So ugly you are that as a baby your own Mother fed you from across the room with a slingshot! So ugly that when you were born the doctor spanked your face by mistake and punched your Dad! So ugly that your folks tied a pork chop around your neck so the family dog would play with you! So ugly that ...”

The rest of Patrick's retorts were lost in a torrent of laughter from the rough crowd of lumberjacks sitting around the bunkhouse sharpening axes, playing cards or smoking pipes. Soon Magnus would kill the lamps and another day in Camp 37 would end. Then it would be dark and Walter would not have to look at the hair sprouting sideways out of each of Sam's nostrils.

In the woods a man's beard served an important purpose. Yesterday Walter had snuck a look over Mister Dawson's shoulder at the camp's only thermometer. Thirty below was not cold enough to keep men and horses indoors! The days they had stayed in, well they must have been deadly cold. On such days breath froze to moustaches and beards until all the lumberjacks resembled walking Jack Frosts. In the warmth of the bunkhouse, ice masks melted and men were like wet dogs shaking dry their soaked facial hair. It was so cold that around the lunchtime fire Sutton tossed the dregs of his coffee into the air and poof! it turned into crystals in mid-air. From dusk to dawn men moved around to stay warm like they all had ants in their pants. Cooke Larson had taken to passing out stones warmed on the stove for guys to put in their pockets. That's how cold it was. A full beard protected the face from freezing. For Walter his brown beard hid his face from recognition by Henry Smith, his only enemy in all of Minnesota, or indeed the world.

There was no mistaking squinty-eyed Henry. No longer the city dandy in polka dot suspenders, Henry had shown up in Camp 37 looking like an accidental woodcutter. He had had to purchase all new clothes suitable for outdoor winter work in the woods. That must have cost a couple of weeks of pay. Of all the lumber camps in the north he had to

come to this one. Walter remembered his long knife and the warning to keep quiet. So far he'd kept out of his way.

Henry and his shifty pal Alfonso mostly kept to themselves, bunking together and working as swampers in a section of woods away from Walter and his crew. Lacking experience, several times Sutton had to lecture them on the right way to swing an axe. They did love to play cards and seemed to win often. Some of the men grumbled and the word "card cheat" floated around the bunkhouse. One night during a game of cribbage, several plugs of tobacco had ended up in Alfonso's pouch. Henry had caused a distraction by pretending to drop an axe on his foot and howling with pain. When the card players looked up, Walter saw Alfonso moving his point-counting peg forward. But, the two were sneaky and so far no proof had been found.

Mister Dawson was worried. A few more lumberjacks had taken a cut in pay to move on to other camps or back to their families. It was February and there weren't enough logs on the banks of the Bowstring River waiting to be floated to the railroad and on to the sawmill in Deer River come spring. Camp 37 was behind schedule and that explained why inexperienced lumberjacks like Henry and Alfonso had been hired. To make his quota he would have to pick up the pace.

More workers were needed. Walter and John Saari got sent to the Suomi Hills to ask the community of Finnish homesteaders to send men to Camp 37.

Sutton and Mister Dawson explained it to them.

"We'll pay top dollar, say a dollar fifty a day for good workers. Tell em' the grub's good here, the coffee strong and the bunkhouse stove is always hot. We'll get a sled to

take ya' across Grave Lake and then you'll be halfway. Ski like ya' Finns know how the rest of the way."

A Sunday project for Walter, John and Lempi Lampi had been to craft wooden skis. Using tools in the Wood Butcher's shop they'd cut and shaped smooth cross country skis. The tips were boiled until soft and bent upwards. They rubbed the snow side with old candle wax. Moose hide made bindings that could be tied and nailed to the skis. Skinny saplings were trimmed into ski poles. They had taken to skiing out to the woods in the morning. Walter loved the fresh air and that moment of peace among the tall pines near camp. On Sundays, skiing made for a welcome get away from the close conditions of the bunkhouse. On workdays the skiers were the first back to the bunkhouse enjoying the space to themselves until the others arrived. Skis were a small bit of home and a logical way to get around in deep snow.

Walter and John quickly agreed to go. John wanted to check on his cabin and see his neighbors, and Walter wanted to see if anyone had word of his Uncle Emil.

On the day of the trip the two rose early and had an extra big breakfast. Cooke Larson gave them a big bundle of sandwiches and doughnuts. They climbed into the back of a supply sled and bundled up in blankets.

"Once we get to skiing we'll be warm. Keep moving that's the trick to surviving up here," John observed.

The sled bounced onto Grave Lake just as the sun broke surface in the east. Morning light made tiny rainbows in hanging clouds of the men's frozen breath. The sharp cry of a blue jay cut through the air. Around the lake only a handful of trees had survived the lumberjack attack. In small bays abandoned mound-shaped beaver lodges

pushed through the snow. Ahead a group of ravens and a fox were congregating around a patch of faint red. It was a wolf kill. A deer had been savagely pulled apart. Bones and fur were spread around in a large area. The deer's backbone picked clean, lay in the middle of the kill.

“Careful boys! Don't get eaten!” laughed the teamster as the two got off the sled.

Walter and John looked at each other. They strapped on their skis as the jingling bells of the sled faded away. Expertly the two glided through a frozen swamp. Dry reeds poked through the ice, waving gently in a slight breeze. They had a few miles to go due south using a small chain of lakes as a guide. This was home turf for John.

“We fish here in the summer. Good bass and pike in these shallow lakes. Today is good skiing weather. We should be there by afternoon.”

Between frozen lakes the snow was deeper and the skiing was harder. They took turns breaking trail. The guy behind had it easier skiing in the tracks of the leader. Beads of sweat formed on Walter's body and he opened his coat to let in fresh air. All lumberjacks knew that in the northland a body warm from exercise was good. However, being wet from sweat meant chilling cold creeping in, robbing hard-earned heat. Keep dry, stay warm was the rule. John kept them going at a steady pace, not overdoing it.

Walter thought he heard dogs barking way off in the distance.

“*Rauf, rauf, rauf!*” That was how Walter's dog back in Finland barked. *Miksi* was his name, which in English meant why. Walter would call to him “*miksi, miksi* come here!” “*Siski, siski*, because, because!” his Father would answer, just one of the jokes they shared. Out in the quiet of winter skiing gave you time to think.

The sun high in the sky reflected off the lake and Walter pulled his hat over his eyes to minimize the glare. Woodsmoke. There was no mistaking that smell. Now more clearly the barking of a pack of dogs echoed off the flat lake and between low hills.

John held up his hand. Ahead a figure was lying on the ice. Dead? Sleeping? Drunk? The person was clutching a long pole and peering into a hole. As they approached, suddenly the man jabbed the pole into the water. Seconds later he hauled the pole out end over end. Impaled on the end was a big wriggling fish. Only then did the man acknowledge the skiers. Walter recognized the buffalo coat of Bungo Dan.

“Dan,” John greeted by name.

“John Saari. Getting cold?” Bungo Dan replied. “Come on.”

Dan strung the fish through the gills on a skinny pole along with a few others he had speared. He strapped on his snowshoes and shuffled off in the direction of the barking noise. Walter and John followed. Over a rise were the low cabins Walter had seen last summer with the Hyttinens. Several wild dogs, fortunately tied up, commenced to bare their teeth and howl at Walter and John. Dan cuffed the nearest with a backhand blow. He took off his snowshoes and walked over to a stump next to his woodpile. With a handy axe he chopped the fish in pieces and tossed them to the dogs. John and Walter were immediately forgotten as the dogs feasted wildly.

“Inside. We’ll have some tea.” Dan was a man of few words.

The dark haired woman and three black-eyed kids inside weren’t surprised at having guests. If they were one would never know. The woman was sewing something. She put it down. After his eyes adjusted to the dim light Walter recognized a birch bark basket like the ones he’d seen at the Hyttinen’s place.

“Boozhoo!” John told her in the Ojibway language, “Hello!”

She gave a small smile in return and said something to one of the boys. He ran outside and came back with a handful of pine needles. The woman tossed these into a pot that was already steaming on an old iron stove, leaking smoke. Walter and John sat on a bench with Dan.

“Need work? Dawson is hiring,” John said.

Dan made his eyes say, “no thanks.”

“You’re that fellow that was working on the road crew,” Dan said.

It took Walter a moment to realize that he’d just been talked to.

“Yes. With Mister Dawson.” Maybe the whole time he’d been around this area Dan had been watching him. There was little doubt that in these woods Dan could spy up on anybody he wanted. Or, maybe he’d been in plain sight and had gone unnoticed.

“Dawson. Dawson. That guy still owes me for some trees he cut on my land two years ago. Took some big ones he wasn’t supposed to.”

The woman brought fragrant cups of pine tea. Thirsty, Walter gulped his down. She motioned to the pot and he refilled his cup. John produced the pack with sandwiches and doughnuts from camp. Dan and the woman declined but the kids shared in the doughnuts. Everyone ate and drank in silence. Was Dan the man who had left the offering of tobacco back at the Indian grave the road crew had destroyed? Not three or four miles from here the boom of the dynamite and big cloud of dust would have been noticed. Walter remembered how the mound had lined up with the sun’s east-west path. The view from the top of surrounding giant trees and beautiful marshes had been like a

poem. Dan would know all the events happening in his backyard. Why was he now offering hospitality? Walter was confused.

What was the right thing to say?

Nobody was saying anything. Walter looked at the kids and winked. Nothing. He wiggled his ears and nose at the same time. No reaction. He made a monkey face. Blank stare. Okay, there was no point in being a *hulivili*. These kids weren't going to laugh. Did they ever? John looked at Walter like it was time to go. He got up. Walter got up too. As he did he heard the beans he had for breakfast talking. In the small cabin so did everyone else. The serious face of Dan's youngest daughter changed to sunshine. All the kids started laughing and even Dan's wide face broke into a smile.

"I hope that wasn't the moose meat I sold to you!" he joked.

Outside the dogs were finished eating and once again barked bloody murder. Dan showed the men how to make a pair of sun goggles out of a piece of birch bark. Cut two slits for eyeholes on a strip of birch bark. Tie it around your face to protect the eyes from the sun's glare.

Skis strapped on they gave a wave to Dan and pushed off. The sun goggles helped. Back out in the bright white snow Walter felt his face relax from not squinting.

"We've got about three hour's travel until we reach Suomi," John said.

"Does Dan ever visit your cabin?" asked Walter.

"Yeah, we trade coffee and sugar and other stuff with him for wild rice or game sometimes. He only does it when he has to, I think. Some of the land around here belongs to him. The Zumbro is supposed to pay him for trees they cut."

Walter thought about Mister Dawson and how he tried to save every penny possible. Was he honest with Dan? If not, what could Dan do about it?

Back into a skiing rhythm, Walter got to daydreaming. He was helping his Mother in the garden. The family had depended on the vegetables they raised. They built fences to keep out rabbits that loved to eat the carrots and other food. When all the plants were thriving and flowers blooming, the garden had been a pleasant place. Really, all of Itasca was like a garden for Dan. Wild rice and maple sugar were like carrots and potatoes. Wild game and fish were fruits to be picked. The stately pine trees and clear lakes were certainly beautiful. As Walter saw it the rabbits going for his Mother's garden were just trying to live and didn't know any better. Who could blame them? The lumberjacks of Camp 37 needed jobs. People all over America needed white pine boards to build homes. The pine trees of Itasca were like carrots. Dan and his people would need a very big fence to keep out all the rabbits.

Through the afternoon they skied not too fast, not too slow.

Now they were in a cutover zone and among the outlines of flat places marked where hay fields might lie under the snow. No tall pines remained. Bunches of birch and poplar saplings poked up here and there like weedy trespassers in the former kingdom of the ancient trees. Walter knew that big stumps hid under a blanket of white. Then, ahead a small tight cabin appeared. The corners were joined together in perfect hand cut diagonal notches.

“That's the Niemi place. We'll stop here. Victor Niemi is a leader of this community and maybe he'll help us convince the others.”

Earlier, John had explained that the homesteaders of Suomi all worked together. If they ordered supplies together from the merchants in Deer River they could bargain a better price than just one family alone. When they sold their cheese and milk they joined together instead of each family competing against each other. That way they could get a higher price. Victor Niemi often represented the group when they bought or sold goods.

“Us *omanpaikkasia*, us from the old country, gotta stick together to make it work. Itasca is a hard place to make it alone.”

They'd been noticed because a squat woman, not so old, opened the painted blue door and waved them in. Soon Walter was seated at a pine table with a clean tablecloth, slurping coffee out of a saucer through a sugar cube between his teeth. A beaming Esther Niemi, pleased to have company, and her reserved husband Victor listened to John explain the mission.

“The Zumbro needs workers. Dawson is plenty worried that he won't get all his trees out this season. He wants the fellows here to work through March and he's offering a dollar fifty a day.”

“A dollar fifty? That's good but it's not great. Sure we need the money. Maybe we can talk him up a bit,” said Victor.

“The more of us go then the more power we'll have.”

Esther and Victor didn't know Uncle Emil.

“Ask around. Some of the boys here have worked all over Minnesota. Maybe one of them has crossed his path,” Victor said.

Victor agreed to go with them tomorrow to visit some of the nearby homesteads.

That night Walter enjoyed a sauna with Victor and John. The heat was a blessing after a long day of skiing. Ladles of water tossed on hot rocks sent up a cloud of steam, making his blood pound and warming him to his bones. Thoroughly cooked, the men ran outside and rolled in the refreshing snow.

Later, a day of outdoors travel and the relaxing sauna made the floor of the Niemi cabin seem like a featherbed.

Walter and John spent the following day visiting all the homesteads of the Suomi Hills. The hills were small with little lakes in the valleys. Tiny hay fields were planted in flat places although most crops were planted on the level region to the west of the hills. In that area it was like a giant plow moving southeast had flattened the ground for miles, leaving piles of earth where it stopped. These piles became the Suomi Hills. Most cabins were on the eastern slope of a hill sheltered from the west wind. All were neat, well-ordered places, scrubbed clean if a married couple lived in one and at least homey if a bachelor was the owner. In the bachelor cabins there was always a deck of cards handy and Walter showed off his prowess at cribbage.

“New competition eh!” a wiry Finn named Arvid exclaimed. Arvid lived in a tiny square cabin decorated with beaver skins.

“Yeah he’s a winner at cards and real popular with the ladies too!” John kidded.

The second part didn’t make much sense to Walter because the only available girl for miles around was Selma Hyttinen. But, he supposed, a cabin would be a much friendlier place with a nice wife whose feet you could rub on a cold winter’s night and

who would cook and clean. Maybe that was why John worked so hard on his plan to wed his Mary and bring her up to Suomi.

Arvid however, did know of Uncle Emil.

“Sure ole Emil and I pulled a cross saw together for a time working for the Itasca Lumber Company. We was in a camp south of big lake Winny. Good worker. I guess it was two seasons ago. He went out to work in Dakota territory that spring. He talked about joining us in Suomi. Far as I know he’s still wandering from job to job, season to season.”

Walter was disappointed but pleased that Emil was leaving a trail of good will wherever he went. Everyone spoke well of him. How good it would be to see him instead of chasing his ghost! At least for now the folks in Suomi were making him feel like he belonged.

Many of the homesteaders had a small dairy operation going. The visitors helped to haul water from holes chopped in lake ice and to tote bundles of hay to feed cows. Everyone they saw offered them homemade cheese, bread and butter and served coffee. One fellow named Pentii had a talent for carving wooden spoons. There were maybe a hundred around the cabin. So many spoons answered the question of what a Finnish bachelor did on cold winter nights.

At John’s place the windows were boarded up tight and the door nailed shut. His cow and horse were staying in a neighbor’s barn in return for help in the fields next spring. All in all a decent life had begun here, no Czar forcing men into the army, no boss to cheat workers on their pay, no train to hop across the territory in hope of work, no one

to say what chores had to done. *Oma tupa oma lupa!* One's own cabin, one's own freedom!

Still, it was living on the edge, farming scraggly potatoes around massive pine stumps and digging out by hand the countless rocks that choked the fields. Everyone could use extra money. By the end of the day, ten men and boys had agreed to finish up the winter swinging axes and pulling saws for the Zumbro Logging Company.

It was evening when Walter and John made their way back to the Niemi place along with three others who wanted to make an early start. All had skis that were the standard winter travel equipment for Minnesota Finns. Esther was glad for the diversion and had roasted a haunch of venison and boiled some potatoes. Community and the chance to visit and help one another made life easier for the Suomi settlers. As they ate they reviewed their approach for dealing with Mister Dawson.

"Remember that we cooperate," reminded Victor. "If we stick together a better wage can be had."

"What if he won't pay?" asked John.

Walter was wondering the same thing. The Zumbro was something he felt a part of and here he was plotting against it. A swamper's wage was only a dollar a day. Well, maybe he could be a part of something bigger, get a raise and still work hard for Mister Dawson!

"Then we turn around and come home. He'll pay more because we're worth more. We've got *sisu*, guts, that he can't fail to see. Maybe Camp 37 land might make someone a fine homestead next year. We can look around while we're there."

The next day the party enjoyed more good weather. Following the ski trail left by Walter and John, the return trip was faster. They stopped only once to build a small fire and brew a tin pot of tea

Arriving just at the end of dinner the five walked in on a rare happening. Mister Dawson was having a meeting in the mess hall. All the men had their eyes on him as he spoke. Even Cooke Larson and his helpers were waiting patiently to clear the dirty dishes, something they usually did in a hurry.

“We’ve got to be safe out there boys,” Mister Dawson lectured. “As you all know we’re a long way from town, at least two days travel in good weather. There ain’t no hospital nearby, no Doc, no help, no nothing. There’s seven more weeks or so of good snow for sledding big logs. Let’s push to get all the trees out of the woods. Not a jack in this room, including me, gets a payday until we clear out the lumber and get it to the river. So watch where ya’ swing an axe and be mindful of what a sharp saw can do to an arm or leg.”

There were no questions, except for the one Walter had. What had happened? The meeting over, everyone got up and a low buzz of serious talk filled the room. Heads were shaking back and forth and a couple of men were wiping their eyes with the back of their hands.

Patrick approached and put his arm on Walter’s shoulder.

“Tom didn’t make it,” he said.

“Didn’t make it? What do you mean?”

“After you left the infection went up his arm and through his body. He was sick with fever and shaking. This morning he passed when we were all out in the woods.”

Tom was dead! The splinter under his fingernail got infected and had caused blood poisoning. Bad blood had spread to his heart. Nothing could be done. Walter was in shock.

John Saari was introducing the new men to Mister Dawson. Cooke Larson put together a supper for them. Although Walter was wiped out and starving from a day of exercise, he had lost his appetite and sat quietly while the others ate. This couldn't be. People didn't die from splinters. What part of whose plan was this supposed to be?

He sat apart from the others. Cooke Larson, who normally chased guys out of the mess hall, left him alone.

A red wave passed through him like all the blood in his body was trying to get out. His face got hot. This was not right. This was not fair! Walter slammed his fist on the table over and over, the pain in his hand a welcome release. He needed more. Without his coat he strode out the door over to the blacksmith's cabin. Without knocking he entered, seizing the biggest double-edged axe he could find.

"Hey! Put that back!" the smith commanded.

Walter ignored him. Right through the middle of camp, down the Hard Road he marched, intent on his purpose. At the edge of camp was a grove of red pines. The nearest were always the last to be cut. Pushing into hip-deep snow he approached the biggest.

Whack! He hammered it with all his might, blasting a deep notch into the trunk. Whack! Whack! He laid into the tree all the feeling he had. Snow got into his boots and the wetness felt good. Cold nighttime air was a tonic for his heat. The sweat he worked up quickly froze onto his thin shirt.

A hand on his shoulder made him turn wildly, brandishing his axe like a weapon.

“Me too Mack. I’m damn mad about it too! Move over.” Patrick was by his side with an axe of his own.

Together the two friends punished the tree, taking turns with perfectly timed swings. The sound rang through the camp. Sutton and Mister Dawson came out to watch. Mister Dawson stepped forward to stop them. Sutton grabbed his arm.

“YAAAHHHH!” screamed Walter with all his might.

It was dumb luck that the tree was on a slope. Patrick jumped back but Walter stood his ground when the pine fell. Its trunk swept upwards, jagged shards of wood sticking out that barely missed Walter’s chest. The big tree bounced away from him. For a moment he was lost in a moonlit cloud of scattered snow. Spent and covered in white he turned back to camp. Watchers and cutters alike, all the men headed back down Hard Road. Tomorrow was a workday.

Nobody seemed to know where Tom was from. He had been Irish, Patrick knew that much. He had been about Walter’s age. He’d never received or written a letter and hadn’t arrived in camp with any friends. Probably he’d come to Camp 37 from an employment agency like the one in Minneapolis where Walter had been hired last summer. A likeable fellow, didn’t say much, worked hard in the woods. That was as much as anyone knew. His body was resting, wrapped in a sheet, in the root cellar where Cooke Larson kept the potatoes and rutabagas. Spring would have to get here before the ground was soft enough to dig a grave.

Sutton was trying to cheer Walter up. They were sitting on the deacon seat, the bench that ran all around both sides of the bunkhouse. Somehow Walter thought that things would be different with Tom dead. But, all the lumberjacks were smoking pipes, sharpening tools and playing cribbage just like always. Stinky wool socks were hanging everywhere. Smelly unwashed bodies turned the air into a filthy soup that Walter had gotten used to.

“Mack, my boy every dang season we lose a guy or two to the woods. The woods’ll get you. When we can, Tom’ll have a proper Christian burial in a fine cemetery in Deer River. Mister Dawson means to send him on the next supply sled heading out. Why next spring ya’ can visit him and pay yer respects.”

Sutton meant well but Walter stayed feeling numb. People all over this land were building homes, building new lives really, with the pinewood that the crew was harvesting. Was this Tom’s contribution to the world, his reason for living? In this cause did Tom have to go?

Walter imagined a family in a good wooden home. A little girl was sitting on her Father’s lap listening to a story. The Mother was making dinner. A cheerful fire crackled in the hearth. There were neat curtains on the windows and fresh flowers on the table. Home. Such happiness was the goal of all men he supposed. Countless workers were cutting the trees, digging in the mines and harvesting the wheat to make this happiness real for others. From place to place, season to season, they roamed the territory like an army, a human engine developing the land. It was easy to get lost or disappear in the annual migrations. Is that what had happened to Uncle Emil? Had he ended up like Tom?

If cutting wood to build happy homes was the cause then Camp 37 was surely on a quest to make it happen. Since the Suomi Finns arrived, trees were falling faster than ever. For once the loaders and teamsters who hauled the cut sections of tree trunks out to the riverbank couldn't keep up. All the others caught wind of the *sisu*, the spirit of the Suomi men and doubled their efforts. With axes banging on branches, saws singing through the pine, why by god Camp 37 was gonna make its quota if the newly energized lumberjacks had anything to do with it! Even Bill and Fred, known as the laziest workers in camp, were picking up the pace. Usually the first in line for lunchtime beans and the last to head back to work, yesterday they'd been called three times to eat.

“What, I say what, are them guys putting in their coffee?” Sam Christy wanted to know about the Finnish workers.

Mister Dawson was pleased. For once he had lumberjacks who didn't shirk hard work and shamed the others into trying harder. Come spring he'd be able to make a good report to his bosses, the owners of the Zumbro Logging Company. A mountain of logs would be floated out to the railroad and onto the sawmill. He'd make his quota and maybe earn a bonus. These were his thoughts when on a Sunday all the Finns came to see him in the wanigan. He was pouring over a sheet of figures with Clerk.

The visitors did not remove their hats.

Victor Niemi spoke for the group.

“Good day Mister Dawson.”

“Fellows. What's on yer mind?”

“Are you happy with our logging then Mister Dawson?”

Mister Dawson leaned closer and cocked his head to better understand Victor's thickly accented English.

“Well yes I'd say yer showing the rest how it's done I suppose. I'm mighty grateful ya' came to camp.” Mister Dawson knew something was up. In the week since his new labor force had arrived the camp had made tremendous progress. This momentum must be maintained before spring arrived and logging season finished.

The two men stared each other down and Walter was reminded of a card game where neither player wanted to show his hand. Unbalanced, Mister Dawson began blinking his eyes, brain working fast, trying to guess what his workers wanted.

“Its like this, Dawson,” said Victor dropping, the Mister part of his name. “One dollar fifty a day is not enough. We need two a day if you want us to stay.”

Mister Dawson was dumbfounded. For a moment his jaw worked up and down but no words came out. Then he found his voice.

“One fifty for sawyers and undercutters is standard in every camp in the northland! I can't do it!”

Victor and Mister Dawson locked eyes, neither willing to flinch.

Then Victor turned to his friends and neighbors speaking in Finnish.

“Let's call his bluff. Everybody, let's go and start getting your skis ready to get out of here!”

To Mister Dawson Victor said, “Well sir, the men it turns out miss their cabins and their fresh milk. We've worked a week so we'll be taking a week's pay and going home. Please have Clerk prepare our money while we get our belongings.”

All the Finns began leaving the wanigan. Mister Dawson stood there with his mouth open. His bonus, his bonus! In his mind gold coins were slipping through his fingers.

“Wait! Ok, you’re the leader right?” he said to Victor. “Let’s have some coffee.”

Victor turned to his men. “Get your skis on,” he instructed and followed Mister Dawson inside.

Nobody was telling Walter what to do. Should he leave with the Suomi Finns? If he stayed, the Finns left and nobody got a raise, would Mister Dawson take revenge?

Miserable, he waited outside making himself small. Mister Dawson had been good to him. But his *omanpaikkasia*, his countrymen, he had to stand with them. Was he ever going to be an American?

Soon John Saari and the rest of the Finns came back with skis on and ready to go. As one they regarded Walter with an unspoken question. Time dragged on. Lempi Lampi began bouncing up and down in his skis to stay warm.

Then a happy looking Victor came back out.

“Two dollars a day it is! And, one fifty a day for the swampers!” he said looking at Walter and raising an eyebrow at his lack of skis.

A raise! It was the middle of February. Logging would continue for another few weeks as long as the snow was good for hauling and the lakes and rivers stayed frozen. What then? At least he would have a stake for his next adventure. But right now he felt shame at not fully standing behind his friends.

As if he was reading his thoughts Victor turned to Walter.

“Relax Walter Myllamaki. We know you don’t have a homestead to go back to. Maybe this raise will help you get one. What are your plans then, young man? You know the Zumbro will abandon this camp next spring. Might be a good place to settle...”

On Sunday, around the laundry boil-up pot, the daring action of the Finns was the talk of the camp.

“Dawson’ll get his quota now, that’s for sure.” Sutton as usual had an opinion. “He had all them shorthanded days when he wasn’t paying a full camp. The raise he gave the Finns ain’t gonna make a difference to the almighty Zumbro. Any savings he was counting on for a bonus for his ownself ... forget it! Course all them fellas that made the walkout threat, well they’ll not be Zumbro loggers next season. Sure as the rain will fall they’ll be on a list: Do Not Rehire! This here’s a special case ya’ know!”

In fact none of the other loggers had stepped forward to demand a raise. Unorganized and timid they’d been used to the company taking care of them for so long that demanding more seemed “ungrateful.” With the frozen body of Tom Mackenzie resting among the potatoes in the root cellar Walter had to wonder what they were thinking.

A tension could be felt in the bunkhouse that night so Magnus organized a cribbage tournament for entertainment. The rest of the camp was learning that not only did the Finns have *sisu* they were fine card players too. Lempi Lampi and Arvid were playing for the championship. Henry and Alfonso, sullen at having lost, were lounging by the stove scratching their rear ends.

“Hey Mack and you too Axel!” called out Magnus, “Show us some of that axe throwing!”

Magnus set up the target. Lumberjacks began betting on who could hit the target the most out of ten throws. Axel went first. All were quiet as he aimed. The bunkhouse roared as the axe left his hand. “Yeah!” was the cry if they bet on him and he hit the bulls-eye and “Aww No!” if he missed. Axel scored four out of five throws. Walter stepped up. The scoundrel Henry for the first time was taking notice of Walter. Henry had bet against him. Each time Walter made his cast Henry let out a loud cough. Walter couldn’t focus. He missed his first two throws finishing three for five.

“Hey ya’ cheat! Next time let him throw, no distractions, get me?” Sam Christy had bet on Walter and was peeved with Henry.

Axel hit the target four out of five of his last throws. Walter stepped up. Again Henry made with the coughing noise giving a “Who me?” innocent look when Walter missed. Sam was steaming. Walter again hit three out of five again. Axel had won but was a good sport about it, clapping Walter on the back.

“Shoor aye joost beet ja! But, aye canna do this!” Axel tried to balance the axe on his chin.

Bets were paid off across the bunkhouse, a resentful Sam paying Henry a plug of pipe tobacco. Magnus called to Walter.

“Mack be a good fella and show us some of that balancing!”

“Mack! Mack! Mack! Mack!” a few men began pounding on the deacon seat clamoring for more entertainment.

Walter hesitated. If he balanced the axe, Henry would guess his identity. Suddenly he didn't care. He'd won a raise today. He was surrounded by friends. He had a right to balance! Borrowing a long-handled double-bladed axe he expertly balanced it on his chin to the cheers of the bunkhouse crew.

Henry had him pegged and as Walter brought the axe down Henry rushed him.

"You're that Finn that got me fired back in the city! I thought you looked familiar. I warned you! Remember this?" Henry hissed.

He pulled out his long knife. He swung the blade wildly, cutting the air with a "whoosh, whoosh" sound. Walter retreated, holding the axe handle like a shield. All activity in the bunkhouse stopped. Everyone was frozen with surprise at the sudden violence. Whoosh! The knife nicked Walter across his knuckles and he dropped the axe. He looked up at the knife descending towards him, slow-motion like.

It was not to be. Henry the card cheat and hapless logger had never been a camp favorite. It was Frankie who leaped into action, literally, over the woodstove like an acrobat, grabbing Henry's arm and twisting it backwards. Down went Walter's attacker Frankie's knee driving into his side. Then the long knife was in Frankie's hand and he was pressing it into Henry's gut.

"Dog! Damn dog! Want to play with blades do ya'! I'll cut ya' like the dog you are! Think you can hurt my friend!"

It was the end for Henry. Walter crawled backwards like a crab, not believing this was happening.

"Don't do it boy. It ain't worth it. Look at me!" Sam's soft voice cut through the shocked stillness of the bunkhouse. He knelt next to Frankie. "Ya' don't want to be like

me. See his face,” Sam said, pointing at Henry. “If ya’ kill him that’s the face you’ll see in your dreams for the rest of your life. Yeah he’s worthless. But you ain’t. Everyday I think about the men, right or wrong, I’ve put six feet under. That’s why I’m messed up. Don’t be like me ...”

Warily Sam put out his hand. Slowly Frankie got control of his breathing. Sparing Henry’s life he handed the knife handle first to Sam.

The curtain came down on this act, on this night in Camp 37, with the men standing in a silent circle.

Chapter 7

Clerk Explains

Clerk was pointing to the western sky where dark clouds were forming on the horizon.

“See it like this.” He made a snowball and covered it with his hand. “The snowball is the planet. My hand is the sky. The planet turns towards to the east and here in Minnesota, generally speaking that is, the wind, rain and snow comes from the west. The

storm rushes to us and we turn away. But, the storm will catch up and it looks like snow later.”

As a simulation he made the snowball turn inside his hand. Clerk was a college boy who had gone to the University in Minneapolis. He was here working in Camp 37 to save money for school and “see a bit of life” as he put it.

Walter pointed to a big round out of place looking rock.

“What about that boulder? Who left that there?”

Clerk took off his hat and scratched his head. He did this three times and then stood on one foot for a minute. A blister on his left big toe from the skiing lessons Walter was giving him was a bother.

“Well. Hmmmmm. From ... what ... I ... gather this is a rock left behind from a period thousands of years ago. The world got cold. Ice cold. The continent was covered with huge sheets of ice that pushed everything around like the snowplow on the icer sled. The ground got scraped clean and rocks like this got tossed around like grains of sand and polished smooth. When the ice finally melted Mr. Rock got left behind. The hills behind us are piles of gravel pushed together by the glacier. There were even rivers under the ice.”

The two were standing on the long snaky ridge that led to swampland and on to the Bowstring River.

“Imagine that this ridge was upside down. Can you see a riverbed? This ridge is an esker. It is all that is left of a river that ran through the ice carrying loads of rocks and gravel.”

It was true enough that at the foot of the ridge Clerk called an esker, smooth river stones poked out of the ground. Walter thought about the deep parallel scratches that could be found in smooth rock surfaces all around Camp 37.

Clerk was on a roll. He cleared his throat.

“Harrumph. Well. HmMMMM. Now then. Of course that’s the theory and the evidence is for all to see. Consider that round hill in the distance. Geologists refer to those as kames. A kame is a...”

Whap! A snowball hit Clerk. Lempi Lampi was grinning like an idiot which made both his eyes point towards the tip of his long nose

“Of course Darwin’s theory of evolution that explains how we evolved from primates doesn’t explain Lempi over there.”

On a Sunday when there was time to ski and mess around Walter couldn’t let go of his dream he’d been having. He was flying and the world turned to meet him below. Over the Hyttinen place, over a secret den where he knew a bear to be sleeping, south over the city, east even to the Atlantic Ocean where the dim profile of Europe was a hint in the distance, his mind’s eye soared. To the west a strong wind blocked his way. The unknown flatlands and wheat farms where his Uncle Emil might be lay to the west.

He’d tried asking Clerk about this part of the territory and got instead a weather prediction of the storm that was heading their way. Oh well. Walter was only catching about half of what he said in his “book lernin English” as Sutton put it, talking about Clerk.

Mister Dawson had sent them down to the river to check on the logs. By the Bowstring River waited small mountains of white pine timber. In a few short weeks it

would be floated out to the railway, each log stamped with a Z in a circle, the brand of the Zumbro Logging Company.

“All the dang eggs are in one safe basket! Where would them logs go? Every season Dawson gets into a tizzy thinking ‘bout the pay off.” Sutton was asking them to go and threw in his opinion as usual.

Seeing the loads of wood it was clear that it wasn’t going anywhere until the ice broke and the log drive began. But Walter knew where they had been. The church, the temple, the cool, still ancient pinewoods he saw last summer had been destroyed. Only a few scattered stands of white pine remained. The area around Camp 37 and Northstar Lake was almost totally denuded of old growth trees. His own hands had helped. In a few weeks he’d have a big roll of cash, green like the trees.

This spring Patrick was talking about heading west. To where? What west? Walter didn’t know enough to say.

Henry Smith was gone. Mister Dawson had sent him and Alfonso packing not even offering a sleigh ride out of camp. The quick episode of violence in which Walter and then Henry had almost lost their lives would be forever etched in Walter’s brain. Now he was among friends, not just his *omanpaikkasia*, his countrymen, but Sutton, Patrick, Frankie and the others.

That lily livered snake

That mean card cheat

We tossed him in the lake

And chopped off his feet

He walked on his hands

Escaped with his life

But the devil he demands

His soul sacrifice!

Henry would be remembered in Patrick's new song.

Last night after the Saturday talent show Walter had asked old Magnus about the west.

“Ya’ mean no-tree land. Ain’t no middle ground in the Dakotas my boy! It’s one or the other. Summer its hunnert and ten in the shade and forty below in winter. I had a place in the Big Stone Lake region ‘fore the railroad came even. I suppose it some twenty-five years since I lost it. My family too. That empty place’ll swallow you up.”

Magnus paused thinking of long ago faces and places.

“Green chicken poop and green eggs! I guess it was about 1872, late summer that the hoppers came. I had me twenty or so acres of golden wheat, forty bushels to an acre and wheat was a dollar a bushel. Do the math. We was on the road to pro-spare-ah-tee! Harvest was maybe a week away. Them grains of wheat were fat and golden. The fields looked like endless yaller fur. We lived in a new pine house. I bought the lumber on credit against the wheat harvest. That summer the heat made sticky pinesap leak from that sweet-smelling wood. One day a cloud came out of the west. Not a rain cloud. Slow-like it came. Right over our place it stopped and ‘fore we knew it grasshoppers was falling like hailstones. A buzzing like you never heard commenced. Ya’ had to yell in the ear order to be heard. My little one, my Lisa, crunched hoppers underfoot running for the house. They flew into her poor little mouth and up her nose.”

Magnus made a disgusted, sad face. Any tears he once had were long gone but the pictures in his head remained.

“Well they ate everything. All the wheat, the vegetable garden, wild plums from the trees by the creek, even the clothes hanging on the line that we didn’t have time to save, they ate it all. Think of a hungry, hundred mile wide blanket covering the ground. It was like that. My wife Katy and I lit hay fires out in the fields hoping the smoke would stop ‘em. No use. Chickens now, the chickens ate them critters like popcorn. If only we’d had a million chickens! I remember the grasshopper-smelling green poop they let. And the eggs they lay were nasty and green. Inedible. Them eggs were needed and without much to eat we had to kill chickens. But, the meat on them birds was evil and green too.

Inedible! In a couple of days we went from boom to bust. One or the other out on the prairie. Now our new fine pine house was as of yet unpaid for. I was countin’ on all that wheat and the money it would bring. What could I do ‘cept put on my walking shoes and look for a job? I kissed my wife and daughter goodbye, we prayed for the best, and off I went. I walked almost clear to Wisconsin looking for work. The land was full of men on the move but finally I got hired on as a farmhand. I sent Katy a letter with money when I could. In late November I walked back with what I’d earned.”

“So what happened? Was your family alright?” Fred asked.

Several men had come over to hear Magnus’s story. Magnus was looking a bit bleary-eyed behind his grey beard. Walter flashed on what he must have looked like on the November night when he returned home. Younger and stronger but, tired and cold. And worried, wondering what he’d find.

“They were gone,” He replied, accenting the “they.” “Gone back to Ohio I suppose. Didn’t even leave a note.”

“What about your new house?”

“I burned it down. Then I left that place and found work cutting trees up north. That’s been my life since. ’Course plenty of others well the hoppers passed ‘em right over. I imagine one of my more stubborn neighbors laid claim to my property. Some are rich men now. There’s preachers say that men are sinners and the hoppers came as some kind of punishment. That’s hooey. We never did one thing wrong to be ruined like that. Men plant wheat. Grasshoppers eat it, each doing what they’re supposed to.”

In the winter bunkhouse wisdom had a way of coming in stories. Over in Bungo Dan’s cabin he must be telling his kids a story. Walter’s father had done the same reading from the Finnish book the *Kalevala* that explained how the world came to be. People in cold places everywhere must save wintertime for storytelling.

Fred had one too.

Bean pole thin Fred considered his wool long underwear to be proper bunkhouse attire. He’d been warming his feet by the stove and sharpening his big knife. He held up his bare gnarly left foot for everyone to admire. Only one of five toes, the big one, remained.

“I parted company with four of my little piggies in South Dakota back in ’82.”

“That’s why he walks so darn funny! Heh, heh, heh!” laughed Fred’s constant companion Bill. The two seemed to do everything together.

“Bill? Whose story is it?” Fred asked.

“Yours Fred. Its yours,” Bill said, dropping his silly grin.

Fred cleared his throat. A gob of spittle escaped his mouth and ran down his chin. He wiped it off with the sleeve of his wool longjohns.

“Out thar’ on the great prairie ain’t nothing to stop the cold wind blowin’ straight down from Saint Nick’s backyard but a couple of barb wire fences. The wind can blow in every direction at once. I’ve seen a V of twenty geese floating in one spot on account of four directions blowing at the same time. Yes I have. Now when a blizzard blows on the flatlands an entire house can get buried up to the second story. Well some winters we lived like gophers tunneling through the snow to git to the barn and poking air holes so we could breathe.”

“That there is a dang fact,” added Bill. “I seen it too.”

The power of that memory distracted Fred from the rest of his story.

“Yer toes Fred?” reminded Sutton.

“Oh yes. The digits of my lower left appendage.” Fred wanted to make full use of his audience and felt he could best do so with the biggest words he knew.

“When a real rip-roaring Dakota blizzard blows the snow flies sideways and will lift a man off his feet. Now one farm where I worked as the handy man ...”

“Handy man? Well that’d be half right!” interrupted Sutton.

“Harrumph! Handy man is ko-RECT! Well in one blizzard I had to get out to the barn from the bunkhouse in order to feed the horses and oxen. Ya’ could not see to the end of your arm in the blizzard. So we tied a rope from the bunkhouse to the barn and held on to that. Let go of the lifeline and you’d be lost not ten yards from shelter.

Anyhoo on that per-ticular day I followed the line to the barn and found the barn door blown open. Or maybe Bill,” Fred shot Bill an accusing look, “left it open being as how

he is known for doing stupid things being a man of little brain who might drown with his ugly noggin' in a lake 'cause he fergets to stop drinking and...'

"Yer toes Fred? reminded Sutton.

"Yes. Indeed. So the door was open and an ox, an equally dumb animal, had escaped. I could just make out his tracks and figured I'd find him and lead him back following the same tracks. Fortunately I soon found the poor beast. Grasping his nose ring I turned to git back to the safety of the barn. Well the tracks had gotten filled in with blowing snow. Having no idea in which direction the barn lay, that ox and I struggled around in circles to the point of exhaustion. I began to freeze and knew that I wouldn't make it alive through the night in such hellish cold. There was only one choice. A man in this territory needs ta' keep a sharp knife at the ready."

Fred produced his hunting knife and displayed it to his listeners.

"With this very same blade, painlessly and quickly as possible, I cut that beast's throat. His red life-blood gushed out hot and steamy. When he'd drawn his last breath, I cut him open neck to belly. For my own dear life I dragged out his heart and stomach with no mind to the stinky gore that covered me head to foot. Then ole Fred climbed up inside of his warm body and I had me a snug shelter out of the blowing snow. Inside that ox I passed the night. The very next day Bill discovered me. The blizzard had passed to the east and cold clear sunshine took its place. Unfortunately I was now frozen inside a dead ox! I screamed! I screamed for my life! Only the ox's head poked out of the snow. Get me out of here, I screamed! This very same Bill yer looking at, Bill answered my call with these immortal words: "I found the ox! He ain't dead! He's a-talking to me!"

Fred gave Bill a well-practiced look. This was a story with legs.

“Yer toes Fred?” reminded Sutton.

“Well the only part of me that didn’t fit in the cavity of the dead ox was my left foot. My toes froze. We cut ‘em off.”

Fred had run out of story. He beamed at his listeners, basking in the lumberjack’s ragged laughter.

“Just another shining example of bone head behavior by butt-head Bill. However I’m eternally grateful to him for cutting me out of that dead ox,” Fred said in conclusion.

“Am I correct in understanding that you had the toes on your left foot surgically amputated in a medical procedure?” Clerk asked.

Clerk liked to visit the bunkhouse on Saturday nights to play cribbage and to get away from the non-talkative Mister Dawson over in the wanigan where they bunked together.

“No they was cut off. With an axe, real quick like,” said Fred.

Clerk opened his mouth to instruct Fred on his choice of words and then reconsidered.

“I’ve been out west,” Clerk told the group. “The profundity of grain produced in this fertile region is certainly a natural wonder.”

The lumberjacks looked at him blankly.

“Ain’t it a dang marvel how much wheat them farmers grow?” Clerk rephrased and was rewarded with bearded faces nodding up and down in agreement.

“Why one only has to drop a seed on the ground and watch it grow. Barring of course fires, drought or grasshoppers. Many men have come to the prairie and seem to think themselves quite worthy and deserving of their success. The truth lies in geologic

history of course. After the great ice age wild grasses were best suited to take root on the barren ground scraped clean by the massive ice sheets. Over time, thousands of years that is, decomposing grasses and plants have built up a rich layer of loam. This rich, dark topsoil provides nutrients to make the wheat grow so readily. I wonder if the lucky wheat farmers ever give pause to reflect on the natural conditions leading to their good fortune?"

Bill was staring at Clerk.

"Now Clerk whatever ya' just said sounded good. Sure that's some rich dirt in the Dakotas. But, after we cut off Fred's frozen toes why we saved 'em until spring. Then we planted them toes with high hopes of growing him some new ones. They never did come up, they never did," He said shaking his head. "Explain that Mister Yoo-nee-ver-si-tee!"

Fred gave the back of Bill's head a slap.

"Check yer brain to mouth connection before ya' open yer cake hole woodja fer once please! Who ever heard of a dang toe tree?"

Bill stuck out his lower lip. His feelings were hurt.

Sutton passed around his pouch of pipe tobacco. Everyone had a smoke. Fred yanked a hair out of his beard to split on the edge of his life-saving knife. Magnus got up to put more wood on the stove. Sam Christy joined the group. He seemed to be walking a little taller since the night he saved Henry Smith's life.

"What's the topic fellers?" he wanted to know. Good yarn spinning could attract a crowd.

“Young Walter Mack here is considering working out in the western wheat fields this summer and seeks our counsel as to the conditions of the terrain,” Clerk informed him.

Sam stared at Clerk.

“What’s it like out in Dakota, Sam? Mack might be journeying there come summer,” Sutton translated.

Sam rubbed his chin, considering.

“Well I did once see a hairy river.”

“A hairy river? What kind of bull feathers is that?” Sutton demanded.

“Jest as I said. A hairy river. The hosses couldn’t drink and was spooked and wouldn’t cross until I shaved it.”

This caused a general uproar. Stretching the truth was normal among lumberjacks, but shaving a hairy river?

“It’s the god’s truth. Hush up and I’ll ‘splain to ya’.” Sam held up his hand for silence.

“Well in North Dakota, I suppose it’s some thirty years now, ole Sam drove a supply wagon for some fellers what were mapping out the best route for a railroad. There was already a settlement where Fargo, North Dakota is today. Big wheat town. The railroad was heading west from there. Back then the land had not been cut by the plow and on this pleasant spring day, flowers and wild grass were at eye-level to my hoss. I can still smell the sweet flowers in the breeze! I made a lovely flower necklace for my mount without getting out of the saddle.”

Walter looked at the battle-scarred Sam Christy in a new light. Sam the flower boy!

“What color were these bee-a-yoo-ti-ful flowers?” asked Sutton, grinning.

“Weeeelll, there was yaller and gold like the sun and purple and orange like a butterfly’s wings and ...” Sam noticed the lumberjacks snickering at him. The old Sam would have been ready to fight but this Sam just smiled and continued his story.

“To the south I’d been noticing a dust cloud, miles away it was. Not from a storm or wind. My hoss noticed it too. The wind smelled of beasts. Lots of beasts. My track crossed the Sheyenne River, that’s a north-flowing river, a feller once told me it drained into the Red and eventually into Hudson Bay way up in Canada. When I arrived at the ford the horses balked, wouldn’t go forward no matter what po-lite language I used! For the river was choked, was covered with a thick layer of brown fur. That’s right fur. Hair. Off an animal’s back. It was on the water, in the air, plain everywhere! The dangest thing I ever saw that will never be seen again! For you see a few miles to the south an eenormous herd of bison had crossed the river. Tens of thousands. And each and every one stopped to scratch their hairy backs on the rocks and big cottonwood trees on the riverbank. The river was clogged with their hair. I cut me a leafy branch and on foot led the wagon into the waist deep water. Scraping the hair out off in front of the wagon was the only way I could get that horse to cross. I shaved that river. I surely did!”

Like a jury, Sam’s audience thought about his story, trying to decide if he was guilty of lying. Magnus came to his defense.

“When I was scouting a place for my homestead I ranged into South Dakota. There was a herd of buffalo that took two days to ride through. No worries about supper! We’d just shoot a fat one and roast us a delicious tongue for supper! And, I’ve seen buffalo rubs, rocks worn smooth by hundreds of years of back scratching. So it’s true what Sam

here is sayin'. Young fellers like Mack here missed out on the real west. As sure as the plains seem endless like stars in the sky, so seemed the countless buffalo that wandered freely. Yet today nary a one remains far as I know. All gone," Magnus said shaking his head.

"Even in 1870, when I was a teamster for the railroad the killing was well under way. I re-kollect that on delivering the supplies to the railroad fellers there was a party of hide hunters at the camp. They rode on a wagon loaded down with stinking bloody hides and meat. With their big guns and leather clothes stiff with dried blood, now they was a vision of doom. Clouds of flies followed them fellers. These so-called hunters shot all they could, took the hides and sold meat to the railroad crews. Most of the animal got left behind. Ya' could always find a kill site by the vultures flocking overhead," Sam added.

"It may still be possible ta' find yourself a bone-field out on the flatland if ya' want ta' imagine the big numbers of the buffalo. Though by now most of the bones been picked clean off the prairie and sold as fertilizer I suppose. Before I opened the earth with the plow there were several acres I had to clear of bones," said Magnus. "Loaded 'em up and sold 'em to a railroad agent for eight dollars a ton."

"Bill and I once found a cliff of blue-colored rock where the story goes, Indians used to drive buffalo over the edge. A big ole pile of white bones was at the bottom. They'd butcher 'em below where they fell," said Fred.

All the old timers had a buffalo story it seemed. Walter didn't know what to think. All around Itasca endless white pine stumps told the story of the disappearing woods. Pinewoods were giving way to homesteads and potato and hay fields. The prairie of the men's memory as they told their stories, seas of wild grass and oceans of buffalo, had

changed into wheat farms. He remembered the big flour and saw mills of Minneapolis where the region's natural riches came to be processed. That was the new grand scale of the world he supposed. Still, anything out west would be new to him. Looking around the stuffy bunkhouse he decided that when Camp 37 disbanded a change of scenery might be a good idea.

Frankie's voice cut across the bunkhouse.

"You guys think only about what you've seen. The west of this territory was home to native people long before you all showed up. Look at my black hair and eyes. That's my Dakota heritage showing it's proud face. Dakota ain't a place. It's a race. A race that had to go so white settlers could come to Dakota. Long 'fore Sam was cutting out buffalo tongues and leaving the rest to rot we used every part of that animal for tools, shelter, food everything! Never did even the tail get wasted. We gave thanks like you fools do once a year in November each time we hunted buffalo."

By bluster and blow a story got heard in the bunkhouse. Frankie climbed up on a barrel, and even the card players stopped their game to listen.

"Boys ain't everybody got an agreement with the Zumbro? You get yer wages bed and board for yer work. Who got it in writing? If ya' did who can read it?"

Some of the men were illiterate and couldn't even add numbers or even read a calendar although nobody was going to admit it now. Others spoke English as a second language.

"Lucky fer you Mister Dawson ain't gonna cheat ya'! Clerk is honest in tallying days worked and wages earned. A contract comes with a large dose of trust from both sides. Mister Dawson counts on ya' to work hard ... "

“Except for Bill and Fred!” added Sutton to general laughter all around.

“... And you all believe you’ll get paid come spring! Ain’t that right? Well the Dakota people in 1851 signed a contract with the US government giving away all their land except for a twenty-mile strip on either side of the Minnesota River, right near your place Magnus, south of Big Stone. Thing was they couldn’t read that piece of paper. In return they was to receive yearly payments and have all supplies taken care of just like Cookee Larson does for us three times a day. But, the people didn’t get paid directly, no, the money went to white traders who cheated em’ and stole the money. Time came when the payments were late and the people got hungry. How would you feel if supper was canceled?”

This was a question that needed no answer. Lumberjacks became very disagreeable when unfed.

“Now imagine if your family was hungry! Then the people were told to go “eat grass.” Well some young men had had enough and long story short the needless killing began. Dakota people had plenty heart but little chance. In the end thirty-eight men, guilty or not, were hanged by order of Abraham Lincoln. Old people, women and children were forced to walk across the state to Fort Snelling, harassed and attacked the whole way. My own Grandmother died along the way, hit in the head with a rock I heard, her body left behind on the side of the road. I never met her. They was all cleared out so your kind could break ground and plant seeds. I was born on Crow Creek Reservation where the people got sent, son of a French Canadian white trader and Dakota mother. My mother survived that trail of tears to Fort Snelling. So Mack if ya’ do make it out west

remember the ghosts of those who were kicked out of their homeland. The real story of Dakota is of a people scattered like seeds and picked like weeds.”

Walter thought about the Russian Czar who tried to own Finland. A truth in the world was that the powerful pushed around the weak he decided. Frankie’s tale was more than a yarn and there was an angry buzz in the bunkhouse. Many men looked down on Indians but Frankie, a respected worker and one of their own, himself was half Dakota! His passionate story moved some and left others shaking heads. Most lumberjacks had worked out in Dakota at some point. Maybe next time they’d think about it differently.

Magnus looked worried. Images of hungry children and poor old Grandmas getting hit in the head with rocks made for an unsettled bunkhouse.

“Ain’t nobody got a happy story?” he asked.

“Can it be about buffalo?” said Patrick.

“I suppose.”

“Well sorry but it ain’t. Dakota now, Dakota is a fine place for wandering. The places I’ve seen in my short life, brave deeds done, well I tink about it and can’t believe it was myself who did ‘em! Mack when you go there, and you will for the pull of the big open canna be denied, go in the summer when the farmers are begging, are crying for men ta’ work the land. You’ll have your pick of jobs. I like to wander from farm to farm choosing the finest for Patrick. Like the summer I heard of the prettiest, most lovely princess of a bonanza farmer’s daughter and decided I’d be working on that farm. The deal was sweetened by the lack of a son. Whoever could woo the lass stood to inherit a tirtee thousand-acre wheat spread. What a plum kingdom for the plucking!”

Apart from their delight in joking about bodily functions, the bunkhouse appreciated equally a good yarn involving bravery and pretty girls. Was Patrick up to it? Everyone found spots on the deacon seat and waited to see. Magnus threw another log into the stove.

“Wandering men are known to gather in cities and towns in order to be located by employers. So it was three years ago I found myself on a dusty corner in Moorehead, Minnesota on the edge of the great prairie standing around with a group of travelers such as yourselves,” Patrick swung his arm pointing to the lumberjacks as a group, “hoping ta’ find work.”

“As we talked the name Dalrymple was on men’s tongues as the owner of the richest wheat farm in all of the Dakotas. Now Dalrymple was said to be the father of a lovely daughter whose fine visage brought smiles to all the laborers toiling in the golden fields. Part of the pay for working for Dalrymple was catching a glimpse of her passing in her fine coach pulled by a pair of white horses. What was my plan, you ask, as I immediately set off on foot for the Dalrymple place? Well to wed the girl, Dora was her name, of course and become someday the next Lord Dalrymple! There wasn’t a moment to lose!”

“So big is the Dalrymple place that in Dakota it doesn’t matter which way ya’ walk. All roads lead there. A happy wanderer I was dreaming of my fine life as a wheat baron! Along the drainage troughs by the roads where the last wildflowers grow I soon met up with a man standing with his nose in the air. This feller was working his nostrils back and forth like a bellows.”

“What’s that yer sniffing then?” I asked him.

“I’m on the road looking for work, a walking man I am. I don’t want to get caught in the rain,” said he.

“Now the sky was clear as crystal, not a puffy white in sight. “Rain?” I asked.”
How can it be? Take a gander at the sky.”

“Smelly they calls me,” says the man. “I can smell the rain from a hundred miles away and tell when it will arrive and if it’s a trickle or a storm.”

“Well this I was not believing but, being a friendly man I invited this Smelly along to seek the Dalrymple place. Off we went.”

“Soon we encountered another fellow. This gent was in the middle of the road puffed up like a toad, like a plump turkey. He’d hold it for a minute and release his breath flapping his purple fish lips. Stalks of wheat across the field bent down in his human wind.”

“Why is it that yer blowing so?” I asked him.

“I’m on the road looking for work, a walking man I am. I’m exercising my lungs for the big blowing I do. Windy they calls me,” says the man. “My spay-she-all-eye-tee is sending the troublesome storm clouds on their way with my strong wind.”

“Well this I was not believing in spite of the wheat field he sent a-bending. But, being a friendly fellow I invited this Windy along to seek the Dalrymple place. Off we went.”

Sutton could not resist. “Windy and Smelly? Are there beans in this story?”

“Only the ones in yer ears ya’ illiterate axe-man!” Patrick replied not missing a beat. He paused to take a swig of coffee and his Adams apple danced up and down his neck as he swallowed.

“It wasn’t long before we came across another fellow, spectacles perched on the end of his thin nose, his face in a book. He was zigzagging back and forth on account of not seeing past the book blocking his view. We watched as he walked in circles and figure eights. Mumbling to himself he was.”

“Seven thousand three hundred forty two, seven thousand three hundred forty three,” He was saying, “and he was writing something down in the book.”

“So I hailed him and asked him his business.”

“I’m on the road looking for work, a walking man I am. Numbers keep me company. I count as I go. I can count the stars in the sky and the grass in the field. Never am I wrong. Now I’ve lost my count of birds on the wing with your interruption!”

“Didn’t ya’ write it in yer book?” I asked him.

“Hmmpfh. So I did,” he said looking in his book. “They call me the Count.”

“Well I was not believing this business about counting the stars. But, being a friendly fellow I invited him ta’ join us to seek the Dalrymple place. On we tramped. The Count had to be pointed in the right direction every now and again.”

“What about the pretty daughter?” called out Sam Christy from the deacon seat.

“Well Smelly, Windy, the Count and myself got hired on as reapers loading the wagons and harvesting the wheat. What was said about the place was true, for Dalrymple’s spread indeed covered tirttee tousand acres. Two hundred reaping machines worked gathering golden grain. And the lovely maiden well her radiance caused the army of wheat workers to all remove their hats as she passed in her covered carriage. But, the bigger the place the bigger the loss, and Dalrymple could always be seen watching the sky. One ripping Dakota hail storm could ruin him.”

“Boys,” Dalrymple told his crew, “if one of you could predict the weather I’d marry him to my Dora and leave him my spread!”

“Well, Smelly knew of my dream to do exactly that. The next day he worked his nostrils flapping ‘em like a buzzard’s wings.”

“Patrick old son,” said Smelly, “You must go to Dalrymple and tell him. We’re in the path of a twister that’ll chew up the wheat and leave a lake of mud behind.”

“Well it was another clear day but as I had nothing to lose I presented myself to the great man’s front door. Of course he laughed me back to the barn. The very next day I was as amazed as him when Smelly’s nose proved true and black clouds filled the western sky. Dalrymple sent for me. Conditions were right for a tornado and the wheat wasn’t half harvested.”

“Fortunately my pal Windy was with me. The storm came near. As shingles started ripping off Dalrymple’s house ole Windy began puffing up, out of sight of Dalrymple, of course. A great wind he released. As he did I commanded the wind: “Turn around storm! Leave this farm to prosper!”

The black clouds stopped in their path. Windy’s forceful blow directed the twister away and south to the farms of Dalrymple’s neighbors. They were all ruined and Dalrymple earned a roomful of treasure for his wheat.”

Half of the lumberjacks were still hanging on to Patrick’s words while the rest chuckled knowingly.

“Again I came to his aid with my friend the Count. The Count determined exactly to the penny how much money he had and how much to pay his workers. Of course I

took the credit for his accurate accounting and Dalrymple could see that I was the cleverest fellow ever to grace his farm.”

The yarn was running out of steam.

“So didja marry the pretty girl and get the rich man’s farm for yourself?” asked Bill.

As Patrick was presently a swamper in the employ of the Zumbro Logging Company, this fantastic question left him temporarily speechless. He gazed at Bill with pity.

“No, I didn’t. As I said her carriage was covered. When I finally did meet the lady face to face she turned out to be an ugly toad. She sported a great big wart on the end of her toady nose from which grew a bunch of wiry black hairs. When I attempted a friendly kiss the hairs tickled me so that I sneezed all over her fine silk dress. That was the end of my wheat baron dreams.”

Patrick gave a big nod downwards with his chin and crossed his arms.

“Fred!” Bill called to his friend in a serious tone. “Next summer we’re heading to Dakota ta’ look for Patrick’s friends and try our fortune at the Dalrymple place. Waddaya say?”

Fred rewarded his dependable pal with another slap across the back of his head.

“Well yer yarn may not have been the gospel truth but I shoor enjoyed the way ya’ lied when ya’ told it!” Fred told Patrick, giving thanks for the story in his special way.

Chapter 8

Fork in the Road

“Shoulders back and elbows in. Lean back. Keep your weight over your legs. Try again.”

Frankie was teaching Walter to juggle. Mid-April rotten snow made good heavy snowballs. Frankie had just shown how he could keep five in the air like bubbles surfacing in a boiling pot. Now, patiently, he taught Walter to get started with three.

Again Walter tried; throw, catch, throw catch, throw, catch-and this time managed ten throws without dropping.

“Breathe Mack. You’re all tight and tense. Think about something you like. Free your mind.”

Walter took a deep breath and let it out slowly. His shoulders released a knot he'd been squeezing in. What did he like?

This fine spring day was one thing. The sun was filtering through a soft haze casting a milky light on the now open river. The ice on the Bowstring River had broken up about a week ago and it was filling up with cold snowmelt water. The men were in shirts only on this mild day. They'd been rolling logs into the river and were taking a break while the teamsters fed the horses. Zumbro Logging Company Camp 37 was wrapping up the season. Time to get the logs to the sawmill. A sweet pinewood smell, the lingering scent of vanished woods filled the air. The lumberjacks were kicking back for a minute. This was a good day.

Meat-filled pies were something else he liked. The bank of the Bowstring River where the log drive was beginning wasn't far from the Hyttinen place. Yesterday Selma Hyttinen, to his surprise and delight, had brought him a basket of homemade meat pies for lunch.

"Hoo-hoo, Ro-mee-o!" Sutton teased him.

Walter had no idea who Romeo was. The meat pies however had been better than the plate of beans, hard biscuits and black tea the other guys ate. Selma had packed ground moose meat, last season's potatoes, carrots and fresh wild onions into golden brown pastry shells. He closed his eyes and enjoyed the homemade flavor. Mmmmmm.

"Can ole Fred have a bite?" Fred asked, making a sad droopy face. An escaped baked bean was hanging from his beard.

"No you may not, unwashed one!" Selma snapped. "Eat your beans and move downwind."

Hangdog Fred slunk away, tail between his legs.

“Father and Mother say hello. You’re invited to come see us. I thought you might be hungry working so hard,” said Selma who surprised him again by giving his arm muscle a squeeze.

She wasn’t wearing her bonnet and her soft brown hair was shining in the sun.

The words seemed to leave Walter’s mouth on their own.

“Your hair is so beautiful today Selma.”

“Close your mouth, silly boy, or food will fall out when you eat,” Selma scolded.

Sutton didn’t speak Finnish but he knew what was going on. He gave Walter a big wink.

Selma and Walter walked down to the river to eat. Walter had the sense that in this brief moment they could have been any couple anywhere. Maybe a hundred years ago an Ojibway young man and woman had sat right here on this spot, enjoying being together.

“What will you do after the log drive is finished?” Selma was asking.

Walter wasn’t sure and gave no answer. But, he did know that he certainly liked meat pies.

Dry feet were another thing he liked. Now that it was warmer he had learned the trick of taking off boots and socks and airing his feet in the sun. A working woodsman had to “see to his dogs” as Sutton put it. Cleanliness was a good thing. Magnus had taken to leaving the doors of the bunkhouse open to air it out. That helped. Walter was looking forward to the end of the season and not sharing a room with smelly, hairy guys whose bodies made bad noises. Dry feet and good hygiene were things he liked.

“Sixteen throws! Not bad!” Frankie congratulated him. “Took me a couple of days to get that far when I first learned.”

Walter, by thinking about what he liked, had forgotten about juggling. When he stopped worrying about juggling he could juggle!

Frankie it turned out was an ex-vaudeville performer.

“In my younger wandering days I was an apprentice to the three Chuard brothers juggling troupe. After leaving the reservation I ended up in Minneapolis. Got a job sweeping floors at the Bijou Theater. Speaking French I struck it up with them boys who had a long term stand at the Bijou. We were in a vaudeville show with a sword swallower, rope twirler and a fire breather among others. I learned the basics. The Chuards though they were several levels above. They had an incredible act where they’d pass fire sticks and machetes back and forth.”

“So what happened? Why’d you quit?” Walter asked.

“We had a falling out over money. I was getting good and there wasn’t room in the troupe for four. My temper got the best of me. Gave one of em’ a bloody nose. That was the end of my vaudeville days.”

Frankie’s hotheaded ways were well-known around camp but Walter sensed that by at least talking about it Frankie could maybe change. Yesterday he’d yelled at Mister Dawson.

“Float logs downriver to build a dam? What for? We can go down to the dam site and use the logs we cut last fall! I’m not getting in that cold water and floating no logs when we already got wood a-plenty down by the darn lake!”

Red-faced Frankie had lost it and was giving the boss the business. Being a people person wasn't always something he did well.

Mister Dawson knew that yelling back would only make it worse. First he let Frankie blow off some steam. Then he fired up his pipe and had a smoke and a think. Last, with the whole crew listening he told Frankie what he'd just said and explained his own reasons.

"If I hear ya' right ya' don't think we need to bother with more logs ta' build the dam. Seems like extra work don't it? Well, my boy, maybe ya' got a point. Could be we cut enough last fall down at the dam site. But, the river is running awful full. Too many logs? They're going downstream anyway right?"

The crew nodded in agreement. Frankie sulked but Mister Dawson knew he'd come around.

Camp 37 was done cutting trees. The Suomi Finns had gone home to their square neat cabins, dairy barns and hay fields. On the day they left, their pockets full of pay Victor Niemi had turned and given Walter a long open-hand-in-the-air salute. This was his quiet Finnish way of saying "Good to know you" and "You're always welcome in the Suomi Hills." Walter knew he had a place there if he needed it.

He could see in his mind this whole part of Itasca. The Suomi Hills, Bungo Dan's place, the blueberry burn on NorthStar Lake and all the little lakes and small valleys were in his mental map. The ramps and dips and high dries and wet lows of Camp 37 were his now. Old abandoned Camp 36 was a memory of pine cabins beginning to rot. Camp 37 would go that way too. On a few trees he'd hacked his initials and at this moment was looking at a log with a rough WM carved on its side. He knew the exact address of the

white pine community that tree had come from. He knew when it was a fine shady grove and knew it now as a barren patch. Trees would grow again here but it would be three hundred years before they'd be equal to the giants that had stood.

Walter doubted an impatient nation hungry for lumber would wait that long.

Most of the rest of the crew had also moved on. Some were down in Deer River or Minneapolis blowing their wages on a big whiskey party. Left behind was a wasteland of stumps. Hundreds of old trees sawed into big logs and marked with the Zumbro Z in a circle waited in piles for their journey to the mill. A dam would have to be built in order to raise the water level of the river. The final task was to float the logs down the river, across Little Bowstring Lake and on to the railroad where they'd be loaded and sent to the sawmill. Then and only then would the last workers get paid.

Sutton remained by habit. A lifelong lumberjack he'd not feel right if the job wasn't finished. Patrick stayed too. He was thinking about the extra big payday and the thrill of the summer road that waited. Frankie didn't seem like he knew what else to do. Maybe the routine of work gave him something to do. Fred and Bill claimed to be fond of Cooke Larson's pork and beans. They stayed. Sam Christy seemed at peace around friends. He was here. Even Clerk had put down pen and account ledger to move logs with a pointed pike pole and cant hook mounted on a peavey pole.

Walter Myllamaki knew the end of the logging season was coming. Little yellow and black birds had begun appearing in the woods.

"Ahhhh, The return of the warblers," Clerk told him, "They come from the tropics where they pass the winter flying thousands of miles to mate. Starting families they are."

Just then a brilliant red bird with black wings and tail landed on a nearby tree.

“Chik-brrr, chik-brrr, chik-brrr, chik-brrr!” it called out.

“My word! The scarlet tanager!” Clerk exclaimed, “That fellow is hoping his handsome red coat will attract a female.”

“The birds and the bees according to our resident nature boy!” commented Sutton.

Walter remembered how, without thinking, he’d run his fingers through his hair when Selma appeared. Would she like him more if he was red all over? He’d sure blushed plenty red that was a fact! Maybe he could show Selma some juggling tricks.

Patrick made his plans known musically.

The axes they fall the saws they sing

Now it’s I who’ll move along,

Coin in my pocket, world on a string

In my heart a happy song.

Out west by rail

A fate I’ll find

Adventure and more travail

Walking the earth, free man I am, forward never behind!

“Mack old son, tink of it! We’ll find us a prospering farm with sweet hay in the barn ta’ sleep on, fresh butter for our daily bread and a couple of bonnie farmer’s daughter lasses for ta’ wink and giggle at! Join me out in Dakota this summer! We’ll have money so we can pick and choose our place. If we don’ like it why we’ll come back to Minnesota and help cut the last of the trees.”

Walter was leaning Patrick’s way for he’d learned that a dependable friend was no small thing. Someone who had your back and who’d pick up your slack. Since last

summer when he'd been lost in the woods and Patrick's tin whistle had called him into camp a solid pal he'd been. Tramping out west with his friend called to his young man's adventuresome heart

A door was also open at the Hyttinen place. Paul Hyttinen would likely welcome him back and be glad of his strong back working and improving his homestead. Selma's meat pies. A sauna every night. And it might be a good base to think about his own homestead in the area. After all *oma tupa oma lupa!*

"Everyone's getting a dern mud vacation but us!" grumbled Sutton.

Springtime in Itasca meant mud. Roads became impassable and anybody who didn't have to, didn't move. Melting snow turned any exposed earth into filthy, clinging clay. It was almost impossible to move about but Camp 37 did anyway. Everyone resembled walking mud men. At a certain point being muddy and miserable was just a fact no more no less.

The crew was cleaning out the bunkhouse. Outside only low mounds of dirty grey remained of the mountains of snow the swampers had shoveled to make paths through Camp 37. Old nasty mattress straw from the bunks of departed lumberjacks strewn along the muddy paths helped make it passable. Nonetheless it was impossible to walk anywhere without traveling through squishy ankle-grabbing mud. Stinky Alley had turned into a puddle. Even though the camp was closing Mister Dawson had ordered the latrine pit filled in.

"A blind man could find his way there no problem!" commented Frankie on a warm day when the stench spread fifty yards in every direction.

“Hopefully he’d not trip and fall in,” added Patrick.

Only on the Hard Road leading out into the old work areas did remnants of the ice road remain, lines of man-made glaciers hanging on in cool shady areas. A pile of timbers behind the Wood Butcher’s shed was the icer sled, stripped of its iron fittings.

From now on everyone was going back to living in tents by the river. Wet tents. When the logs got delivered everyone got paid and that was what kept them going.

First a raft was constructed by lashing together white pine logs. Then the crew poled the raft a few miles to the dam site near where the river emptied into Little Bowstring Lake. Along the way deep pools where the river took sharp turns were easy sections and no one had to get out and clear a snag or push off a sandbar. Surprised ducks flashing green spots on their wings suddenly flew out of little backwaters where they were nesting. A beaver lodge, active for the fresh chew marks on nearby trees, concealed its inhabitants. The Bowstring River was running full but was still really only a small stream. At the river’s outlet into the lake was where they’d build a dam. At the far end of the lake was the railroad, the end of the line

Walter and Patrick’s wages were raised to two dollars a day to get into the waist deep, cold water and dig. Lifting up his shovel Walter noticed little insects flitting about and countless tiny white dots lodged in wet gravel.

“Fish eggs,” Patrick informed him.

Into the holes were buried twelve-foot long logs so that they stuck five or six feet above the water. Behind these, big rocks and shovelfuls of gravel were laid. This channeled the river into a narrow passage. The water started rising. In front of the dam,

most of the crew was now in the water depositing loads of rocks and gravel. The stream began backing up.

A big bonfire by the work site, dry wool blankets and a shot of whiskey helped the lumberjacks recover from working in the icy water. Walter was glad that Selma wasn't around to see him peeling off sopping wet clothes and wrapped in a blanket. He thought about what his Mother would say if she knew he was getting wet and cold, on purpose! Cooke Larson made a kettle of tea, hot stew and fresh fry bread to warm up the guys. They camped that night well back from the rising river.

In the morning Mister Dawson inspected the dam and pronounced that it would hold. Poling back upstream was easier now that the river was getting higher. The beaver lodge was submerged. No ducks jumped out and Walter couldn't find the backwater where their nests had been. The whole river was turning into a backwater. It took all day to pole back up the river to where the logs, the product of a winter's work, waited.

Now, with the help of the big draft horses, the next step was to get the rest of the wood into the water. Mister Dawson issued everyone oiled waterproof high boots spiked with nails for traction. Walter and Patrick were sent out into the stream with pike poles to push logs forward. They dug their feet into the logs they floated on, always balancing, always moving.

"We're in the circus, walking the tightrope," joked Patrick.

"Watch it!" warned Walter as Patrick almost lost his balance. Quickly Walter swung the handle end of his pole over so Patrick could grab it and not fall in. Next to the space where he almost fell two logs crashed together with a loud "Bang"!

The two friends exchanged looks.

Walter thought about the artificial limb store back in Minneapolis.

“Careful Patrick,” he warned him.

The boys stuck close together pushing logs forward and making room for more.

In a couple of days the Bowstring River was choked for two or three miles with logs. The crew worked on, herding them forward, a few men in front, some working the middle and the rest bringing up the rear, chasing down straggling logs and logs stuck on the bank.

Sutton was in his glory for Mister Dawson had given him the green light to dynamite. He carried sticks of dynamite in a waterproof oilcloth bag. Sand bar off to the side catching logs? KaaaBOOM! Now there was a nice level stretch of river. Downed tree in the way? BLAM! Not for long. In camp, Walter had heard Sutton and Mister Dawson talking. This stretch of river had been “worked” last season for the Camp 36 log drive and this season was actually easier. With thousands of logs scraping the riverbanks and Sutton blasting with dynamite, it was a wonder that any ducks or beavers still lived here at all!

Walter and Patrick, manning the front of the log drive, could hear Sutton’s work echoing up and down the river. Spiked boots gripping wood, poles for balance, it was now possible to walk for a couple miles upstream from log to log, balancing and dancing the whole way. They’d both taken several spills into the water and were exhausted from constant balancing and the heavy work of pushing logs forward with their spiked poles. Logs began accumulating behind the dam.

By some miracle Cookee Larson had guided the faithful Rosie the mule pulling the cook wagon through the mud road following the river. He set up camp near the lake.

Patrick and Walter were the first in and were resting their aching ankles by a fire.

“How’s the grub been boys?” he asked them.

This was the first time in months of being together that Cookee had spoken to them. Cookee’s bald head and round face smiled like a happy face Walter had seen on a clear cold Minnesota winter night full moon. The boys were snacking on fresh doughnuts sprinkled with sugar that Cookee had somehow managed to make over a campfire while standing in mud. Walter realized that he’d been taking for granted the man’s good cooking for a long time.

In his best English he replied, “Cookee if it hadn’t been for your fine food I would be working for another camp. Thank you for all your wonderful meals.”

Patrick nodded, showing that he felt the same, letting someone else do the talking for a change. Cookee grinned even wider at the boys’ appreciation of his work. He and the two boys enjoyed a pleasant moment of agreeability. The grateful cook then heaped more doughnuts on their plates.

“There’ll be some happy families livin’ in the sturdy houses built outa’ the good lumber were supplying the nation! How was it done?” Sutton flexed a bicep and held it in front of his round belly. “Muscle, sweat and blood! The old time way, like we did it back east in Maine, in Michigan, in the Chippewa Woods of Wisconsin and now here in Itasca! Thankee boys for a grand season of timber!” Sutton gave one of the oxen a kiss.

“He made the same speech last year,” said Frankie.

Pushed by unrelenting hydro-power, logs were now heaped up against the dam. It was time to blow the dam and release them into the lake. In a sudden **whoosh!** of water thousands of logs would stream into the lake. At least that was the plan. All night a creaking, grinding, bumping noise kept the men awake as pressure built up. Walter witnessed one log suddenly shoot straight up in the air, squeezed out like a toothpick. Mister Dawson patrolled back and forth by the dam, hands clasped behind his back, sending up smoke signals with his pipe.

It was time for the show.

Sutton was jumping back and forth from leg to leg rubbing his hands together. Mister Dawson gave him a nod. He climbed out onto the dam and placed a bundle of dynamite in the center. Carefully he backtracked, unrolling a spool of fuse behind him. The crew watched from a safe distance. They were wearing the spiked boots and had pointed poles at the ready. Sutton extracted a lit cigar from between his teeth and put fire to fuse. He ran, comically fat belly bouncing and bowlegs pumping. He flopped on the ground by the crew.

Everyone waited with hands over ears.

BLAM! White smoke, steam and wood rose in a clump. A wave rushed forward followed by scores of big Zumbro Logging Company white pine logs surfing into the lake just as Mister Dawson had planned. Walter hoped the fish eggs laid in the river gravel had already hatched.

Two more days were spent herding all the wood into the lake. Strange to see a forest floating sideways, Walter thought, remembering the pinewoods he'd seen last fall.

He and Patrick helped each other to keep safe. Bill and Fred were doing the same a hundred yards away. Using iron hooks they joined two logs together to make a boat of sorts they could stand on and work from. With hooks and chains a long line of logs got circled together enclosing three or four hundred logs. These were “rafts” that would get towed across the lake and to the railway.

“Where are the oxen?” Sutton wanted to know.

For some reason Mister Dawson had sent ahead the oxen that were to tow the rafts from land.

“New plan,” he said. Mister Dawson was studying a letter that a Zumbro Logging Company man in a small steam-powered boat had piloted across the lake. Clerk was helping him read it.

“Well, my word, we are in the modern age!” exclaimed Clerk.

The crew gathered around, wondering what the company had in store for them.

“Mack, Patrick, Bill, Fred, Frankie, yer all going back with this feller,” instructed Mister Dawson. “It says here that yer to tow a long rope from the train. Some contraption is gonna be pulling the logs across the water.”

It was a treat moving across the lake without any effort, although smoke and cinders from the boiler ruined the clean air. The boat vibrated so much that Walter’s stomach got sick. Still, it was a matter of minutes crossing the mile-wide lake.

A train waited, its boiler gently releasing an occasional puff of smoke.

Several gentlemen (they hadn’t been sleeping in a tent!) who were dressed in new clothes that made them look like they were playing lumberjack were examining an iron steam tractor machine. These fellows were all bearded but their beards were carefully

trimmed unlike the wild-haired lumberjacks. The machine had rolled down a ramp. Its engine was hitched to a giant coil of heavy rope. Only one of the men even bothered to look at the lumberjacks.

“Dawson’s men? Hurry, we’ve been waiting! What took you so long?” The man seemed irritated and not interested in an answer. He showed them a big rope. They were to unwind it from the boat, tying a float on every hundred yards for support.

Even so the rope only covered half the distance. The crew anchored a float in place and went back for more. When the rope stretched across the lake the grand plan became clear. The tractor engine would act as a winch pulling a raft of logs across the lake.

Using their poles to balance and spiked boots for grip Walter and Patrick rode the first raft back to “see if it holds.” They’d been given a red flag to wave in case of problems. The rope groaned and stretched.

“Move back Mack! If she snaps and whips back we’re goners!” warned Patrick.

Slowly the raft began to move. Logs tightened against each other to form a compact mass.

“Permission to come aboard captain!” joked Patrick hopping aboard Walter’s log.

It was smooth sailing at first. Water lapped over the edge of the logs but their boots gripped tight and their feet stayed dry. But, as the raft picked up speed they noticed the front edge of the massed logs submerge. Then more logs got squeezed underwater. A few yards away a log disappeared under the pressure, only to pop up in open water behind the raft.

Patrick waved the red flag frantically. If a log they stood on got squeezed under, they'd be crushed and drowned. To stay alive they kept on the move, jumping from one to another waving the red flag. The raft must slow down!

It did not slow until they reached shore.

Patrick worked his way off the raft hopping mad!

"Did you not see the flag? We could have died out there!" he yelled at the men in charge of the machine,

"What's Paddy saying?" said the one who bothered to turn to listen to Patrick.

"It appears he was in some kind of danger," another said.

Walter, afraid that Patrick would make use of his spiked pole, had to grab him and hold him back.

They watched as steam engine power was used to haul logs one by one up ramps and onto railcars.

"Progress gentlemen! When steam power is used for logging, then men such as these won't be necessary. Just a few fellows to run the machines will be able to log camps double the size of Camp 37. Machines will never complain about food or low pay. Three cheers for machines!" One of the fancy dudes gave a speech.

Looking at the steam engine Walter knew that the trees of the world had no chance.

After helping to load the rail cars, shovel coal for the steam engine and collect the long rope the season was suddenly over. As sudden as logging had begun, now it was done. The pinewoods were now a load of logs loaded onto a long line of rail cars.

“You can ride into Deer River on the log train. Meet me at the Zumbro Office and we’ll settle up. Thanks boys. Camp 37 was a darn good camp. We felled the trees, didn’t we now!” Mister Dawson said. “The Zumbro is gonna log an area north of big Lake Winny next season. Any of you boys interested in a road building crew job come see me in about a month.”

“I’m drinking a whole bottle of whiskey by myself,” said Bill, “unless of course ole Fred wants a taste.”

“There’s a strong possibility of that being the case!” promised Fred.

“Time for my annual bath. I suppose I’ll check into the Deer River Hotel, get me a restaurant meal, get cleaned up and burn my old clothes,” said Sutton.

Frankie, whatever he was planning, wasn’t saying.

“In Deer River there’s a fine woman, a Mrs. McGee who keeps a clean boarding house. Me I’ll be sleeping on clean sheets and eating my meals at a proper table. Say, my friend Mack what’s yer plan?” Patrick asked.

Walter could only shrug. He didn’t know. All the lumberjacks were going to take some time off. He’d seen white tail deer moving into cutover land browsing on newly budded saplings. They knew what to do. Geese were on the wing flying north in big V formations. They had no doubt as to their future. He could tag along with his pals for a while. The lumberjacks were a smelly, friendly, hardworking bunch and he’d grown fond of them. But, his heart ached for home and they weren’t family. To speak Finn with the

Suomi Hills people would be great. Maybe John Saari would welcome him. Paul Hyttinen and the lovely Selma; spending time with them was a tempting pull.

Uncle Emil was still out there. The unfinished business of family nagged at him. Where was Uncle Emil?

“I must find my Uncle Emil. When I get my money then I’ll be thinking about where he might be. That’s my plan.”

The guys nodded at him thinking about that.

“Mack good luck to ya’. Take it from an old hand who ain’t got no family. Find yours and hang on to it if you can!” Sutton clapped Walter on the back. “Now let’s get that whiskey!”

Talking about the whiskey, good food, card-playing and other delights offered in town occupied the men all the way in to Deer River. Walter rode with the crew on top of a load of logs. They’d been offered seats in the passenger car with the Zumbro Company men.

“Thanks, but no thanks!” Sutton answered for the crew.

Laying in a crevice between two pine logs, Walter pulled his battered black hat over his eyes. Like the others, all his worldly goods were rolled up in a wool blanket. Nine months ago the hat had been new and stiff. Now it was soft and perfectly molded to his head. Beyond a big payday his future was unclear, except now he was headed out of the woods instead of in.

In Deer River Mrs. McGee knew Patrick and gave him a big hug. At her house the boys enjoyed a hot soak and the treat of freshly laundered clothes. As Patrick promised they slept on clean sheets.

In the morning they collected their pay from the Zumbro. The roll of greenback dollars, \$278 for Walter it came out to, was a fortune. He kept checking his pocket to make sure it was still there. They were strolling down the plank sidewalks of town looking in shop windows. Patrick had bought a roll of red licorice and shared it with Walter. Both had fresh haircuts and shaves. Walter's stiff new canvas work pants were pinching him on his rear end.

"I'd forgotten how ugly ya' were behind yer beard," complimented Patrick.

The town was full of lumberjacks from camps all around Itasca with money in their pockets. Every doorway offered a way to spend it. Men with hard eyes and soft hands waited to play cards. Every other building seemed to be a saloon and they were all busy.

"Look here," Patrick grabbed Walter's elbow.

Through an open doorway of the Sawyer Saloon they could see workingmen sitting around tables gambling with cards and dice. In the smoke-filled air everyone was yelling and cursing. Others were standing at a bar attacking bottles of whiskey with grim determination. Bill was lying on the floor passed out, his own filth trailing down his shirt. Fred was cavorting with a woman in a greasy nightgown who was whispering in his ear. He was glassy-eyed and wore a vacant smile.

"Fools and their money soon part company," observed Patrick. "Likes of them will soon be newly poor and back at work."

"Come on in boys and enjoy yerselves!" offered a man in a bowler hat, crisp white shirt and red suspenders. "We've got a free lunch, fine liquor, dancing girls, games of chance, just the relaxation two woodsmen such as yourselves deserve."

“Tanks anyway but I tink not,” said Patrick.

“We don’t know the word no!” continued the man who started to push Patrick inside.

“He said no thank you!” said Walter behind his friend.

The man turned and inspected Walter more closely. His eyes grew wide. He released Patrick from his grip.

“Sorry! A misunderstanding, it would seem.” The man scurried back into the saloon.

Patrick was grinning and slapping his leg. “Well yer the fellow to be walking with in hostile places!”

“And why? Why did that man run off?” Walter didn’t understand.

“Why ya’ ask? Look at yerself! Nine months of hauling heavy wood and swinging an axe have made you a Monster Mister Mack. Ya’ aint the skinny fella that wandered into the woods last fall.”

Walter thought he had grown bigger and stronger working for Camp 37. How much he hadn’t realized. He did have to buy his new shirt in a larger size. He reached out and put Patrick in a headlock dragging him down the street.

“Come on, you’re my *omanpaikkasia* now! That’s Finn for those who look out for each other! I want you to check something out with me.”

At the edge of town the boys visited the grave of Tom Mackenzie. A simple wooded board with Tom’s name and the word Zumbro Logging Company marked his resting place. Walter had been unable to help Tom and now he felt just as useless. In this poor man’s cemetery there were twenty or thirty graves of Zumbro Company men.

Patrick got out his tin whistle and played an Irish song called “Danny Boy.” Without saying it both knew that either of them could have been in Tom’s place.

Next they visited the offices of the Itasca Lumber Company. A couple of wagons were tied up outside. One of the teamsters had just finished caring for his horses and followed them in. Inside, a man wearing spectacles like Clerk’s hadn’t heard from anybody named Emil Aho. Where could Uncle Emil be? This land was too big. There were too many directions to go, too many farms and camps to disappear in. He would never find his uncle.

“I’ve heard the name Emil Aho,” said the teamster. “If it’s the same fella’, we worked on a wheat spread down near Pipestone last summer. A rich man named Friesen owns a place where we both worked as reapers. He did funny tricks with balancing things.”

“Like this?” exclaimed Walter grabbing a shovel from the wagon and balancing it on his chin.

“Hah! Just like that. Darndest thing I ever saw.”

“So is he still there? When did you see him last?”

The teamster looked thoughtful. He rubbed his chin.

“I suppose. When I left after the season was over Emil stayed on as a hired hand. Could still be there.”

That did it. Walter felt a wave of warmth pass through him. Pipestone. His road was clear.

As train rides went this was a good one. Walter had been on passenger cars. These might be smoky and you didn't get to pick whom you sat with. The guy next to you might be drunk or smell bad. He'd been on timber cars riding in the open air. On these a rider could have personal space. But, it was windy and offered no cover from sun and rain. Plus they could be too close to the engine and coal fire fumes and burning cinders might get blown back on you. All train rides were bumpy, but Walter's stomach had grown accustomed to swaying up and down and side to side.

Today he and Patrick rode west in an empty boxcar they shared with one other traveler who was face down sleeping in the corner. The big sliding doors were open on either side letting plenty of fresh air pass through. Piles of empty burlap flour sacks made good cushions. Patrick was trilling a tune on his whistle and Walter was working on whittling a wooden spoon. Crowds of red-wing black birds made short flights here and there through a wetland they were passing. The train was ambling along slowly enough that Walter sat in the open door with his legs hanging over the side.

Things were good. Both boys had plenty of money. Walter had sent most of his back home to his parents in Finland. Patrick left a roll of dollars in the care of Mrs. McGee in Deer River. Both felt certain they could earn more. The plan was to travel to Pipestone hundreds of miles to the southwest, look for Uncle Emil and see what adventures might come their way.

Choices were good. Walter felt the pull of natural curiosity that kept him wondering what was around the next bend. With money in his pocket, strong hands and back to carry him, and a friend at his side, being a free human being walking the face of the earth was an opportunity he was finding satisfying.

If need be they could rejoin the Zumbro or work in a sawmill turning logs into boards. Here in western Minnesota pinewoods had surrendered to grass, flowers and wheat waving in the prairie breeze. Everywhere farmers were busy driving wagons loaded with supplies and driving teams of horses pulling plows. Good workers like Walter and Patrick could wander and always work for a meal and a bunk.

In every town they'd passed, new wooden buildings were going up. A carpenter high in the rafters of a two-story house put down his hammer to hail them with open hand.

"He's thanking us for his lumber. Wonder if it came from Camp 37?" Patrick thought out loud.

"We're moving west and so are the trees from Itasca," answered Walter.

"You could tink of it like that I suppose."

Sure enough in the next little town they stopped in there was a lumberyard with fresh white pine boards stacked cross-ways to dry. Strange to catch a whiff of pine scent here in this place where the trees only grew next to rivers. Walter had an urge to stop and look for the Z in a circle mark of the Zumbro Logging Company in the wood.

Maybe it was the lack of the train's regular clickety-clack that woke the sleeping man on the other side of the car. Dirty and unshaven the fellow rubbed his eyes and wagged his head trying to shake away his sleep. He reached into his coat pocket, took out a bottle and yanked out the cork. It was empty.

"Dang it! DANG IT!" he yelled smashing the glass bottle against the wall.

Turning his head sideways like a snake, the man realized he wasn't alone.

"Either of you boys got a drink?" It was a demand, not a question.

Walter thought about the request for a long moment. Then he opened his pack and got out his tin flask. He stood up, walked over and offered Henry Smith a drink of water.

Henry wasn't looking too good. He had a black eye, a busted lip and his hair was sticking out in different directions. His boots had no laces and his pants were ripped.

After a long glug-glug pull from Walter's bottle he handed it back. Henry's good eye gave him the once over.

"Water'll have to do. Don't I know you? You again Ya' dirty Finn I warned ya'," he hissed. "Remember what I told ya'?"

Walter sensed Patrick at his side but stayed focused on Henry.

Henry produced the long knife like maybe he wasn't sure why anymore. Unsure and unsteady he moved forward. The two circled around the boxcar looking for the moment of attack. This time Walter was ready with his own blade.

The train whistle blew. With a sudden lurch forward the train began to move. Walter immediately regained his balance but Henry, Henry, in his unlaced boots caught his heel against a nail sticking up from the floor. Wildly he windmilled his arms and let go of his knife, stumbling backwards. The knife did two perfect flips and landed with an audible "thunk," point buried in the floor. Henry fell out of the open boxcar door.

Poking their heads out the door the last Walter and Patrick saw of Henry was a still shape lying by the side of the railroad

Walter Myllamaki shook his head in amazement and clapped his friend on the back. Patrick pulled Henry's knife from the floor. Then with all his might he hurled the weapon as far as he could out of the boxcar.

"Now there's a bunkhouse story that will live to be told, wouldn't ya' say Mack

old son?"

The End

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