

1990

I Am a Finn

James Tate

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Recommended Citation

Tate, James. "I Am a Finn." *The Iowa Review* 20.2 (1990): 96-97. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.3892>

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a newborn calf, full of pride and fierce hunger, leapt —
and that's when Vito had had enough. He dressed,
very deliberately, with the firm knowledge
that his sole duty at this hour — to tap out an existence
within these flames — was to drive drive and drive
that neighbor's dog around the world.

I AM A FINN

I am standing in the post office, about
to mail a package back to Minnesota, to my family.
I am a Finn. My name is Kasteheimi (Dewdrop).

Mikael Agricola (1510–1557) created the Finnish language.
He knew Luther and translated the New Testament.
When I stop by the Classé Café for a cheeseburger

no one suspects that I am a Finn.
I gaze at the dimestore reproductions of Lautrec
on the greasy walls, at the punk lovers afraid

to show their quivery emotions, secure
in the knowledge that my grandparents really did
emigrate from Finland in 1910 — why

is everybody leaving Finland, hundreds of
thousands to Michigan and Minnesota, and now Australia?
Eighty-six percent of Finnish men have blue

or grey eyes. Today is Charlie Chaplin's
one hundredth birthday, though he is not
Finnish or alive: "Thy blossom, in the bud

laid low." The commonest fur-bearing animals
are the red squirrel, musk-rat, pine-marten
and fox. There are about 35,000 elk.

But I should be studying for my exam.
I wonder if Dean will celebrate with me tonight,
assuming I pass. Finnish literature

really came alive in the 1860s.
Here, in Cambridge, Massachusetts,
no one cares that I am a Finn.

They've never even heard of Frans Eemil Sillanpää,
winner of the 1939 Nobel Prize in Literature.
As a Finn, this infuriates me.

I AM STILL A FINN

I failed my exam, which is difficult
for me to understand because I am a Finn.
We are a bright, if slightly depressed, people.

Pertti Palmroth is the strongest name
in Finnish footwear design; his shoes and boots
are exported to seventeen countries.

Dean bought champagne to celebrate
my failure. He says I was just nervous.
Between 1908 and 1950, 33 volumes

of *The Ancient Poetry of the Finnish People*
were issued, the largest work of its kind
ever published in any language.

So why should I be nervous? Aren't I
a Finn, descendent of Johan Ludvig Runeberg
(1804–1877), Finnish national poet?

I know he wrote in Swedish, and this
depresses me still. Harvard Square
is never "empty." There is no chance