



Eilola, Patricia. *Gifts of the Spirit*. Novel. North Star Press of St. Cloud, St. Cloud 2016. 290 p.

During the mass migration from Finland to North America in 1870-1929, there was a saying: Amerikka on "naisille taivas, miehille helvetti". America is a heaven for women and hell for men. While Finnish men in the new country were offered hard, dangerous and backbreaking jobs in mines and lumber camps, women took allegedly easier jobs as domestics. Finnish females as servants, maids and kitchen helps were a common sight in the USA in the early 20th century. In the newspapers there were advertisements placed by Finnish women seeking employment as domestics, and even the iconic novel of the 1920s, *The Great Gatsby* by Francis Scott Fitzgerald, mentions the protagonist's maid, "a Finnish woman, who made his bed and cooked breakfast". Nevertheless, there was no heaven for Finnish females in the USA, and the jobs as domestics were hardly easier than mines and lumber camps. Sadly, there is still too little written about Finnish working women in the early days of Finnish America. A female perspective on work is regrettably too often not seen under the iconic masculine images of Finnish American lumberjacks and miners. This makes the recent historical fiction novel *Gifts of the Spirit* by Patricia Eilola all more precious.

The author is a third-generation Finnish American from Minnesota. In her previous novels *The Fabulous Family Hölmöläiset* (1996), *A Finntown of the Heart* (1998) and *A Finntown of the Soul* (2008) she has skillfully

addressed the experiences of Finns in this region while paying special attention to Finnish American women's point of view on challenges, struggles and victories in the process of building a new life in America. Her latest novel continues this tradition. Set against the backdrop of dramatic historical events of the early 20th century such as the 1918 flu pandemic (ah, this is all too familiar for us now), the Great Depression and the Roosevelt's New Deal, it yet again tells us a story of the average Finnish family in northern Minnesota. The central protagonist is a young Finnish American woman, one of those who are called defiant sisters by Varpu Lindström in her titular study. For the protagonist, there is much to defy in America of the 1920s-30s: restrictive gender roles and norms, racism and prejudices, and the immigrants' low status. Early in her life she faces the necessity to be a breadwinner for her family and becomes a live-in domestic. Yet this is only a beginning of her journey. Learning the difficult new language, Americanizing herself without losing her Finnishness, and eventually finding love and her own place in the new country - there is also so much to accomplish for this young woman. Although Eilola's novel is a work of fiction, it gives a good enough insight into the experiences of Finnish American families during the years of stress and tumult, and the most important role of mothers and daughters in overcoming hardships and finding the way. A much needed inspiring and enlightening read for today's trying times.

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