

The PannuKakku Incident

As told by Veli Bruce Schaalje

Now, Tornio, Finland, in seventy-two, was a cold place for a greenie.
Veli Schaalje had been there exactly fourteen days.
Just long enough to know a tad of Finnish . . .
but not long enough to know why his trainer wouldn't wake up.

The morning light hit Tornio, a quiet border town.
But Veli Beckham wouldn't stir, his sugar dropping down.
Veli Schaalje shook his shoulder, felt the panic start to rise.
Fourteen days of Finnish couldn't open Beckham's eyes

He grabbed the phone and dialed Veli Marjanen, his words a tangled vine.
Mixing English with a language he was failing to define.
Oh, Tästä tulee pannukakku. Yikes! It's gonna be a mess
When your Finnish is a fumble and your buddy's in distress

Clutching grammar like a Bible while the ambulance flies by.
It's a pancake of a morning under that cold Finnish sky.

The landlord took the telephone with a calm and steady hand
While Veli Schaalje felt like a stranger in a lonesome, frozen land
They loaded up the car for a thirty-kilometer ride
With a little yellow grammar pocketbook tucked closely by his side.

Veli Schaalje sat in the back seat studying verb forms and declensions.
"Grammar Hints" was all it was, but the title told the tale:
When the pancake hits the griddle, even the bravest men can fail.

We made it to Kemi. Nurses movin' fast, glucose in the vein.
I was standin' in the corner,
holding that "Pannukakku" book like it was the only thing keepin' me on the ground.
Then... he finally blinked.

"I'm sorry," Veli Beckham whispered, as the world came back in view
"I shoulda told you 'bout the juice, and what you had to do."
Relief washed over Veli Schaalje, then a different kind of dread
As Veli Beckham looked down at the gown upon his hospital bed

The room went quiet, and the shame began to win

'Cause he was sitting in that Kemi ward... in nothing but his garment skin.
Where's my shirt, and where's my pants?
Then Veli Coombs and Veli Slagowski came cycling through the rain
With a spare suit and some mercy for this missionary's shame

Now I've learned a thousand lessons that no grammar book can teach
Like keeping juice boxes handy and spare clothing within reach
And when your companion's diabetic, here's the protocol, my friend:
Pack the sugar and the trousers—you can conjugate verbs later, amen!

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Yeah. A real fiasco. Next time... just give him a glass of sugar water.
Keep the grammar book in your pocket, and bring his pants!

Totta kai!

