

Of Sacrifice and Respect:
A Review of Joseph Damrell's *Untamola Blues*

By Beth L. Virtanen, PhD

Finndian Skully Nikkanen named his commercial fishing boat Windigo, the word for an Ojibway evil spirit, a cannibal, and since then he has been out of whack. He forgot to give thanks to the spirits for his catch, forgot to be thankful for anything at all, taking too much, giving too little—or nothing—in return, drinking too much, not caring enough for his place in the natural order. When he falls in love with Maddie, an art teacher in the local schools and Native in touch with her heritage, all of that changes, but the change doesn't come without great trial.

Elvis impersonator, Earl and his half-wit cousin Dwayne happen upon a deer-truck accident in which driver Arlie Person is knocked unconscious by the deer that crashed through his windshield. The two oddballs steal the truck and its cargo of unstamped cigarettes and hard liquor bound for the casino at Bad River and make off with Arlie, stashing him at the group home where Dwayne lives. Of course, no good can come of this caper.

Lulu's ex-husband Roth (also known as Papa Smurf) who thinks he is dying of cancer shows up again, the same ex-husband she threw out seven years previous for gambling away her nest egg, twenty-eight thousand dollars that she has saved by working for years in her diner, selling dubious quality food to a captive audience, as she is the only café in Untamola, a fictional town situated in the geographic spot where Ontonagon currently sits. She takes Papa Smurf back, but he takes up with Earl perpetually dressed in Elvis garb and Dwayne who has tiny razor sharp teeth with which he bites anyone who annoys him. Of course, Dwayne isn't the only one (or thing) that bites in this story.

Two crooks from Canada and their cousin Estes who is just liberated from Camp Kitwen outside Houghton turn up, and there is trouble brewing. Two FBI agents enter the fray along with one Disability Claims Investigator after Lulu's son-in-law, and the melee is in full swing.

The Ojibway healer, Joe, Maddie's uncle sets a course of action that rights the situation, but the action moves from Untamola, to the reservation, to the marina, to Lulu's dilapidated farm, to Isle Royale, to Canada, and to the western shore of the Keweenaw Peninsula before all is resolved.

This is a quirky, funny, slap-stick comedy in which one confused Finndian rediscovers his Native heritage and his place in the world. At the same time, the other oddballs' lives, after serious trouble, take a turn for the better. It is published by North Star Press of St. Cloud.