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The Tree-Woman

THE TREE-WOMAN

by

Dag Rossman

The onset of Spring brought with it a heightened sense of awareness to the Tree-Woman, who stood upon the strand that bordered the fjord. She could again begin to feel her rootlike toes that probed through the soil and deep into the gravel that lay beneath it, providing her with both support and nourishment. And, increasingly, she grew aware of the sap flowing through her torso and limbs. After the long winter's sleep that had lain upon the land, life was returning to the northern world and to those who dwelt there.

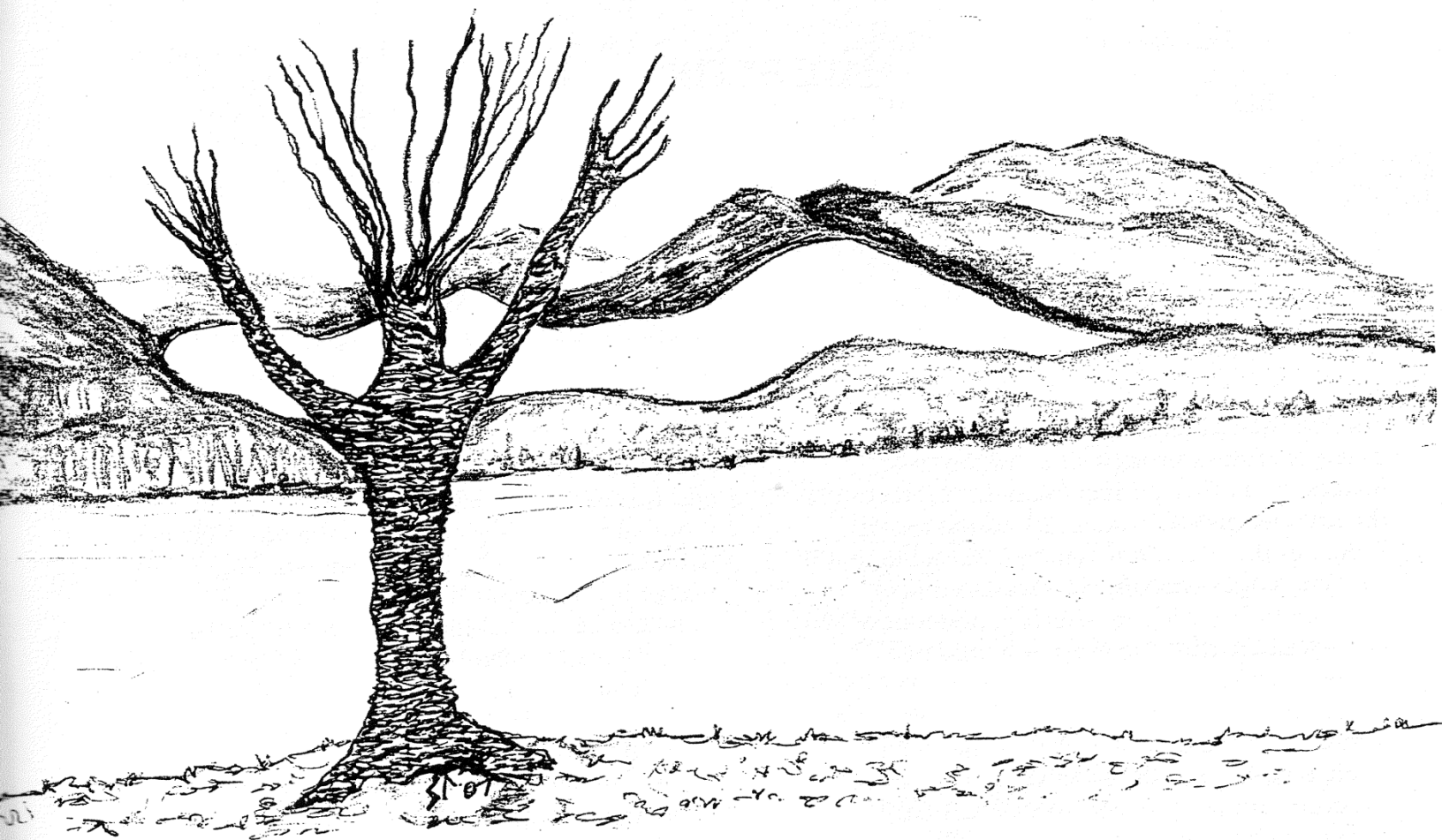
Forcing open her bark-sealed eyelids, the Tree-Woman lifted her gaze to the horizon and beheld, across the mirrored waters of the fjord, the being who was to be both her joy and her bane. There, on her granite couch, reposed the slumbering form of the Snow Queen, cloaked in her glorious garment of shimmering white, her mounded breasts and bended knees thrusting nearly as high as the mountains on which she slept.

The Tree-Woman thought she had never beheld a lovelier sight, and she stretched out her arms with their green-tipped finger buds in mute adoration. Then, looking upon her own gnarled limbs, dull grey skin, and small, rough breasts, the Tree-Woman recoiled in a mental maelstrom of envy and self-loathing.

But life goes on, as do the seasons, and as the Chariot of the Sun came to spend ever more time above the northern realms, many transformations began to take place. The Snow Queen's lovely mantle grew smaller and thinner as it melted away, formed glistening rivulets, and tumbled down the mountainside to swell the waters of the fjord. The granite-grey body thus revealed through the rents in the garment no longer appeared soft and rounded, but now was stark and angular.

Down on the strand, kindly Nature wove a magnificent cloak for the poor, naked Tree-Woman, wrapping her with a leafy green garment festooned with soft, white cherry blossoms. Her beautiful cloak drew many admirers, and soon the newly crowned Summer Queen was holding court for countless bees—who fed at her blossoms—and birds—who nested in the shade and protection of her welcoming limbs.

Peeking out through her leaves, the Tree-Woman looked up at what remained of the threadbare form of the Snow Queen and wondered how she could ever have envied her. And so the Tree-Woman was very happy and content . . . until the next turning of the seasons.



Dag and Sharon Rossman's Note of Explanation:

This story and the accompanying illustration by Sharon Rossman were inspired by Norwegian artist Nicolai Astrup's painting "March Morning," which we encountered repeatedly during a visit to the fjord country of western Norway in 2004, and which haunted us with its images. Astrup (1880-1928) was one of Norway's premier painters to blend folklore images with landscapes. This is the only painting to feature a tree-woman, but many of his other paintings include a recumbent snow-woman in the background.