

Tjikko

Hannah Park

I stand atop Fulufjället Mountain with my head held high, arms spread wide, and my feet firmly planted as I sway gently in the wind. The breeze is a soft embrace as it idly dances by, cooling my skin and rustling through the underbrush. Native bees lazily buzz around the greenery, their wings beating rapidly, emitting a soft melody that lulls the forest into a languid trance.

In times like these, I often ponder the history of the human race — the evolution and advancement through the years. From wooden clubs to stone, stone to bronze, bronze to steel; and now technology far more advanced than ever before — gadgets, thingamabobs, all that hooaha. I have never understood modern technology, it seems far too complex, I would much rather sit in the woods all day. Standing among vegetation that has survived millennia, I am at peace. I talk to the trees as if they are my sisters, “Come out and play!” I implore, but they never do. Sometimes they whisper back, a thousand voices in unison, too afraid to leave the safety of their trunks. I suppose it's my fault, their fear, for I constantly inform them of the horrors of the world — the greed, the gluttony and the gore.

It was not always this way, though; for centuries the world was tranquil. Then came the humans with their avarice and disregard. They brought deforestation and pollution in arms to this world. Bulldozers and factories threaten the place I call my

wild home. My friends, the trees, cannot fight back for they are chained to the forest floor, forced to choke on malignant, poison air. Humans have guiltlessly raped Mother Earth and her offspring with their saws and their shovels. Sometimes they give back by replanting trees, but their actions are in vain as they only take and take again. The endless cycle of regrowth is a circle no more, but a line with an end that will come soon. The air is warm — warmer than it should be — yet I shiver. It pains me to think of the downfall of humanity. For centuries I have admired their resilience in the face of adversity — the unparalleled ability to live on when the world is telling you that you cannot. On this day, however, I resent that tenacity. For it is that desire to live, to be the superior species, that is destroying my home.

Standing upon this mountain, feet rooted in place, my limbs shake with fear of the onslaught that is to ensue. My heart beats rapidly like the wings of the hummingbirds who flit around the amber buttercups, deaf to the sounds of their demise. The steady rumble of machinery resonates through the ground like the sound of a distant thunderstorm; the hum would be calming were it not a funeral dirge. The endless grumble of large engines draws closer and with it comes an overwhelming sense of foreboding. Steering the machinery are malicious mercenaries with chainsaws. Murderers. Serial killers. Yet their crimes are dismissed by the ignorant lawmakers of the human world. They possess no guilty conscience; they slaughter forestry without care or compunction. Their trucks are body bags, built to hold the severed remains of my kin.

The mighty roar of their engines, like a battle cry, fades into silence as the men survey their killing ground. They begin to take measurements, tattooing the brittle bark with blood red markings. The trees tremble silently and the wind howls for mercy, but the men, I fear, are deaf to their cries. I hold my breath as waves of trepidation roll over me, disturbing the calm that the wind once created. The catastrophic climax of nature's everlasting battle is finally coming to a close. For a moment there is silence and I feel a seed of hope begin to blossom in my heart, for this tragedy, alike many others we have faced, shall pass and one day there may be reincarnation. And then, simultaneously, their chainsaws whirl to life — the hostile grinding and scraping of metal on metal disrupts the lullaby that once was. It is then, with the sun beating down and the wind roaring recklessly, that the slaughter begins. All around me trees fall, cut down and dismembered; they collapse silently and without protest.

I stand tall in Sweden atop my high mount, surrounded by slaughter, as I silently cry for help that will never come and for mercy that is no more. I was born in the ice age, millennia ago, my roots grew strong here and here I have remained for thousands of years. From ice age to present, I have watched the world change, more so than ever in the past century. And now I fear for my life and for my kin because we cannot fight, we can only stand boldly, as we wait for our death.

I am the Old Tjikko tree, spirit of the wild.