

## A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Ground

It's hard to explain what it feels like to be a dogwood in full bloom, but I will try. My flowers are my access to the world. Through them I feel slow breezes blowing late at night. I feel warm, soothing sunlight on my petals at sunrise and sticky drops of dew accumulating on my flowers at dusk. I feel ticklish as fuzzy bees buzz through me on their search for pollen. On my petals I feel the cool spray of hose water when I'm watered each afternoon. And I grow tall towards the sky, standing proud, because I know my petals are beautiful. I can feel it.

My leaves are my ears. Through them I hear birds chattering, waiting impatiently for my flowers to turn to drupes. I hear dogs barking in the summer and howling in the winter. I hear the patter of ants patrolling my leaves as I eavesdrop on their secret conversations. And I hear people. Toddlers, most insightful, notice the changing colors of my leaves through the seasons. People of all ages speak about my flowers. "How beautiful. Dogwoods were everywhere when I was young," elders remark. "What a stunner," passersby state. I try to be humble, but I bask in the compliments. Despite the praise, I will never forget what people did to me years ago...

I heard footsteps through my leaves. Someone was fast approaching. I heard panting, and my suspicions were confirmed: a runner. Then it happened. A yelp and howl below me. Was a dog near? I heard a thump. I could not feel, as it was winter, and I had no flowers. But I knew what happened. My roots had grown thicker that year, up through the sidewalk, and my branches had grown astray. I was in wild form, and I had tripped a runner. I felt a rush of shame inside of me. I had hurt someone and felt despicable. Sadness gushed through my trunk, into my branches, and my bark began to crack. Slits and holes opened up across me, and thick, amber sap flowed from me. Until that day I never knew trees could cry.

A week later, I heard a truck pull up beside me. Its engine grumbled, and I felt a shiver run down my bark. “Did you bring the chainsaw?” A deep voice huffed.

“Yup,” another replied. “Its branches are everywhere. No wonder she fell.”

“We should cut down the whole thing. It’s an ugly tree, anyway,” the first man replied. Were they talking about me? I grew nervous. But no, I consoled myself. I was not an ugly tree. Sure, I was not in full bloom, but come springtime I would be gorgeous. Suddenly I heard the sound of a thousand bees, and within seconds, the chainsaw was moving through me. Even without flowers, I could feel. Pain. A fierce, fiery pain rushed through me, hotter than August heat. Was I going to die? They were cutting me down. There would be nothing left of me. Nothing left to hear crooning mourning doves, to feel spindly spiders in my flowers. Nothing left of me to listen to families complimenting my beautiful blooms. There would be nothing left of me, and there was nothing I could do.

“Timber!” The man shouted, and I braced myself for my demise. I began to fall. Any moment I would hit scorching pavement and perish. But a funny thing happened on the way to the ground. I felt a shift of energy, my soul moving swiftly, deep underground, into my roots. My roots! They branched down from my stump like a thousand rivulets, bringing up water and nutrients. Indeed, my roots brought me life.

Six months later, a sprig had grown up from my trunk, and soon it was a sapling. Despite my traumatic experience, I felt wonderful. I had quite literally regained my youth. But it was a special kind of youth, because I had wisdom, too. In Spring, I grew one flower. The old me would have been ashamed. My blooms were my pride, and I would have shunned myself for

producing but one measly flower. But I stood tall, displaying it to the world. I needed no compliments that year. I was alive, and that was enough.