

# Resurrection Ferns

*Elizabeth Terhorst*

I've always hated having splinters. When I was a child, my dad would hold my hand down to the back of the kitchen table and dig them out with his Leatherman. It didn't matter how much I screamed or cried or begged him to stop. He wouldn't stop until the little sliver had exited. I always hated having splinters, but I was stuck with this big lump of wood in the middle of my abdomen.

I'm supposed to like having some tree bark in there. Most people born with pink bows and dresses do. I'm supposed to want little saplings to grow and have a nursery of my own— something to call home.

But, this piece of wood is rotten. It's putrid and twisting backwards. Stumps jagged and pressing into my spine through the kidneys and intestines and tendons. It stabs through my back, and the blood mixes with my blue shirt to create a harrowing purple.

This is one splinter my dad refused to rip out— despite how I begged and pleaded.

The purple dripped down my body and collected around my knees during the time I spent praying on the pew before the clergy of clinicians. Sent home with pantry strength pain relief and penance, the rot only spread and festered. It felt like it was crawling outside of the exit wound on my back and corroding my still tender flesh from the "Atta boys" I'd get.

Night after night, I'd wake up covered in sweat with leaves between my legs.

They crunched and disintegrated under the weight of my shaking body in bed. They ranged in brilliant shades of brown and red. No matter how much I scrubbed and scrubbed and scrubbed, I'd still walk around covered in pieces of decaying leaf.

I longed to snap off this piece of branch and throw myself

into the river. To become driftwood and sail down the bends and curves until I found a delta where the ocean would welcome me into her loving arms. But, not all pieces of wood float.

I stole my father's Leatherman and tried to cut it out myself. Hours and hours of trying to chop down this tree, I finally collapsed in exhaustion at the riverbank. My body sank beneath the blue waves. Between the bubbles and the blurry outline of my hands, shades of pink and red leaves floated up to the surface.

I always hated having splinters.

After being fished out and left to dry under the broiling sun, I stumbled to the new doctor with leaves stuck to my face by gluey tears. She used her tweezers and peeled them off, one by one.

It hurt, but never as much as the knife.

It took days, weeks, months. But, after she had washed me of my sins, she found the septic site in my back. She tried to shave off some of the wood, but it had grown callous in my neglect.

She pulled and pulled, but it stayed rooted in place. Each tug tore at something deep in my stomach, but it wasn't the searing rip of losing something that belonged to you. It was the painful relief of removing an abscess.

But, it broke my heart when she couldn't get it out alone.

The crumbling wood rubbed against my seat all the way to the hospital. I felt propped up on display, back breaking under the weight of the medical interns gawking at the twisted limbs I had grown. But, when I woke up, I was flat on my back for the first time I could remember.

It was scary to cry, for I feared any water would inspire the seeds to take root in the still fertile soil packed around my surgical scars.

The new doctor assured me nothing would grow again, but

the dogwood-shaped remnants clinging underneath my sheets coaxed my doubts to blossom into beautiful, velvety flowers.

This is the one piece of wood my dad would never take out. It couldn't be gone. I hadn't started a nursery of my own yet.

But, the nursery never would have been mine; I didn't want to raise seeds my parents wanted me to care for in hopes of ripening fruits to sit at their dinner table. I'm glad it's finally gone, but the removal didn't remove all of the pain.

I thought that once it turned into an abandoned excavation site, it wouldn't hurt anymore. No leaves trail and drag behind me. There isn't a symphony of twigs and branches snapping in my wake. Even the faint smell of autumn hasn't graced my presence, but there is still a dull throb at the base of my abdomen.

At night, I can feel it reverberate all the way up to my diaphragm where it pushes against the underside of my lungs until it feels like all of the air has escaped me. I lie for hours and hours gasping for breath, for the memory to leave me. Only when the cool, winter light starts creeping through my curtains do I find something to take in and turn into glucose and oxygen. Facing the sun, there is still the dull throb, but I can feel my green fingers start to stretch and grow.

Without the desperation and the decomposers, I think I've finally started to find my own shape.

However, my growth did not come without pains. The push and pull of spring came with nights where I thought I was going to freeze to death and days where the heat made the water evaporate before it could reach my roots.. Like a seed splitting out of a shell to unfurl a green sprout, I tried to break though the surface. Again. And, again. And, again.

I ached for sunlight.

When I finally felt the first ray of sun, the first brush of breeze against my cheek, it frightened me. I didn't know how to

step into the sun. Without the carefully curated walls of my parents' nursery— the only walls I had ever known, it all felt like too much. Maybe this plant was to stay on the shelf, never to make it outside to take root in the ground. But, I couldn't always hear the animals sing from inside my walls.

The faint hum of nearby amphibians became my newest obsession. It was hard to think of anything else, or feel anything but the butterflies in my stomach when the croaking would start. It was maddening at first. Disharmonious squeals and achy whines. But, as time passed, I was able to hear the ensemble hidden underneath the shrieks. I couldn't bear to leave my nursery, but I wanted to know what the sounds were coming from. Maybe they'd give me new splinters, but maybe they wouldn't. The thought of having to rip out a splinter all over again was enough to keep me from unfurling all of my leaves. For weeks, they stayed curled up in tight fists by my sides. But, each day I heard the animals sing, my leaves loosened a little. From sundown to sunrise, I'd listen to the music and from sunrise to sundown, I'd debate on being strong enough to leave. Long nights turned into brighter days, and on the solstice, I finally stepped outside.

Summer comes, and I can feel myself start to breathe life into mine. While it is not a band of saplings, I've grown to be quite fond of the class of frogs I've been able to shelter. Each night, they had asked for me, and when I finally stepped into their room, I was met with the warmest embrace I've ever known. They're bug-eyed and headstrong, but I can hear their croaks create a new sound that welcomes me to join them in the night. It's loud enough and bright enough to not leave room for memories lurking behind my surgical scars; I've found I cannot be haunted if I am not alone. These tiny creatures and fellow friends I've made help me keep my face in the sun, and while I see other trees start to pop up, I do not hold fear of them taking root in me again. The rain comes and washes away any tendrils that creep close. The rain always comes, even if the clouds bring the night with them. And, after the night, there is always the return of the Sun..

I know that I've done my part to make the air clean and sweet for more frogs to come and go as they please. It isn't a nurs-

ery, but it's a place which feels more like home than any garden I've walked through before. I don't think I have to worry about getting splinters anymore.