



Volume 26
Issue 1 *Planet Nowhere* (2017-2018 Issue)

Article 47

4-17-2018

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Emma LaGoy
Concordia University - Portland

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CU Commons Citation

LaGoy, Emma (2018) "The Healing Tree," *The Promethean*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 1 , Article 47.
Available at: <http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol26/iss1/47>

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The Healing Tree

Emma LaGoy

Steady, steady.

She focused all her energy on her hand that quivered as she placed the glass in her kitchen cupboard. Shaky breaths escaped her lips as she lowered her hand. Her mind had been so crowded this morning she thought doing mundane tasks would put the constant record player of frantic thoughts on hold for a moment. And it did, but as she looked at her hand that was still racked with tremors, her focus shifted.

She traced her shaking back to her veins that were not circulating blood correctly. Her veins led her back to the broken muscle nestled inside her ribcage. She lost all vision of the white kitchen around her and every sense was overcome with the aching in her chest. You see, she had a small fracture that split even deeper after months of negligence. That small crack had started to fester and ache.

The sharp outlines of the white kitchen faded into view when the cracking of ceramic bounced off the walls.

Shit, shit.

She fell to her knees, her favorite black-and-white coffee mug now surrounding her, shards scattered on the tile floor. Panicked, she swooped twenty shards together in a pile and cried out as one edge punctured the skin on her middle finger. The trembling stopped. Warm crimson dribbled down her knuckle. As

if it was the only blood left in her body, she began to deflate. First, her veins collapsed. Then every organ felt as if it were a popped balloon.

She couldn't feel a thing.

Before her muscles had the chance to disintegrate, she grabbed her keys and walked out the door.

The skin around her knuckles was stretched thin and translucent as she kept a firm grip on the steering wheel. She didn't have to think about the turns she was making; her hands led her to the concrete graveyard. She needed to see it.

Just once more, once more.

As the rubber tires drove through the parking lot, she ran over the white lines that cut out perfect rectangular spots. She stopped in one next to the shopping carts. With one turn of the key her engine stopped and she took in the thick silence of her old car.

Her eyes shut for just a second. The night sky was a dark blue when she opened them. No stars were able to shine through as black clouds cast a blanket over them. Next to her, her husband's frustration grew hotter. He always hated stopping by the grocery store late at night. The black mirror in her hand lit up and shook her arm. The words would not stop flooding into her phone. They were always relentless, taunting her to read them one by one as the screen smiled back.

He shook his head. “You don’t have to do that.”

She couldn’t help it though as her thumb pressed down on the silver ring. The cracks in her phone ran above each word, but no matter how skewed the glass was, the screen still displayed the letters perfectly. As she took in each syllable, her blood began to curdle. The whole earth around her stood still, and the mush inside of her head was the only thing still spinning.

Hot tears ran down her face, and each gulp of air scratched her throat. He reached out his hand and placed it on her back. But even the warm circular motions his hand made could never begin to repair the gashes that soaked into her cotton shirt. He could never understand the strong roots of friendships that were strengthened with years of laughter and hardships. He would never feel her surrender as her roots began to wither that night with the words that were now etched into her trunk:

Selfish, shitty.

Those words sent cascading cracks through her whole being that branched out to reach even the tips of her toes. And it was those words that had opened up the sore upon her broken muscle. It was those words that put her key into the ignition once again, and she drove towards the grassy edges of the graveyard.

Spring must’ve been near, as her skin did not recoil against the wind like she had grown used to. Instead, she was greeted with the sweet warmth of sun cutting through the chilled air. She

couldn't recall how long it took her to drive to this open field from the graveyard, but judging by how far the sun had begun to lower into the horizon, this day was coming to an end.

One tree stood in the middle of the grassy plain, and now, in front of the yellow sky, it looked fake, like paper. This was the kind of place that teenagers would run off to when the stars illuminated the dirt beneath its branches. *A great place to make out*, someone said to her once.

The branches were long and winding, and their smallest leaves tickled the ground. Stepping under the tree cover was like entering a house, its greenery thick like drywall. She fell to her knees and the budding clovers beneath her felt like a soft picnic blanket. The wind quieted for a moment, and the tree bent down its ear to listen to what the girl had to say.

“This earth doesn't feel like home anymore,” and with her confession, a tear slipped onto her cheek, dried and began to itch.

The wind picked up, and the long branches stretched out to embrace her like a mother holding a newborn. As soon as the leaves rested upon her shoulders, the tree could feel it all. It saw right down to the roots this girl had planted in the warm loose soil. There were dark masses of air beneath the ground where stronger roots had rotted away. The tree wept as it felt the girl's pain and was overcome with her darkness.

The tree sighed and stretched its branches further, searching through every part of her and gasped. *Hope is not all lost*, the wind sang into the girl's ears.

Her hair whipped around her face, blinding her sight. Sepia-toned memories flashed before her.

The pride of her parents as they watched their daughter begin a new life.

Friendship that had come and gone, and the love it had left behind.

A boy who had so eagerly, without hesitation, promised her everything.

The losses too were shown to her again. But she could see the stronger fiber that grew back when her heart was broken.

Her hair fell down around her, and she rested on the plush ground, breathless. The tree straightened up, its trunk solid once again. Tears fell in a steady stream down her face and soaked into the dirt beneath her. She was not sad, she was overcome with the life and the truth that surrounded her.

From the cracks that had been formed that night, new flowers began to bloom from her chest. They lifted their leaves up towards the sky. They struggled to find warmth, as the shade from the tree above was thick and stretched far across the grassy field. But through the darkness, her leaves grew wide and could drink in the patches of light.