

WRITING

This Golden Place

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TYPE

MEMOIR

GENRE

GRADE 11

The outline of my tent bends and warps, illuminated only by headlamps and lanterns. I had fallen back asleep; the tent was now being taken down around my sleeping body. It's five in the morning, an early start to a day on the trail. I blink and sing and pack my backpack with my friends. I say goodbye to the campsite, my home for only one night, but a refuge for my aching body nonetheless. I think I leave a piece of myself there. I don't know how I'd get back.

We walk for an hour, the sun rises. Mountains, lined with pink. My legs, lined with mosquito bites. My guide rubs ointment on the swollen bulbs, she tells me that I'm strong. I believe in her. I believe in myself. I believe in my friends—I wonder when that stopped. We walk for a while, then walk some more. It feels like we're wandering, I'm not in charge of the map. But I have to trust that there is a line we are following, through forests and fields, over peaks, down valleys.

I walk fifteen miles that day, and find a bakery at the end of the path. The Stehekin Pastry Company hides down a paved road, among a few scrawny trees, in a cabin. My grandpa had been there once before—he told me to get the cinnamon roll. I did, and I am glad. We cut open cakes and pastries and rolls, cracking them open just like our jokes. I smile wide and look around: two guides who lead with golden intent, nine friends I wish to keep, and my face in a Nalgene’s reflection. We lay on the lawn in front of the hydrangea bush, and I promise I will remember this place forever. It’s a promise I’ve kept.

When a tree falls in a forest, and there’s no one around to hear it, does it make a sound?

When you say goodbye to the trail, when you unpack your backpack, when your friendships fall apart, what happens next? Did that time in my life ever happen? I think so, I wouldn’t be the way I am if it didn’t.

The first day I got home after my backpacking trip in Washington, I peeled off my hiking shoes and left them on the front patio. It was August then. But time rolls on, just like the rains—soon those boots turned into puddles. I think it’s for the best; maybe a water strider will love them as much as I did.

If I went back and relived summer of 2019 again, I’d keep some things, and I’d change some things.

Things To Keep:

- Buy a scoop of cream cheese frosting for 25 cents.
- Spray Febreze from the bakery’s bathroom all over Sophia and me to take away the smell of backpacking.
- Cry over mountain ranges; it’s okay to be soft.

Things To Change:

- Help Maddie write in her daily rock journal.
- Take more pictures with Annie.
- Dunk my head in the water sooner—the between stage of dipping your toes in and fully submerging yourself is always the hardest part.

Robert Frost warned that nothing gold can stay. On some days I think that’s true.

Summer turns into winter by way of fall. Friendships fizzle, hiking boots flood. Other

days spin different tales—tales of golden hours and tromps through tall grass, dogs swimming in ponds and laughter. I plan on keeping those golden moments, from this golden place, tucked away in a corridor of my heart. They'll stay there for awhile, until I can make my way back to those fir-lined groves, not by map or compass, but by memories and the direction they blow the wind.