

Autumn at the Noland Trail

The morning is dark gloomy and cold, although the sun is trying to peak out from behind the clouds. The crisp leaves crunch under our feet as we walk the trail heading to the first bridge. I take a deep breath of the fresh fall air, admiring the deep red—almost purple, the blazing oranges, golden yellow fallen leaves against the brown sandy ground. I look at the water as we cross the first bridge, green algae making a home on top of the water and the vibrant trees mirrored on the lake. A sense of sadness washes over me as we come to the end of the bridge, but I shake it off and look out onto the water while everyone's laughter whirls around me.

I get lost in my thoughts—how my life has changed over the past year—as we walk to the one and half mile mark. You see, the Noland Trail is a hard place for me to go to, mostly for this past year or so. My best friend passed away from an undetectable heart condition here after our run for our cross country team. The wind picks up, causing the trees to shake from the cold. The different colors glisten on the lake, the reds blend into the oranges making a sunset on the water. It's hard to tell the difference between where the water starts and where the tree line ends. It's different being here now rather in the summer, when the trees are dressed in green leaves and the skies are clear.

It becomes hard for me to continue going along the trail. I turn around feeling like I had a stone heart beating in my chest and tears building up in my eyes. I look up at the sky as it starts to drizzle, the cold rain soothing my hot skin. It reminds me that it is okay to feel this way. I take my time going back to my car, my senses taking in everything: the smell of fresh rain on the leaves; the sounds of squirrels chasing each other up the trees and the sound of the rain falling on the leaves; other runner's feet pounding on the ground as they pass me with a smile and a wave.

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I become angry with myself as I come closer to the trail head. I know it wasn't my fault, or anyone's for that matter. But I'm angry about how everything I know has changed. Going to the Noland Trail doesn't bring me joy anymore like it should.

I stop at the tree, the one we planted for my best friend, the wind swirling around me, rain falling on me. I've been here few times before. Something about this day makes me feel strong and grateful, but furious at the world at the same time. When we planted it, it was small with no leaves, not strong, and needing help to stand. Now it's taller, stronger, and able to stand on its own. I feel like the tree because I'm stronger than I was when we planted it, but still growing stronger every day. I felt content.