

Everything I Need

“Please work, please work, please work, please...”

Sparks fly, winking out long before reaching my tinder. I fight against my sweaty, freezing hands, smashing the flint again, and again, and again.

All of a sudden a stick is crowned in red, its smoke tickling my nose. Quickly, I need to work quickly! Memories whisk through my mind. Grab some brush and hold it over the ember, blowing until the glow blossoms into fire—I blow, but my breath is wobbly, nervous, and the ember waivers.

Calm down.

Focus.

I can do this. I *need* to do this. Do it well. My breath will bring life to the flame, it will live on my air and the wood I feed it. It will keep me safe.

I blow until I have no breath left to give. The ember brightens, then dims again, red spots dancing across the stick’s surface. It won’t listen to me! I breathe in the frosty air and blow harder, forcing it to take my breath anyway.

It’s alive, and it’s growing! Twigs catch and burn, the fire eats sticks from my hands and snaps for more. Crawling back and forth from my pile of wood is exhausting, but it’s my duty now. *They* don’t like fire, it scares them. I’ll be safe now. Nothing to fear.

Fire protects me in exchange for food. I have plenty of food. The wood’s all dry because it never rains enough. I sit back and pull off my boots. My socks are steaming.

My camp is empty except for Fire and I. Everything I own in a backpack. Blankets and clothes and flint and hatchet and knife and rope and flask. Everything I need. I’ve been collecting rocks too. Rocks are fun to look at and touch and hold when I’m hiding from them.

Fire barks at me. It’s hungry again.

Fire is small now. Another log and it wines. Fire is collapsing on itself. Darkness creeps closer. I scramble to Fire’s side.

“Breathe Fire, breathe,” I say, kneeling down. “In and out. Like this—” and I breathe a stream of air into Fire’s lungs, but it’s too much, and now Fire is choking.

“No! Fire, it’s me, you can relax!” The air is cold against my skin, in my mouth. I can feel it rattling my teeth. “Please! Don’t go out!”

Fire disappears.

I’m freezing. Wind watches from afar, shaking the trees. I’m alone. They might find me now. Fire would have scared them but not now, and I only have my knife and hatchet and they don’t care for steel and—I grab my flint.

I’ll bring Fire back.

I smash the flint and sparks explode.

None catch.

(a rustle in the branches)

I can barely see my hands.

I strike the flint again.

Still no fire.

(a crunch on dead leaves)

Sparks fly.

Fire isn't coming back.

(a looming presence)

I'm not alone.

They found me.