

College Essay Example About Challenges

Was I no longer the beloved daughter of nature, whisperer of trees? Knee-high rubber boots, camouflage, bug spray—I wore the garb and perfume of a proud wild woman, yet there I was, hunched over the pathetic pile of stubborn sticks, utterly stumped, on the verge of tears. As a child, I had considered myself a kind of rustic princess, a cradler of spiders and centipedes, who was serenaded by mourning doves and chickadees, who could glide through tick-infested meadows and emerge Lyme-free. I knew the cracks of the earth like the scars on my own rough palms. Yet here I was, ten years later, incapable of performing the most fundamental outdoor task: I could not, for the life of me, start a fire.

Furiously I rubbed the twigs together—rubbed and rubbed until shreds of skin flaked from my fingers. No smoke. The twigs were too young, too sticky-green; I tossed them away with a shower of curses, and began tearing through the underbrush in search of a more flammable collection. My efforts were fruitless. Livid, I bit a rejected twig, determined to prove that the forest had spurned me, offering only young, wet bones that would never burn. But the wood cracked like carrots between my teeth—old, brittle, and bitter. Roaring and nursing my aching palms, I retreated to the tent, where I sulked and awaited the jeers of my family.

Rattling their empty worm cans and reeking of fat fish, my brother and cousins swaggered into the campsite. Immediately, they noticed the minor stick massacre by the fire pit and called to me, their deep voices already sharp with contempt.

“Where’s the fire, Princess Clara?” they taunted. “Having some trouble?” They prodded me with the ends of the chewed branches and, with a few effortless scrapes of wood on rock, sparked a red and roaring flame. My face burned long after I left the fire pit. The camp stank of salmon and shame.

In the tent, I pondered my failure. Was I so dainty? Was I that incapable? I thought of my hands, how calloused and capable they had been, how tender and smooth they had become. It had been years since I’d kneaded mud between my fingers; instead of scaling a white pine, I’d practiced scales on my piano, my hands softening into those of a musician—fleshy and sensitive. And I’d gotten glasses, having grown horrifically nearsighted; long nights of dim lighting and thick books had done this. I couldn’t remember the last time I had lain down on a hill, barefaced, and seen the stars without having to squint. Crawling along the edge of the tent, a spider confirmed my transformation—he disgusted me, and I felt an overwhelming urge to squash him.

Yet, I realized I hadn’t really changed—I had only shifted perspective. I still eagerly explored new worlds, but through poems and prose rather than pastures and puddles. I’d grown to prefer the boom of a bass over that of a bullfrog, learned to coax a different kind of fire from wood, having developed a burn for writing rhymes and scrawling hypotheses.

That night, I stayed up late with my journal and wrote about the spider I had decided not to kill. I had tolerated him just barely, only shrieking when he jumped—it helped to watch him decorate the corners of the tent with his delicate webs, knowing that he couldn’t start fires, either. When the

night grew cold and the embers died, my words still smoked—my hands burned from all that scrawling—and even when I fell asleep, the ideas kept sparking—I was on fire, always on fire.