Escape

Fire smiled down on the forest before him.

“Spiring spruce, sombre fir, majestic pine—all wither at my approach!” he declared. “Willows weep and alders anguish as I turn their roots to ash. No creature, winged or legged, escapes my radiating wrath.”

Ahead, an old grizzly leaned heavily on a gnarled stump. The bear paused his scratching as Fire drew near.

“You there! Bear! Have I charred your wits already? Do you not see the height of my flames, the brilliant splendour of my dancing fingers? Flee or face annihilation!”

“Indeed,” replied the bear, moving deeper into the forest. “For all that lives dies, and nothing lasts forever.”

“Irreverent buffoon!” scoffed Fire as he pushed forward—but the bear was already gone.

Later, Fire happened upon a river. There sat the same old grizzly catching salmon.

“You there! Bear!” shouted Fire. “Run now or be destroyed! You feast on little fishes; I dine on all there is!”

“I’ve seen your kind before,” said the bear. “You believe your flames will burn

forever, yet you would be wise to pace yourself. Take only what you need—the old, the dry, the dead. Beyond that is greed."

"Fool! I consume as I wish, for the more I consume, the bigger I grow!"

"Perhaps," said the bear, "but all that eats and grows must perish."

Fire raged at the bear's retort, sending black plumes high into the air and searing embers down upon the river. Unfazed, the grizzly swam to shore, lumbered up the bank, and disappeared into the forest.

Autumn arrived, and again Fire spotted the old grizzly, this time eating berries at the foot of a mountain.

"You there! Bear! You cannot escape me forever! I will blacken your berries. I will melt your mountain like wax!"

"I've seen many like you, but none so greedy," the bear exclaimed. "Do you not notice the days growing shorter? Look at my mountain. The trees here are few, and their wood is dense. You would be wise to temper your flames and burn elsewhere."

"Insolent beast!" replied Fire. "I burn what I please!"

The grizzly shrugged, drank deeply from a nearby spring, and started away up the mountain.

Fire burned with all his might, determined to reach the bear. However, the climb was tedious. His flames struggled to find purchase, and the wind turned cold against him. Yet Fire continued, driven onward by his anger.

Many days later, the old bear emerged from his mountain den to the first snowfall of winter. He sniffed the air and found only the faintest scent of smoke. Scanning the valley below, he saw a great black scar stretching across the land. As he pondered the landscape, something caught his eye nearby. There, amongst the falling snowflakes, a tiny, smouldering ember struggled in the cold.

Listening carefully, he heard a whisper from a familiar voice.

“You see! No one escapes from me!”

The bear snuffed out the spark with his leathery paw, then turned to go inside.

~Nathan McLean