

## **Never Enough**

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Swish, swish, swish our tan colored rough hide cloaks swirl in the light breeze trailing across the sand behind us, erasing our tracks. The five of us travel in a loose circle, silent as shadows. Sound travels far through the high dunes and predators are aplenty, man and beast. In addition to cloaks we wear loose clothing and head wraps to cover our faces from the heat. Distortions in the air from heat keep us from seeing anything beyond a quarter mile but they also keep us from being seen. We travel on foot; there's barely enough food and water in this desert for the humans in our group. I walk in the back left, Leina is in front of me, and Canor behind to the right. Everyone carries weapons and has a role. Mine is navigator and tracker, I lead the way and hunt. I carry twin 10" bone daggers strapped to my forearms and a belt full of throwing knives. In addition to this I have a skinning knife at my right hip and a pack on my back. My pack, like everyone's, carries as much water as I can collect, maybe three liters, and other personal essentials and keepsakes. We are all running dangerously low on food. I'm completely out; it's likely the others are too. If we don't find food soon we will all run out.

It's the year 2143 and due to global warming the population of the world has dropped considerably; to my knowledge we are among the last humans alive. Extreme weather has ravaged the planet, destroying most plant and animal life, leaving Canada a desert. We would leave but clouds cover the poles leaving it icy cold, and the sun scorches the equator of the earth making both uninhabitable. The ground has become a mixture of sand and dirt from erosion and gets blown into a deadly hail of debris every time a storm comes, which is at least once a week. Our huts are therefore built on the leeward side of massive dunes; the more important buildings including storm shelters are built inside the hills. From a young age we were trained to survive in this harsh environment. During the day we'd have lessons about surviving and hunting, but at night we'd hear stories about what the world was like before and how we destroyed it, through relentless expansion with no one paying any attention to the environment. Now though, I'm practically alone on the road with nigh but four companions. Our village no longer has the means to produce enough water for our growing population. So five of us seventeen year olds have been tasked with setting out to find a location to set up a new home.

We trudge onward through the desert as the sun beats down from above, baking the little bit of exposed skin we have. My stomach grumbles. I ate two nights ago. I can still last at least a day without food. I am the leader of our group. Although I am barely 17 I proved myself through relentless training. When I was born everyone said, "She'll always be the runt of the pack, it would be a mercy to end her now." But I proved them wrong and with the completion of this mission no one can ever doubt my abilities again—all I have to do is get through this. If I win the support of our people maybe finally my parents will be proud of me, maybe they will love me.

I am so lost in my thoughts, almost in a haze of light and silence, that I don't notice when Halen suddenly collapses.

"Aurora," Canor shouts.

I whip around getting a flash of our surroundings, seeing nothing. Then I spot Halen lying on the ground and rush over, feet barely skimming across the ground.

"What happened?" I ask, my voice scratchy and rough from disuse.

"I don't know, he just said 'food' then he collapsed."

I groan. I was hoping to cover at least another mile before sunset but it's too late for that.

"Alright, pick him up, we'll head for that sheltered rise to our right," I say, swiftly scanning our surroundings. I had spotted it earlier as a place to run if bandits should appear.

Canor picks Halen by the armpits and begins dragging him up the side of the dune to the shelter. Leina quickly rushes in and picks up his feet and we begin moving quickly, Kal walks behind, covering our tracks and making sure there is nothing around. By the time we are there, Halen is awake. He's still being carried and is half limp but I can see his eyes fluttering. When we reach the small cave I quickly go through it checking for threats, slowly pulling down my face covering. It's only about 5 feet deep and 8 feet wide but it will work. After I finish I head over to Vanor and crouch down scanning my surroundings to make sure no one is behind me. "What happened," I ask gently, "Canor said you were talking about food."

He mumbles something back at me, that I don't catch.

"Can you repeat that," I say calmly but firmly.

"No food, three days, thought I could make it," he gets out, his voice barely a whisper.

I curse inwardly—three days. "He's half starved," I say to the group standing up. "I'll head out to get food, Kal you come with me. Canor, Leina stay here and take care of him."

We head out into the dunes and I pull back up my face covering. We try to find high ground in order to spot bushes where game might hide. We have little time. I tried to make it not sound urgent but... if we don't get food very soon Halen is going to die. I can't let that happen after all the suffering we went through to get this far, he can't die.

We finally find a rabbit nest and manage to catch five of them. Now we'll find out whether he is alive or dead. Will I continue to disappoint or will we all pull through? So many questions, and no one who can give an answer except time. We start down the same dune that we had come up. Sweat drips down the back of my neck and it isn't from the heat. I step in first and gasp. My heart goes cold at the sight before me. Not only is Halen dead but beside him is the body of Leina. She's dead, right arm ripped from her body, deep lacerations covering her chest. She's completely purple, her lips split and bloody as if by a sickness. There's something else going on here, something else entirely and I don't plan on sticking around.

"Ahhhhg, please hel..." gurgle, gurgle. I twist around and see Canor behind us, throat ripped out, eyes wide and blank. I feel dizzy all of a sudden. I've seen death before, everyone out here has, but never something so brutal. I go to my knees and throw up and I realize... that what I threw up on was Kal's lower body. The other half lays on the ground 10 feet away. I hear a huff of breath behind me then my whole world is in pain. The last thought I have before I die is, we never even saw what they looked like.