

One more step. One foot in front of the other. I've lost count of the amount of times those words have gone through my head. The sun beats down on my dirty, crusted skin, the scorching temperature draining my energy by the second. Each step feels heavier, each drop of sweat beading on my skin making my mouth dry out. "One more step," I mentally repeat, stumbling my way across the barren landscape. The blue sky above me is the only colour contrast to the dry brown and yellow of the desert sand beneath my feet. My body aches for rest, shade, water. It aches for simple reprieve for my burning bones. The horizon blurs as my head spins, my feet stumbling forward as I force myself to continue. Lungs throbbing, each breath becomes harder to take as sweet sweet oxygen parches my mouth.

One more step. Each time I stumble forward seems to drain the last of my will to continue. Aching bones, burning lungs, heat stroke. Everything stacks up against me. A choked sob escapes me but no tears fall, my body too dehydrated to even do that. Glancing up from the ground beneath my feet, a dark blurred shadow appears in the distance. Clumsily, my hand reaches up to rub my eyes, trying to see through my exhausted haze. I can feel my heart stutter in my chest, hope breaking through the desperation and dread that's been plaguing my body for days now. It can't be. It must be an oasis, a figure of my imagination.

Still, my body reacts, a second wind propelling me forward. Jagged breaths burn my weary lungs, the small breeze of my own speed brushing through the tangled mess of hair atop my head. Tired legs struggle to stay underneath me, stumbling and tripping along the barren ground, fighting to keep up with the ambition of my actions. As my brain tries to stay rational, to not to raise my hope, it becomes undeniable that this isn't a figment of imagination. Relief. It's over, a weight leaving my aching chest. This time, a solitary tear escapes me, the sun drying it out on my dirty cheek before it can even reach my lips.

The windows have all been broken, shattered glass on the ground in front of it. Each wooden plank is weathered, the paint barely visible anymore. Some have even chipped away from the nails holding them in place, now hanging precariously. The brick chimney is falling apart, slanting almost as much as the tower of Piza. Yet, as I step into the shadow of the decrepit cabin, a sense of calm floods my bones for the first time in god knows how long. Nearly falling up the steps onto the unstable porch, a whoosh of air escapes my aching lungs, the heavy feeling of dread leaving my body. Never before have I been so elated to have splintered wood beneath my hand as I all but fall through the creaky door. Finally safe, I barely have time to glance around the cabin before my jelly legs give out. A monotone ringing fills my ears, overwhelming my senses. As gravity calls for me, my world fades to black before I even hit the rickety floor.