

The path becomes more even, the pebbles smaller; layers of gypsum protrude like tilted boards from the ridges of clay and enclose on all sides a flat arena. We have been four hours on the way and have covered 3 farsakh; if the guide's data are correct we shall then require forty hours to traverse the 30 farsakh of salt desert. My riding camel has crossed the Kevir thirty times during the eight years she has been at work, and she is ten years old. In this district, therefore, the camels begin to work at two years old, and on that account remain small. Our large camels had not been broken in before they were three or four years old. At regular intervals the cluck in the throats of our bearers is repeated, for they ruminant all day as they swing along.

The country becomes more desolate, poor, and more solemn as we approach the great desert, and the feeling of its proximity is heightened by the gloomy, dark purple clouds which hang over us at sunset. It grows dusk, night is coming on, and the desert before us is enveloped in its murky shroud. The guide hurries on in front to collect fuel while Gulam Hussein leads the camels, mine coming last. We march on in the gathering darkness and not a sound disturbs the peacefulness; it is as silent as in a tomb. The ground is perfectly sterile, the moon tries in vain to break through the heavy masses of cloud which soon gather together, so that not a gleam shows us the place where the lantern of night is hidden.

Now the guide comes with a large armful of fuel. He points to something which is just visible rising up before us in the darkness, and says that it is the dome over a *hauz* or water-reservoir, and that we must pass the night here and set out as early as possible in the morning. We encamp beside a ruined wall sheltered from a slight breeze from the west; it is done in a moment, now that our baggage is so light. The stand is set up and the burkha thrown over it; a candle is lighted, and I take out my note-books to record the events of the day while the men make a fire and infuse tea. And then the first cold chicken is served up with bread and three eggs, and we enjoy our free life more than usual, now that we are so