

few. My travelling companions sit under the open sky and smoke their pipes. There are no living creatures but ourselves in this God-forsaken land.

Then comes suddenly a violent gust from the north sweeping over our lonely camp. It would throw down my improvised tent if I did not catch hold of the stand just in time. Two minutes' calm and then another gust more violent than the former. Sparks fly out of the camp fire. *Bad-i-kevir*, desert wind, says the guide with a serious expression. There is impenetrable night around us and the sky is pitch black. Some large heavy drops pelt down on the burkha, the wind rises and becomes continuous, there is a piping and moaning in the corners, and a storm is coming on. The rain also increases and becomes thicker, falling in a steady shower and noisily rattling on my tent. The men still sit by the fire with their cloaks over their shoulders, and I creep in and try to take no notice of the dropping and streaming from the burkha. We must finish our meal, and we cannot help it if it rains.

But soon it becomes too bad; such rain I have not experienced all the way from Trebizond; it pours down, splutters and splashes in the mud, it is heard hissing far and near, and dashing on to the ground in gushes. It is a dense, close, dismal rain, and its persistent rush gives no hope of its stopping. We have just reached the margin of the Kevir, and are on the point of venturing on a journey over the flat quaking marsh when the only kind of weather which can interfere with our plan breaks loose. What good is it to be energetic and to make up one's mind to a venturesome resolution; it is useless to fight with the elements. I hear the splashing outside with a feeling of vexation, knowing that every moment the desert is becoming worse for traffic. It is as if a powerful being were building up an insurmountable wall to make us turn back.

But we could not long endure this drenching. The men took possession of an anything but inviting hut in ruins, a miserable den under a decaying roof, and thither we tramped through the splashing mud and made haste