

ready to march off just before five, but we had to wait a good quarter of an hour for the men from Yezd. Thick darkness lay over the earth, the moon had set, but bright stars twinkled above the desert and the night was calm, quiet, and solemn. Our neighbours loaded their camels silently as ghosts by the brilliance of a flaming fire, which lighted up the camels and made them stand out in high relief, orange-coloured against the darkness. Only the sound of the bells and the crackling of the firebrands broke the silence, foretelling the approach of another day. There is nothing to speak about, for every man knows his work, and which camels and loads he is responsible for, so he keeps silence, and, like his comrades, experiences a serious feeling of unrest. Occasionally he throws an angry word of abuse at an obstreperous camel.

The weather was fine and pleasant, though cool in the dark hours of morning, but there was no wind, and not a cloud hid the stars. When all was ready the Yezd men took all the branches and twigs left over and piled them up on the fire, and the flames rose in a vertical sparking pillar into the air, and lighted up the dreary neighbourhood of Ramazan's waterless well, where we had passed four long nights and four impatient days. I mounted at once between the humps—best to ride as long as the ground is stable—and so we passed out into the darkness, rendered doubly black by the strong light of the fire; and the bells rang out, some loudly, some faintly, according to their distance. In a minute we are out of the range of the firelight, and its brightness vanishes behind the hills like a dying beacon on a shore.

The large Yezd caravan in front of me looks only like a black mass, as I sit up on the first of our four camels and read my compass and watch and make my notes with the help of a cigarette. No path is visible, but if the men do not see it the camels will find the way. Most, however, depends on the leader of each *katar*; he tows the others and they follow him closely. The darkness is dense, and, for my part, I do not see at all where we are going, and have no notion of the formation of the ground, but I feel that I can thoroughly rely on my camel mare's