

## **The Desert**

A.W. Kinglake [1840]

Then begins your season of rest. The world about you is all your own, and there, where you will, you pitch your solitary tent; there is no living thing to dispute your choice. When a last the spot had been fixed upon, my servants, helped by the Arabs, busied themselves in pitching the tent and kindling the fire. Whilst this was doing I used to walk away to the East, confiding in the print of my foot as a guide for my return, apart from the cheering voices of my attendants, I could better know and feel the loneliness of the desert/ Reaching at last some high ground, I could see, and see with delight, the fire of our small encampment, and when at last I regained the spot, it seemed a very home that had sprung up for me in the midst of these solitudes. My Arabs were busy with their bread – Myseri rattling teacups; the little kettle with her odd old-maidish looks sat humming away old songs about England, and two or three yards from the fire my tent stood prim and tight, with open portal and with welcoming look.

Then within my tent there were heaps of luxuries – dining-rooms, dressing rooms, libraries, bedrooms, drawing-rooms, oratories – all crowded into the space of a hearthrug. By-and-by there was brought to me the fragrant tea, and big masses of scorched and scorching toast, and the butter that had come all the way to me in this Desert of Asia from out of that poor, dear starving Ireland. I feasted like a king – like four kings – like a boy in the fourth form.

When the cold, sullen morning dawned, and my people began to load the camels, I always felt loth to give back to the waste this little spot of ground that had glowed for a while with the cheerfulness of a human dwelling. One by one the cloaks, the saddles, the baggage, the hundred things that strewed the ground and made it look so familiar – all these were taken away, and laid upon the camels. A speck in the broad tracts of Asia remained still impressed with the mark of patent portmanteaus and the heels of London boots; the embers of the fire lay black and cold upon the sand, and these were the signs we left.

My tent was spared to the last, but when all else was ready for the start then came its fall; the pegs were drawn, the canvas shivered, and in less than a minute there was nothing that remained of my genial home but only a pole and a bundle. The encroaching Englishman was off, and instant upon the fall of the canvas, like an owner, who had waited and watched, the Genius of the Desert stalked in.

*Eothen*, pp. 179-81.