

GEORG and EFFE already stood there with bared chests and their hands tied behind them as in a vice; and each of them had one or several pistols an inch from his heart. The murderers had their fingers on the triggers, and if one of them had tripped on the uneven surface of the dark courtyard a round would have been let off and the signal given.

In the meantime, rifles were clicking as the bolts were pushed home before firing. The soldiers formed a group to one side, holding their rifles aslant, with the barrels pointed at us. It remained only to give the order: ready, fire!

In one second my life flew past me; I thought of my dear home in Sweden, the young men for whose lives I was responsible, the expedition for which I should have rendered account to the Central Government. We were going to be shot in half a minute! Christ in heaven, it *must* not happen! My three comrades' lives and my own were worth more than one motor-lorry. I cried to GEORG:

»We'll be shot! Promise them the car to-night!«

GEORG, a head taller than anyone else, translated my order in a quiet, low-pitched voice. The psychological current changed. Taut muscles slackened; the rifles assumed more vertical positions. A new word of command rang out:

»Take the old man in! Keep a tight hand on the young ones!«

The soldier who had made the first turn round my wrists dropped the rope and released my hands. Two others jostled me into the room and drew a chair up to the table on which the candle stood. I sat down and was about to light a cigarette. My cigarette-case was missing, as well as other things I had had in my pockets. Curiously enough, my watch was still there. The others lost theirs.

The minutes that followed were like so many eternities.

»Aren't the others coming?« I asked the guards who stood watching me like wolves.

»They're coming!« they replied.

But they did not come. I sat in a terrible state of suspense, expecting every moment to hear the volley that would announce the deaths of my three friends.

»Aren't they coming soon?«

»They're coming!«

Still they did not come. Tortured with anxiety, I rose quickly, meaning to hurry out into the yard to see what had happened or was happening. The two soldiers placed themselves in my way, pointing to the chair. It was half-past ten. It had all been the work of a few minutes. I remained outwardly calm, but feverish with anxiety.

The next moment YEW was thrust into the room with a violent push, and I shouted to him:

»Say that the car will be here this evening on condition that all of you are untied and brought in here.«