

»We want to come in! Don't be afraid!» the men answered.

»Our Swedish doctor doesn't see patients at night. Come again to-morrow morning at eleven.»

»We don't know anything about the doctor, we want to come in,» they said.

This was followed by an animated conversation between the soldiers. But the voices grew fainter and fainter; and at last they died away down the street. It was a good thing that our quarters were 300 meters from the main artery of the town, so that only roaming marauders and plunderers strayed our way.

An hour later the night-watchman looked in again, to report in a trembling voice that a crowd of soldiers had collected outside the gate and were hammering on it with their rifle-butts and shouting »Open the gate at once!»

Our Chinese, BERGMAN and I had just gone to bed in our clothes; but HUMMEL was still up and hurried out. In a little while he came back and called to us inside:

»Come out at once! It sounds threatening!»

A large party of Tungan soldiers were making a noise out in the street, talking excitedly the while. We could not tell how many of them there were. They were bumping and rattling their rifles. We, too, raised our voices and spoke in threatening tones. One of the men banged on the door with his rifle-butt, shouting:

»Open at once, or we'll fire!»

»This gate is not opened at night; Europeans live here!»

»We want to speak to you. One of you must come out here to us, or else we'll fire.»

»One of you can come in to us.»

»No; we won't send anyone alone. We must all come into your place and see who you are. You needn't be afraid to open the gate; nobody's going to take you prisoner.»

»Well, and nobody's going to let strangers in here at night, either!»

»Were you with that motor-convoy that went off from Turfan?»

»Yes, certainly.»

»Show us your passports!»

»There's no need. MA's men have seen them already. You can have a card if you like.»

My visiting-card was thrust out through a chink in the door and held in the light of an electric torch. None of the men could read. YEW read out my title on the card: head of the road-making expedition in government service. Again they talked eagerly among themselves, finally going off in the pitch darkness without making any further demands.

We assumed that they were only going to fetch reinforcements, and that next time they would answer our refusal to open by smashing the gate and bursting into the yard, brandishing rifles and pistols. The fugitives, numbering some hundreds, who were still in Korla were under nobody's command. They were simply