

We had veered off considerably to the north and west; but now we left the mountains through a funnel-shaped valley and steered south-east over the dark *sai*-surface towards the Qum-darya, which, with its yellow reed-beds, could be glimpsed in the distance.

To our astonishment we passed EFFE's lorry. In the driver's cabin we found a letter from YEW explaining that the lorry had been on the way to Ying-p'an to fetch provisions from Tikenliq when a back axle had broken, and the passengers had had to proceed on foot. He asked TSERAT to meet them.

#### BACK IN BASE CAMP NO. 70

With the mountain-ridge of Charchaq on our left we proceeded across the barren plain, where the going was good, stopping at 6.30 at base camp No. 70, where only NIKOLAI and a couple of Turkis were to be found. NIKOLAI told us that BERGMAN and GEORG were on the other bank of the Qum-darya with tents, servants, horses and donkeys, all ready to start off into the desert the next morning. YEW, with EFFE and two of our men, had gone off an hour or two earlier to the broken-down lorry, to repair it and bring it back to camp.

The most important thing for me now was to get into touch with BERGMAN's party before it started. We therefore went to the bank and got ready a couple of canoes. It was already dusk when we embarked, and we had to paddle upstream a good while before we saw the outline of BERGMAN's tent. We landed close by in pitch darkness, by lantern-light. GEORG and the servants were down on the bank to receive us; BERGMAN had already gone to bed, but he dressed hurriedly when he heard our voices. He had not known till then whether we were still alive or had perished. And here we were turning up at his camp at nightfall.

BERGMAN was, of course, extremely interested in our discoveries of the graves; and the collections we had made were handed over to his care. He and GEORG confirmed what we already knew — that nothing whatever had been heard about the promised oil. They had sent a messenger with a letter to the commandant of the garrison at Korla asking for news; but the messenger had not yet returned. My decision to go to Korla in person, or even, if necessary, to Urumchi, was thus the only right course. We had much to talk about, and sat up a good while after midnight.

BERGMAN's and GEORG's little caravan consisted of ÖRDEK, who had said that he knew of strange burial places in the heart of the desert, a Turki from Yangi-su who knew the way, a couple of our servants, five horses and three donkeys, and three week's provisions. During my absence they had in vain searched for the burial sites but only lately got on the track. And now they were to go west, south and south-east to the main burial place, that was said to be a hard day's march east of Yangi-su in the sand desert.