

So far so good. But that very same evening the local authorities started their game of mean, petty intrigue. Mr WANG from the foreign department came to tell us, with the Governor-General's compliments, that we might not leave Urumchi without a special pass.

»Well, why don't you send the pass, then? It's to save a man's life!«

»You will know at ten to-morrow morning whether you can have the pass or not. If you get the pass, petrol will be sent too.«

We were dressed early on Sunday; but there was no sign of either pass or petrol. I wrote to APRESOV, and a reply came that he was not at home. The hours passed. TSERAT arrived from the garage with the small car; it was repaired, and we had got petrol. We now needed only the pass to be able to start.

Late in the afternoon came Mr WANG, the skilful stage manager in this drama of intrigue. He said insinuatingly:

»If you sell SHENG TUPAN two of your lorries, you can get anything you like out of him.«

»We can talk about that when the cars have come to Urumchi. What we want now is the pass, to be able to go to Dr HUMMEL's aid.«

»The pass will be here at ten to-morrow morning.«

»But you know it's to save a man's life. Whatever's the point in making us lose yet another day?«

He rose with a smile, bowed, and left.

The night passed. We were up at seven. Ten o'clock arrived, but there was no sign of any pass.

After the lapse of an hour, when WANG's promise had been proved to be worthless, we drove to the Russian Consulate. Mr APRESOV had a visitor, so we waited on the little verandah. Suddenly the door opened, and a tall man with a familiar face came out, accompanied by one of the secretaries — KEMAL EFFENDI. But he walked with bent head, with a serious and worried air, and did not notice us.

Our turn came next. Full of humour and high spirits, Mr APRESOV treated us to a masterly little piece of acting. With an expression of the greatest astonishment he rose and exclaimed:

»What! haven't you gone yet? Why, your doctor's ill and in urgent need of help, and you're still sitting here wasting your time! I'll denounce you to the Swedish Government. You've got petrol and oil, your car's repaired, and still you don't start! It's monstrous!«

»You're quite right, GAREGIN ABRAMOVICH. But the foreign commissariat has told us through Mr WANG that we may not leave the town without a pass; and although we have continually reminded him about it, and he has given us repeated promises of its arrival, it doesn't come.«

»Oh, I'll settle that in a moment!«