

"Supposing your father-in-law heard you?"

"What father-in-law? What do you mean by that?"

"You think because you hide yourself under your cap that nobody sees what you do. Aren't you going to Pocovnicu Iordache to engage yourself to his eldest daughter? Come, don't look at me like that, go into the next room to dinner."

I had seen many clean and quiet rooms in the course of my life, but a room like that one! What a bed! What curtains! What walls! What a ceiling! All white as milk. And the lamp-shade, and all those crochet things of every kind and shape! And the warmth, like being under a hen's wing, and a smell of apples and quinces!

I was about to seat myself at the table, when, according to a habit I had acquired in my childhood, I turned to bow towards the east. I looked carefully round all along the walls--not an Icon to be seen.

"What are you looking for?" said Mistress Marghioala.

"Your Icons. Where do you keep them?"

"Dash the Icons! They only breed worms and wood-lice."

What a cleanly woman! I seated myself at the table, and crossed myself as was my custom, when suddenly there was a yell. It appeared that with the heel of my boot I had trodden upon an old Tom cat which was under the table.

Mistress Marghioala jumped up quickly and undid the outside door. The injured cat made a bound outside while the cold air rushed in and extinguished the lamp. She groped about for the matches. I searched here, she searched there. We met face to face in the dark. I, very bold, took her in my arms and began to kiss her. The lady now resisted, now yielded; her cheeks were burning, her mouth was cold, soft down fluttered about her ears. At last the servant arrived with a tray with viands on it, and a light. We must have hunted some time for the matches, for the chimney of the lamp was quite cold. I lit it again.

What excellent food! Hot bread, roast duck with cabbage, boiled veal sausages, and wine! And Turkish coffee! And laughter and conversation! Good luck to Mistress Marghioala!

After coffee she said to the old maidservant: "Tell them to bring out a half-bottle of muscadine."

That wonderful old wine! A sort of languor seized my every limb. I sat on one side of the bed, draining the last amber drops from my glass, and smoking a cigarette, while through the cloud of tobacco smoke I watched Mistress Marghioala who sat on a chair opposite rolling cigarettes for me. I said:

"Indeed, Mistress Marghioala, you have marvellous eyes! Do you know what?"

"What?"

"Would it trouble you to make me another cup of coffee, not quite so sweet as this?"

How she laughed! When the maid brought the coffee-pot, she said:

"Madam, you sit talking here--you don't know what it is like outside."

"What is it?"

"A high wind has got up, and there is a storm coming."

I jumped to my feet and looked at the time; it was nearly a quarter to eleven. Instead of half an hour, I had been at the inn for two