

"What think you, Bogdan," he said after a short pause, "shall we succeed?"

"How can your Highness doubt it," replied the courtier, "the country groans under the harshness of Tomsha. The whole army will surrender when you promise them higher pay. Those boyars who are still left alive are only held back by fear of death, but when they see that your Highness comes with force they will at once flock to you, and desert the other."

"Please God we shall not be obliged to do what Voda Mircea did in Muntenia; but as I have told you, I know our boyars, for I have lived among them."

"This matter must be left to your Highness's sagacity."

Thus speaking they drew near to Tecuci where they halted by a wood.

"Sire," said a messenger approaching, "some boyars have arrived, and crave an audience of your Highness."

"Let them come," replied Alexandru.

Four boyars soon entered the tent, where he was sitting surrounded by his boyars and officers; two of them were elderly men but the other two were young. They were Vornic Motzoc, Postelnic Veveritza, Spancioc, the noble, and Stroici. They approached Voda Alexandru, and bowed to the ground, but without kissing the hem of his garment as was the custom.

"Welcome, boyars!" said Alexandru, forcing himself to smile.

"Good health to your Highness," replied the boyars.

"I have heard," pursued Alexandru, "of the affliction of the land, and I have come to deliver it; I know the country awaits me with joy."

"Do not imagine that it is so, your Highness," said Motzoc. "The country is quiet; it may be your Highness has heard things that are not really facts, it being the habit of our people to make stallions out of mosquitoes. For this reason the community has sent us to tell you that the people do not want you, no one loves you, and your Highness has only to turn back----"

"You may not want me, I want you," replied Lapushneanu, and his eyes flashed like lightning. "You may not love me, I will love you, and will come among you with your consent or without it. I turn back? Sooner may the Danube change its course! Ah! The country does not want me? Do I understand that you do not want me?"

"One dare not behead ambassadors," said Spancioc. "We are bound to tell you the truth. The boyars have decided to take their way to Hungary, to Poland, and to Muntenia, where they all have relations and friends. They will come with foreign armies, and woe betide the poor country when we have war between us, and maybe your Highness will not do well because Shtefan Tomsha----"

"Tomsha! Has he taught you to speak with such temerity? I know not what prevents me from smashing the teeth in your jaw with this club," he said, seizing the weapon from Bogdan's hand. "Has that wretched Tomsha taught you?"

"He who is worthy to be named the Anointed of God cannot be wretched," said Veveritza.

"Am not I, too, the Anointed of God? Did you not swear fealty to me when I was only Petre Stolnic? Did you not choose me? What was my reign like! What blood have I shed? Whom have I turned from my door without due reward and help? And yet you do not want me, do not love me? Ha, ha, ha!"