

And they mixed with the crowd. They were Spancioc and Stroici.

At the court great preparations had been made for this feast. The news had spread that the Prince had made his peace with the boyars, and the boyars rejoiced at the change, in the hopes they would once more occupy positions whence they could amass fresh wealth at the expense of the sweating peasants. As to the people, they were indifferent; they neither expected good nor feared evil from this reconciliation. The people were reconciled to the rule of Alexandru Voda. They only grumbled about his Minister, Motzoc, who took advantage of his credit with the Prince to cheat the mass of the people. Thus, although the complaints of the community were continual about the thefts of Motzoc, Lapushneanu either would not answer them or would not listen to them.

As the hour of the feast drew near, the boyars arrived on horseback, each accompanied by two or three retainers. They noticed that the courtyard was full of armed mercenaries and that four guns were trained upon the doors, but they concluded they were placed there to fire the usual ceremonial salute. Perhaps one or two suspected a trap, but once inside it was impossible to return, for the gates were guarded and the sentries had orders to let no one pass out.

Lapushneanu joined the boyars, forty-seven in number, and placed himself at the head of the table, placing the Chancellor, Trotushan, upon his right, and Home Secretary, Motzoc, upon his left. The pipes began to play, and the viands were placed upon the table.

In Moldavia at that period there was nothing remarkable in the fashion of the food. The banquet only comprised a few varieties of dishes. After the Polish soup came Greek dishes of boiled vegetables floating in butter, then Turkish rice and finally a roast. The table-cloth was of home-spun linen. The dishes containing the food, the plates and the goblets, were of silver. Along the wall stood a row of earthenware jars full of wine from Odobeshti and from Cotnari, and at the back of each boyar waited some servant who poured out the wine.

In the courtyard by the side of two roast oxen and four roast sheep, three casks of wine had been broached; the retainers ate and drank, the boyars ate and drank. Soon brains began to get inflamed: the wine began to do its work. The boyars saluted, and congratulated the Prince with loud applause, to which the mercenaries responded with shouts and the guns with salvos.

They were on the point of rising from the table when Veveritza raised his glass, and bowing, said:

"May your Highness live for many years! May you rule the land in peace and may a merciful God strengthen the desire you have shown to no longer molest the boyars or afflict the people----"

He did not finish for the dagger of an esquire struck him right on the forehead and felled him to the ground.

"Ah, you would insult your Prince!" cried the esquire. "Upon them!"

In a second, all the servants behind the boyars drew their daggers and struck them; other soldiers under the captain of mercenaries entered and slashed at them with their swords. In the meanwhile Lapushneanu took Motzoc by the hand and drew him to the open window whence to watch the butchery which began. He laughed; but Motzoc, forcing himself to laugh, felt the hair rising upon his head, and his teeth chattering. And, in truth, it was horrible to watch that bloody scene. The fancy must picture a hall 33 ft. long and 30 ft. wide, a hundred and more desperate men, determined to kill, executioners and victims, some fighting with the fury of despair, others with drunken rage. The boyars had had no suspicions, thus treacherously attacked from behind, and unarmed, they fell unable to defend themselves. The older men died making the sign of the cross; but many of the younger ones defended themselves with desperation; chairs, plates, the implements upon the table became weapons in their hands;