

FROM MY ESTATES

By THE NISTOR

Translated by JOSEPH LEFTWICH

The Nistor (Pinchas Kahanovitch), born 1884, in Berditchev, in the Ukraine. Victim of the Soviet purge of Yiddish literature in 1948. Was influenced by Hassidism. Has written a great many poems, ballads, children's stories, and translated Hans Andersen into Yiddish. After the revolution, during the Kiev period of Jewish cultural activity, David Bergelson and he were the chief representatives of Yiddish literature in the Ukraine. Left Russia for a time in 1920, and lived in Berlin for several years, but afterwards returned to Soviet Russia. Used Yiddish folk-motifs very largely in his writings, and a simple, naive style, with a somewhat twisted syntax at times.

I DON'T know where it came flying from, but suddenly, in the midst of everything, I felt on my forehead a wet mud-patch. I looked round. Who could it be, and who had thrown it? Saw nobody. And at once removed the mud-patch with my hand, and lo, a coin.

And as I had long been going about penniless, had not eaten, nor had a decent lodging, I wanted to have a good time now. So I went to a fine restaurant, had a meal, ate my fill, and then I went into the town for a stroll, with something still in my pocket for spending. And since a fine day it was, and I feeling pleased with myself, passing the splendid promenading place, and seeing tents and booths put up there, in which books were sold and many people, grown people and also children buying, because a cheap book-week had been proclaimed all over the country and books were being raffled in the booths, and each raffle, it was written down, must win, I also went up and drew a ticket, and when the salesman in the booth unfolded the ticket, he gave me a book.

The author, The Nistor!

The title—*The Writings of A Madman*. And on the cover the drawing of a pale lunatic wearing a strait-jacket.

I turned the pages and the book started like this.

The Nistor complained that he had ten bears boarding with him and eating his head off, eating him out of house and home. And when he had nothing left, not a cent, and he himself had to go begging in the houses, they still would not leave him alone. They kept coming to him, sat round his table, and everything he bought, that he had got together begging on the doorsteps of houses, they demanded, and he had to give it to them.

The last time he came home he found them round his table again—four on one side, and four on the other, and one at the head and one at the foot, the two oldest and most sedate. They were all silent, waiting, looking at him—and what they were waiting for was—food.

And when the Nistor showed them—let them see!—that there was nothing in the room, and he undid his wallet, and nothing there either, and the only cupboard standing open, and the shelves bare, and on the walls no raiment, and in the corners of the walls only spiders, and the spiders, too, dead or faint with hunger—they still kept silent.

And the Nistor thought to himself—what more could he show them that they should see that he had nothing—except his ten fingers—maybe! And he said so to them: “This is all I have and all I possess—no more. And do with me what you will.” And the bears looked at his fingers, and agreed. Fingers are fingers, and fingers are food.

So the Nistor went up to the first bear, a little bear, and offered his little finger to chew. And he bit it off. He offered the next finger to the second. And he did the same. And so from one to the other along one side of the table. The Nistor already had no fingers left on one hand—instead of fingers blood and chewed bones. And the others were famished, waiting their turn, and licking their jaws very respectably.

The Nistor went over to the other side of the table, and offered the little finger of his other hand, and then the next, till he had only two fingers left, and two more bears to feed, a young bear along the side of the table, and the oldest bear, at the head.

The young bear had no patience, seeing all the others busy eating, their mouths full of blood and gristle, and his appetite was roused, and he was full of desire. And when the Nistor went up to him and offered him his finger he snapped at it and in his haste bit off both fingers at once. And the oldest and last of the bears was left without food, without a finger, and he sat there very annoyed, and very sedate, and waited. Of course, the Nistor would not let him go without anything. Why was he worse than the rest? On the contrary, he was the senior and deserved more.

And the Nistor stood there with two bleeding hands now, holding them up, and the blood was running into his sleeves, and the pain was intense, and what could he do with the blood, since he could not even put on a bandage, or tie a towel round.

Then the Nistor went up to the oldest of the bears and said: “Look, I haven't any more. And I can't do anything more. Even if I want to.”

And when the bear heard this, he silently and sedately laid his paw on the Nistor's breast, and asked: “And this, what is this?”

“This!” answered the Nistor. “It is nothing, a little watch, of no consequence. It goes wrong, and doesn't keep time properly.”

“A watch is a watch,” answered the bear, and did not take his paw off the breast. And the Nistor realised that it was all up, that he would have to part now with his breast and his heart, and then the spiders in the room too, would have to die, and then he would not be able to go begging in the houses any more.

So he stood for a while and looked at the bear, and here his finger-pain

became more intense, suffering not to be endured, and a great cry broke from him, but he kept it back; he did not want to disturb the feast of the other bears. And then, when they had all finished eating, and the oldest of the bears still kept his paw on his breast, and he was hungry for his portion, and waited for the Nistor's breast, the Nistor lifted up his voice and said:

"My lord bears. You demand from me the last I have, and if I give it to you, neither I nor you will have any more, and we must now bid each other farewell. And since you have seen me in my poverty and in my bitter plight, and in my wealth never, I want to tell you about that now, so that you will see how being rich, one can become poor. So why not being poor again, again rich? And perhaps if you will now leave me this last that I have, who knows but you would have no cause for regret afterwards, and maybe by not eating this once you would afterwards be rewarded with many rich feasts:

"My fingers which you have chewed up hurt, and the bones which are now being digested in your bellies have left me blood-burning wounds, and there is a cry sticking in my throat, and it is only for the sake of your feast that I did not cry out, and a great cry is still in store for me, when my heart is taken out of me, and as much time as I am still destined to spend in company with it, I want to use in order to rejoice with it for the last time. So permit me this for the last time. And hear me speak of my riches.

"You must know that in the highest places I had my own ladder, and often I went up, and once I remained there for a long time. And up above as down below, there are places of different kinds, beautiful and eerie, and also ugly and muddy. And as usual, I sated myself first with the beautiful, and spent much time there, and then I left them, and I crossed the frontiers and a filthy, squalid, muddy place I found myself in.

"A town was there, and the town was more than half sunk in mud, and the walls sullied, and whiteness and something not filthy was a novelty there. And people trudged along up to their ankles in mud, and the houses were mud, and the roofs were covered with mud, and when it rained and the roof-mud got wet the filth ran into the houses, and what happened then in the houses can be guessed, and how the people looked inside these filthy houses can be imagined. And like the people, so were their means of earning their living. And they baked bread of mud, and with unwashed hands they ate.

"Anyone who came to them as a guest from outside suffered, of course, starved, couldn't put a thing in his mouth, but in the end he could not hold out any more. He had to eat. He gave in and willy-nilly had to join in their filth-feasts. And I, too, when I came there from the lovely places, suffered intensely at first from hunger and from cold, because their food I could not eat, and their couches revolted me. But after some time had elapsed, and all my fine things and everything I had

brought with me from those other places gave out, I had no choice but to yield, and whether I wished it or didn't wish it (of course, I didn't), I had to break their filth-bread and dig my spoon into their dirt-plates.

"And I ate, and soon vomited it up, and I ate a second time, and I vomited again. And the filth-people were indignant. Why was I so fastidious—why could they eat it and others as well, even guests from outside got accustomed to it, and why was I better than everybody else!

"And they hated me. And when I became ill because of their food, and couldn't get up, nobody came to me, nobody brought me any different food, like for a sick person, nor even for one who is not sick. They forgot all about me, and did not bring me even their ordinary muck.

"And I became wasted, and nobody paid me the slightest attention. I just lay there and couldn't move. And when I once asked in my room for a drink, and a child in the room, if its parents had gone out, or an aged person left behind, handed me sometimes on my plea a little of their water, and the water, like their food, was black and filthy, and I sipped it, wanting to still my hurt and quench my thirst, I vomited the water, too, and with the water everything I had left, the very gall in me, and I became green, and shrieked as I vomited, and when the child that had brought me the drink, or the old man who had been left behind grew frightened and ran to call the people of the house, their own or relatives or neighbours, these for the most part took no notice, would not even listen, and even if they did, and even if they sometimes came and found me green, belching and faint, they used to stand and look at me and spit and 'a nuisance' they would say, and 'who sent for him, who asked him to come here. Soon he will die and we shall have his body on our hands, and have to dig a grave for him—as if we hadn't anything else to do!'

"Help, of course, they did not give me. Nor did they have anything with which to help me, since it seemed to be all my fault, because my stomach and my guts appeared to be different, and I was a stranger besides, and what, after all, was I there, and what claim had I on them, and why should I be a burden on them.

"As for getting well, I saw that among these dirt and filth-folk I should never get well, because food and remedies of dirt are neither food nor remedies. And I did not want to die among them. The thought that even after I was dead filthy people would lay me out with their filthy paws—though life there was uninviting—did not make death any more pleasant.

"And I strengthened myself, pulled myself together and I got out of my muck-bed, put on my bemired garments, and as best I could, without saying a word to anyone, without a farewell to anyone, I dragged myself to the door, crossed the threshold and went outside.

"The very thought that I was already outside made me feel well, and the hope that perhaps by exerting all my strength I would somehow be

able to get out of this filth, gave me increased powers, and I strode forward through the mud.

"And the people of the house saw that, and when I got out of bed, and quietly, without a word of farewell, left them, and went out into the fresh air, and the air agreed with me, and my eyes sparkled with health, they scoffed and jeered at me, and they believed, they were sure that I would not be able to get as far as their frontier. Also they were annoyed with me, as I have said, for being fastidious. They hated me. 'Look!' they shouted. 'He is going away. He is leaving us. Our country doesn't suit him. Our mud is not to his liking. He is looking for fresh lands, the perisher is leaving us!'

"And some of them accompanied me with curses and with reviling and others slung mud after me, first the children, and afterwards the fathers and the older folk. And the people got excited, and the people bent down to the ground, and picked up mud, and mud there was plenty, and how to handle mud these people knew well enough, and the people threw mud, and everything they threw stuck to me—first my back was plastered, then when I turned round to look at those who were slinging mud at me, I was covered with it in front, too, and my face as well, and my head, and the hair on my head, and I was wet and black all over, and heavy with the weight of the mud on me. And the mud kept flying at me, one lump after the other. The first I felt, but those that followed I ceased to feel, and muddied and besmirched, I just managed to get away from the pursuing, pelting mob.

"And with great difficulty and feeling very ill, I slogged for ever so long through the mud, and covered quite a distance, and many times I stopped in the midst of the mire to catch my breath, and many times I thought it was the end of me, that I should never get to my destination, and would leave my soul in the mud, till it was over, and I got out of there, and placed a wet foot on the dry frontier, and again came into a beautiful land.

"Soon the frontier people saw me, and they seemed very much surprised, and they stared at me, with awe, with their eyes wide open, and I understood, and I explained their wonderment to myself, thinking that they stared at me because I was an object to be stared at, like a corpse that had arrived in a living land, or someone filthy and bedraggled who had come into a clean country, for I was ill, and surely there must be signs of something deathly on my face, and I was covered with mud, and these two things together, ill and filthy, had no doubt provoked their amazement.

"But when I looked again, I saw that more than wonder, there was awe in their eyes, that they kept aloof from me with tremendous deference, not as if a sick man, poor and mud-coated, had appeared to them, but one who is very wealthy, overwhelming them with his opulence, and they, the frontier-folk, and the inhabitants of that land had never

seen anything like it, as if he were walking on gold, and as if he were hung with gold from head to foot.

"And, indeed, when I lifted up my hand and wanted to take the mud off my face, to get rid of some of the filth, and in this fair place make myself more fair, and I took off the first bit of dried caked mud, and held it in my hand, I saw in my hand not mud, but actually gold. Once I took off—a lump of gold, the second time—again gold. And when I looked at my mud-pelted garments and the whole of my body, I found myself all over shining, golden, as if encased in armour of gold.

"And clear it was to me why the frontier-folk paid me honour, and comprehensible also why they held aloof, full of deference and awe. And I saw myself terribly rich, and soon I felt myself strong, and since from the mud-folk I had come tired out by the journey, and ill, and famished, not having eaten for a long time, and as I looked round in that place, immediately on the frontier, and saw shops with fine raiment, and all sorts of luxuries, I went at once into the first shop, and owner and assistants ran up to me and gave me what I desired.

"And when I wanted to pay with the caked mud that in my hands immediately turned to gold, and I gave the proprietor a gold coin, and wanted to take the goods, he would not allow me to. 'No,' he said to me, 'I must not do that.' His assistants would take everything home for me.

"And the proprietor asked me where I lived, the house where I stayed, and I could go, and soon I would have everything brought to me at home.

"And I was not living anywhere, and had no place at all, so I stood there for a time embarrassed, and could give the proprietor no street, no number and no house.

"The proprietor saw my embarrassment, and asked me the reason. And I said:

"I am a stranger, and I am not living anywhere yet, and perhaps you could be good enough to tell me where I could get a room."

"Certainly," the proprietor hastened to answer, showing me every sign of courtesy and honour. And he at once sent out one of his assistants, who ran and immediately ordered a room for me in a hotel. And he came straight back, and the proprietor ordered him to take me to the hotel, and to be at my service, if I wanted anything else on the way, that I would like to purchase in other shops, and he would go with me, point out everything for me, and carry home for me all the other things I would buy.

"I thanked him, and went out with the assistant, and wherever we went people stared after us, and wherever we turned people stopped their work, no matter what they were doing, and looked at us. And people came to the doors of the shops, and shopkeepers and assistants gazed at us with amazement, and from the houses, too, and the windows, people

looked out, and the whole town, all the streets through which we went, had one subject and one thing only to do—to admire me clad in gold, and not to take eye off me or cease to talk about me.

“And the assistant went with me from shop to shop, and in all the shops we bought what I required and needed, and then the assistant took me to a hotel, the richest and cleanest, and the finest room was given to me, with all conveniences, with beautiful walls and great doors and tapestries and windows looking out into a lovely garden, and a strong, beautiful bed, and great comfort and excellent service. And many servants stood waiting to carry out my wishes, and everything I said was done at once.

“Presently I told everyone to go out and I got into bed and rested, and I had a doctor called, and the doctor came and examined me, and he found that there was no longer any illness in me. I was having good food, and the doctor prescribed in addition to the good food certain other good things, and his treatment was right, and in a few days I had forgotten all that had happened before, the muddy place and the bad treatment I had there, and the mud with which they had pelted me, and my illness there, and what was left me of the mud was gold, and I am rich and honoured and in a beautiful spot, and in the most beautiful house of this beautiful spot, and the owner of the house in which I am staying keeps hovering around me, and servants walk on tip-toe in front of me, and what more could I desire?

“And, indeed, as soon as I felt well I dressed and went out into the town, and the town knew me from before, and the townsfolk stared after me more than previously. And many interested people I saw, merchants, agents, and others who wanted to do business, who kept following me, wanted to propose something to me, but did not yet venture to approach, stared after me, watched where I went in, but kept their distance, did not yet dare to come up to me.

“But after a time, first one, and then another, and then many others came up to me. And soon I was surrounded by a crowd of merchants, agents, and people with business schemes, and each of them proposed something to me, or had something to sell.

“They persuaded me that there was a shortage of money in the country at present, and if I want a house I can have a house, if I want a shop I can have a shop, if I want a forest, if I want a field, I can have it all, and for next to nothing, and I must not let the opportunity slip, but let myself be persuaded.

“I allowed myself to be persuaded, for without business there would be nothing to do, no way of passing the time, and what was the use of walking about with the gold? What would be the use of it to me? While if I trade I lose nothing, on the contrary, I add to my usefulness. For I had made enquiries, and saw that the businesses that were suggested to me were really advantageous, and the country really experienced a crisis, as

they had told me, and it could be exploited, so why not, and why should I decline?

“And I bought. If a house was offered I bought a house. If it was a shop, then it was a shop, if something else, it was something else; and in a little while, when I looked round, and I went through the town, walking with my agents and business promoters, and they pointed out my possessions, the houses and the shops, I perceived that entire streets were already in my pocket. Also I had on me the contracts for a great number of shops, and I am the boss, and I give orders, and a large part of the town already belongs to me, and before long the whole town and everything in it will belong to me.

“And so it was. In a short time, the man who was above everybody else in the town came to me himself, the man who owned the land, the site on which the town stood, and said that he had heard that I am buying, and that I am not short of money, so perhaps I would buy the town from him, the land and the title-deeds, and all the buildings, and the open spaces, and everything all around, and the whole of the revenue would be mine.

“And I bought. And I became master of the town. And for a little while I was content with that, had sated my buying-lust. Then when the town ceased to be sufficient for me, and sitting about doing nothing was tedious, I left that place, the town, with everything I had bought, and went to another place, and there I did the same as in the first place, and I did that too in a third place, and so on and so on; I bought up everything, and my breast-pocket was bursting with papers, and my case kept getting more full of contracts.

“And in all places my name was great, and everywhere I was known and respected, and whole countries were at my service, and entire districts waited for my orders. And merchants and agents stood in queues at my door, waiting to hear me speak a word, and revenue from the entire country came flowing into my pocket, and all my desires were fulfilled, and the loveliest daughters of the land were waiting for me to delight them. If I but nodded, the best of them were at my disposal. If I beckoned, the finest robes fell off the most ravishing bodies. And my banquets and balls that I arranged were talked about and remembered months and years afterwards. And the rich wished they had my wealth, and the poor dreamed of me on their couches at night, and in their dreams they looked up at me as from the earth to heaven, and I stood over their heads like a great sun, and their eyes were too small to see, and their heads were not big enough to imagine such great good as mine.

“And I was not sated, and all the good things I had were not enough for me, and already seemed little to me, and all that I had did not satisfy me, and I wanted to be the ruler over the whole country and the whole kingdom.

“And one fine day I achieved that. The Lord of all, the paramount

ruler, whose word was law, once sent to me early in the morning one of his great officials, with his footstool for me, and the footstool looked like a crown, and it had a rest on which to place the feet, and the man offered it to me, and I placed my feet on it.

"And so there was nothing more to wish for, and no gold on my body was left, and the mud with which I had been pelted had by dint of long-in-riches-living and much washing been rubbed away, and left to me was only on my forehead a little gold, and a little mud-patch, which in spite of all the washings and soaps couldn't come off, and I picked at it with my fingers, and it was very hard—and then, when the man brought me the footstool, a little perspiration broke out on my forehead—I was so excited and surprised, and I put my hand to my forehead, and a lump of gold came off, a hardened lump, and when I saw it in my hand, I felt very jolly, and that gold seemed to me the best gold of all, and it was indeed the best gold. And I said to the man:

"I am arranging a ball, and let the ruler come and see that his footstool has come to rest under deserving and worthy feet, and his crown—"

"I did not finish, but I meant that his crown was on a head undeserving and little worthy.

"The man flushed red. But out of awe for me, and because his ruler had sent him on such an important mission to me, and the ruler himself had sent his footstool to me, he heard my insult to the crown and said nothing, but a little abashed for his lord, and also a little out of fear for me, he bowed his head.

"And the ball took place. The finest and largest halls were decorated, and all the loveliest flowers of the land were brought there, and all the most beautiful women filled the dance-halls and the tables. And servants handed round food on plates of gold—and there was plenty of everything, oysters from the sea, and birds from distant isles, and wines from the cellars of princes, and goblets from the biggest landowners, and the music was the most delightful, and birds and parrots with their cries helped to drown the music.

"And dresses were seen there such as no eye could have previously imagined, and the tables took away the breath of even old and former kings. And the guests marvelled and gaped, and no one was able to see all the wealth that was there, for wherever they looked they were unable to take their eyes off, they could not see enough of it. People walked about dazed. They looked at things without seeing them, and they did not know where to look first.

"The official had conveyed my wish, and the ruler came, and he, too, was amazed, and his eyes were lost. And the guests were so full of the splendours there, and the servants also, that no one even noticed him, save I alone, and I called him to the head of the hall, and seated him at my side.

"There was a chair there for him, but he hesitated to sit down on it,

because though he was a ruler, his eyes had never seen anything like it. And when at last he obeyed me, and sat down, he soon jumped up again. The great joy and admiration all around him made him feel small and insignificant, and involuntarily his hands stretched up to his head, and he took off the crown, and placed it on my head, as the one truly entitled to it.

"And the rejoicing was intensified. And everybody was intoxicated and dizzy with happiness. And the music added to the noise, bodies soared on wings, and feet glided on air, and women did not feel their bodies, and men did not feel the women, the dance was so elevated and airy and joyous, that only music could keep time with it, and only women with young and beautifully-smelling blood could fit into the step.

"And here I started drinking. Without counting, and without any measure I drank, and a special servant stood at my right hand, and from a special flask he kept pouring out wine for me, and the wine, too, was of a special kind, and it knocked me on the head, and came down into my legs, and I felt hot all over. And the guests drank with me, and the eyes of all were full of wine, and my joy was above that of all of them, and of all the heads I was the crowned head, and all the women were for me.

"And there were many shut-off rooms in the halls, and if I ask and command, and the music plays, the most beautiful women would follow me submissively into the shut-off rooms, accompanied by the music and my riches. And I did not command, and I did not call any woman, because I could have them all, and call them all, and I only went on drinking, and the music deafened me, and the parrots shouted my head off.

"And then I shouted. And my shout rose above every other sound, the noise of the guests, and of the music, and of the parrots, and I cried:

"Let the Great Bear come down out of the star-constellation, and I shall dance a bear-dance with him."

"And everybody was silent. And the music was hushed. And the parrots ceased their cries, and no one stirred, and the entire hall was petrified, and all eyes turned to the door, and all saw the Great Bear come in.

"And the Great Bear was very grave, as if he did not come willingly, and it seemed as if he had been called away from his work, or roused from sleep, and all the people who gazed at him were awed, and all stood silent, and all eyes were turned on him.

"That annoyed me. It made me feel a bit angry. Why were they all looking at him, not at me? I had called him, and he had come at my command. And my annoyance, and my haughtiness, and my pride and my superciliousness hurt my heart, and I cried out into the silence, in a loud voice to the Bear:

"Now, hear and see, Star-Bear, I have bought up the whole of your kingdom" (and I pulled out the title-deeds from my breast-pocket, and brandished them in front of him). "The ruler himself has abdicated his throne to me, and I have put on his crown. I am now the richest man in the land, and all the subjects of the land are here as my guests at this never-before-seen ball. I want to enjoy myself. I have exhausted and tired of all the joys this land can give me. One, one joy has been left—to dance with you here at my ball, in front of everybody, to the accompaniment of soft music."

"And the Bear heard me out, and he came up submissively, and he entered silently into the centre of the ring formed by the people, and the ring was silent, and filled with awe, and I went up to him, into the centre. And we met there.

"And I told the music to be silent. Only one violin should speak. And the violin spoke. And I went up to the Bear and embraced him, and we both danced, silently, as one dances with a bear. He stood on his hind legs, and his front paws he held on my shoulders, and his head was a little averted, and a quiet star appeared in his forehead, and the lights in the hall began to go out, and the people were in darkness, only I and the Bear in the centre, and the little star shone on us, and I led, and the Bear followed, in time to the music, slowly, and I began to sing:

"The Bear, the Bear. Oh, this is bliss. And I have nothing more than this. No place to which I now aspire. And nothing more that I desire."

"And the Bear danced with me, and the music softly accompanied us. And the people stood in a dark, congested mass, and, faintly shone upon, watched our steps.

"I felt happy. My head began to whirl with happiness, and I got happier as I danced. At first I led the Bear. But as we went on dancing, he took the lead. The people kept us in view, and the encircling darkness united us, and the little star shone on our union, and as I danced I shut my eyes, and my head fell on my shoulder, and soon I saw nothing. And as soon as I shut my eyes, I no longer knew what was happening to me, I only felt delirious joy, and there was supreme happiness in the dance.

"And suddenly the wine and my intoxicating megalomania rushed to my head, and I opened my eyes, and saw the star shine on me, and I dancing alone, arm-in-arm with the Bear, and I cried out again into the silence:

"Bear, Bear, I have bought up the whole of your kingdom! And here I have the title-deeds!"

"And the Bear did not answer. He was as grave as before. And he went on leading me.

"Then suddenly the little star in the head of the Bear went out, and I could not see the Bear either, only I felt him holding me and I felt his fur, and suddenly, instead of the ring, there was a big opening in the floor, a pit, an abyss, and I was standing on the very edge of it.

"And the Bear bent his mouth to my ear, and said to me:

"You mad fool, with your vast riches: So you have bought up my kingdom, and you boast about the title-deeds in your pocket. Down with you, and see if you can feed ten of my children, my earth-bears. Here is the pit, and here is the abyss, and here is the ladder up which you came. And now I'm going to give you a shove. Catch hold of the ladder, so that you don't fall down. I don't want you to get hurt or killed."

"And the Bear shoved me, and I flew. I didn't manage to catch hold of the ladder, my hands had no grip in them. I went bouncing down, hitting the ladder, rung by rung. My body bumped against the rungs of the ladder. Like a wind I flew down, and as I flew I lost my senses.

"How I escaped breaking my neck on my way down I don't know. I only know that I hit bottom, and lay for a long time on the ground, feeling as if every bone in my body was broken.

"Some time seems to have passed; it was day now, and I had rested and recovered a little from my flying and falling, and I arose and stood up.

"And I started to walk. It was my land and my town, but people who met me did not seem to know me. They turned away from me, and some stared after me, and some lifted up their eyebrows, and some actually laughed in my face.

"I did not understand. My mind was still full of recent events—my riches, and the ball, the Bear, and my fall. And I was full of doubts. I wanted to convince myself, to remember, to make sure whether it was true or whether I had dreamt it all, and I lifted up my hand, with a gesture of helplessness, and also because there was perspiration on my brow. And my hand encountered something soft, and I unstuck it, and I looked at it, and I found there was a bit of mud in my hand, a vestige of my gold.

"And I still believed myself rich, as I used to be, so I went into a shop, full of assurance, and I asked for soap and washing accessories, various little things I had need of immediately, and they gave them to me. And when I had to pay, and pointed to my forehead, meaning to indicate that there was gold there, and that they should recognise me, know who I am and where I come from, and they would naturally trust me, they laughed at me, and the shopkeeper looked at me with an odd expression, and the assistants surrounded me like a madman. And one of them very gently took the things I had bought and which had already been wrapped up, out of my hands.

"I resisted. And I shouted at him and at all of them who were in the shop: 'What does this mean? Don't you know me? Can't you recognise me?' And they went on laughing at me, and said that they knew me well enough, and they showed me the door, and told me not to waste their time, because time was money.

"I was furious. And I shouted at them: 'Idiots! Fools!' And I put my

hands in my pocket, and pulled out a pack of papers, the title-deeds to my properties, and I showed them. 'See, what a lot of property I own!'

"The shopkeeper and his assistants seemed indeed to have no time, for other customers had come into the shop and were waiting to be served, and my shouting caused a lot of people to collect outside the shop. I was really holding up the business. And one of the young men went up to the door, and out into the street, and called a policeman, and the policeman came into the shop, and took me by the arm, and put me outside. But I didn't want to go. I struggled and screamed, and a big crowd collected. And the policeman got hold of me by the scruff of the neck. And he was strong and I was weak, so I had no choice but to allow him to lead me away.

"He took me to the police station and I spent the night in the cell, and in the morning, when the police saw that I was quiet, they thought that I wouldn't behave like that any more, that I wouldn't pester any more shopkeepers, so they let me go.

"But since I had no home, nowhere to go to, no place to spend the night, and nothing else that human beings require, the same thing happened over again. I was again in a shop, and made my purchases again, and again I wanted to pay in the same way, and again I was treated like a madman, my coins were laughed at, and my assurances did not suffice.

"I flew into a temper, and the end of it was in the second shop as in the first, that a policeman came to assist the shopkeeper and his assistants, and I was taken away again to the police station.

"It happened several times like that. At first the people did not know me sufficiently. I used to go into a shop, and they treated me at first like any other customer. But afterwards when this had happened two or three times, and crowds had collected, not only the owner of the particular shop in which I happened to be, and his assistants, but all the assistants in all the shops in the whole of the street rushed up and kicked me out; as soon as I showed myself at the door of any shop, they came up to me at once and drove me away.

"I was known not only to the shops, but also to the small boys, who used to collect round me as soon as they saw me in the street. 'Look!' they cried. 'There he goes, the man from heaven, the multi-millionaire.' And 'Hi!' they shouted. 'What have you been buying now? Show us your title-deeds.'

"Sometimes it annoyed me, and sometimes it didn't annoy me, and I pretended to take no notice. But sometimes I had to take refuge in a courtyard or hide in a passage, for if I didn't, after the shouting a stone sometimes came hurtling at me, and sometimes a lot of stones. And once I got a nasty knock, and I couldn't stand it any longer, and I jumped on the stone-thrower, and I nearly throttled him. And a crowd collected, and when they saw how I was avenging myself, mercilessly, some tried to rescue him, but they got something to remember me by as well; a

great many of them got badly hurt, and the blood simply poured down them.

"And when people saw this they said one to another, and then they all shouted it to everybody else:

" 'Why do we allow this to go on? He's mad. He's capable of murdering somebody. We must have him put away.'

"And there were some daring spirits among them who took the risk and came up to me, pinned down my arms. I struggled, and I foamed at the mouth, and they got some rope and trussed me up, and one policeman, and a second came running up, and they brought an ambulance, put me on it, and took me away where people like that are taken.

"They took me to a room, and slung me inside, trussed up as I was. And the floor of the room was of stone, the windows had bars, and the door was of iron. I was left there alone for a time and no one came to me. Then at last a man came in, a tall, burly fellow with a bull neck, and a red face. He carried some kind of garment in his hand, like a shirt, and he came up to me and undid the rope, and at first he tried to induce me with kindness to put on the shirt, speaking kindly to me, asking me who I was and where I came from. And I, seeing his size and his strength, wanted to answer him nastily, and I said: 'I come from above, and I have got a lot of estates up there, and in one of them I keep a dog like you.'

" 'Like who?'

" 'Like you,' I said, looking him straight in the eyes. And the man was, as I have said, very strong, and he drove his hefty fist into my face, and punched me on the nose, and bunged up my eyes, and I was knocked out.

"And then he did something else to me, but I wasn't aware of anything at all just then. I don't know whether he went on punching me, whether he kicked me, or whether he just left me alone. It was all one to me. I don't remember a thing. I only recollect that after a time I woke up as if from a severe illness, and I felt no anger, I had no estates, and I had no regrets that I had lost my estates.

"I found myself in a quiet place, all alone, in a house with other quiet people. I was provided with everything, with a shirt, a long, linen, patient's overall, and with food and drink, and plenty of rest, too much rest. And the other inmates of the house never disturbed anyone else. Nobody got into anyone else's way. Everybody lived a sequestered life, and retained of his past life only vague memories.

"And some, who, like me, remembered the blows we got from the keeper in the beginning, had already forgiven him, and bore him no grudge and no enmity. But others, whose anger lingered, and the keeper hit them often and long, they no longer remembered the blows, but they carried the marks, some on their faces, but mostly on their bodies. And if ever they saw a reflection of themselves in a window, or a glass door,

they stopped, surprised, looked at the reflection as if they did not recognise themselves, and asked others who passed—Did they know whose reflection it was, so terribly mutilated? And some had no answer and kept quiet. And those who did know said it was the keeper, and the mutilated people, looking at the reflection of their injuries, listened quietly, and they, too, were not angry with the keeper, and accepted the answer quietly, as if it were only natural, and of no special interest.

“So we lived, and in each of our heads it was quiet as after a storm. And our movements, too, were quiet, and none of us had any relations with the rest, and we did not form any association, nor any groups, but each was taken up with himself, segregated, only with his quietened head and his extinguished thoughts.

“I do not remember how long I stayed there like that, alone, extinguished, with those extinguished people. I only remember that once I found two of them sitting on my bed, and we got into conversation, and we discovered a close and common language, and the language opened us, and we had an understanding ear for each other’s words.

“One of them was silent and a hoarder and grudged to use, and kept under his pillow food and all sorts of things, the hat off his head, the socks off his feet, the shirt off his back. And another, a poet apparently, also stuck everything under the pillow, for he was constantly fasting, and always kept something at hand to eat when the fast was over.

“The hoarder was unshorn, and the hair of his beard and on his head was hard, stiff and bristly, and the whites of his eyes were bigger than the pupils. And the poet, too, was unshorn, but his hair was soft, and blonde, and his beard was curled, and his pupils took up the whole of his eyes, leaving very little space for the whites.

“And when we got talking, they asked me why I had nothing under my pillow, and I answered that it was taken away from me, and as for saving, it was out of the question, because I gave away the very food out of my mouth, and often I didn’t have enough to eat myself, and I had to buy additional food, and pawn the few things that were still left to me.

“And when they asked me how that was, who took it away from me, and whom did I give it to, I told them where I came from, and all the things that had happened to me, and about my fortune, and they listened to me, and sympathised with me, and they were very much interested in my tale.

“It was evening then, and on the window facing my bed the night had already descended, and I told them how I had grown rich out of mud and dirt, and how my riches had again become dirt, and at the end of my riches I had danced all by myself with the Great Bear out of the stellar system, and at the beginning of my poverty I was beaten in the madhouse by the keeper, and as a result of those blows my head is now empty, and I go about inside my head, as through immense chambers, and I am all alone there, and I light a lot of candles, and the chambers

become kingdoms, and the kingdoms enormous, and everywhere lighted candles, set at great distances, all over the earth, all in candlesticks, and I keep going all round them, lighting and putting them out, serving them. Mostly I keep them all burning at the same time, and it is lovely and warm, a bright holiday, and the air is still, and the candlesticks stand up, and the candles splutter and flicker, and I am the master and servant both, and my cheeks are red with the glow of the candles, and I feel well and at peace, and very happy sauntering among all my bright lights.

“Once I went far away, ever so far, among avenues of lighted candles and I came to a palace, tall and turreted, and white stairs leading up to it, so I walked up to the door, and it seemed as if it were specially there for me, and the door opened by itself, and when I entered I found myself again in a huge room, and in the room there was a table, and sitting round the table ten bears on ten chairs, quiet and restful, as if they were waiting for me, and when I came in they greeted me very nicely, and then they waited a bit. There was nothing on the table, and no one serving there, the tablecloth was clean and nothing on it. And I felt that they were waiting for me to serve them and to put something on the table.

“And here I had nothing, and was far from home, and nowhere to bring anything from. So I said to the bears:

“‘You see, bears. I am indeed master here, and all the kingdoms are mine, but apart from candles and candlesticks I have nothing, so how can I offer you anything?’

“But the bears took no notice. The bears were hungry, and they went on waiting. And they looked at the walls, as much as to say: ‘You have got a palace, and kingdoms of light. Sell the candles, sell the candlesticks, and buy bread for us bears to eat.’

“I was embarrassed, and did not know what to do, and what to reply to the bears. But after I had stood there for some time, and the bears still waiting, I had to go up to my candles and candlesticks, and I had to put out some of them, and I felt ashamed looking at the rest. But I took the candlesticks whose lights I had snuffed, and shoved them under my coat, and stole out. And I felt all the other candles and candlesticks staring at my back. And I went into a market-place, and approached people, and asked them to buy, or if they would not buy, at least to lend me some money on them.

“And that, I told my bedfellows, is what I am doing ever so long—pawning them. A good many I have sold, and many more I have left as pledges, as hostages in alien and unworthy hands. And my avenues of light keep diminishing in number, and my kingdoms are growing dark. And everybody knows me by now. Everybody knows me and my candlesticks, in every street and every market-place. And people don’t want any more. The market is flooded with them.

“‘And now I have come back from my bears, and I have got another

couple of candlesticks with me, and I can't find a purchaser. And the bears are waiting. The bears are probably ravenous by now. Perhaps, friends, you will buy this time,' I said, turning to the two sitting with unshorn hair and beards on my bed.

"They both jumped up at once, both anxious to buy. 'Produce the goods,' they said, and they would look at them, and they would certainly buy. So I stretched my hand out towards the window, and pointed to the night outside, and there was a brass bit of moon in the sky, and I said:

"That is one brass candlestick. And there is one of silver, too. Only the moon has got the silver one hidden away under his coat."

"And they were both agreeable, and both of them bought from me. One bought the moon, and went away and brought me from under his pillow stale bread and rolls. And the other bought the sun, the silver one, which the moon had hidden under his coat. And he brought me something as well. And (you probably remember it, bears) I brought it to you, and you ate it up, and you were satisfied. And so was I, because you were satisfied. And you went away. And then you came back again.

"And there was another sitting held on my bed, and I told my bedfellows again that the bears are now frequent visitors, and my avenues are half extinguished, and ever so many candlesticks are missing, and that I walk among them, and feel very sad, because I see that I am losing everything, that soon I shall cease to be master and even servant, because there are no more candles, and the candlesticks are disappearing, and soon there will be nothing left to light and extinguish, and the cold keeps blowing between the empty spaces, and my cheeks are chill always, and even near the light I freeze.

"And when I go walking sometimes in the avenues, I no longer come upon a palace, but a little wooden hut, and when I climb the wooden stairs, they give under my feet, and when I go inside I find an ordinary room, a rickety table, and a dirty table-cloth, and the bears sit and wait, but they no longer treat me with respect, and they look at me demandingly, and when I point to the walls, and show them that I have nothing, and I tell them that my road along the avenues this time was in darkness, that I have sold or pawned everything I had, and there is nothing more, and I can't get anything more, they won't listen, and they point to my head and the hair on my head, and it isn't their affair, they say. I've still got a head, so I can think of something, and, if not, I should give them my head and the hair on my head. Bears don't mind. They are not fastidious. Food is food.

"So I felt perplexed. I stood there and didn't know what to do. The best candlesticks are already sold, and those that have remained are only little ones, toy candlesticks, for children to play with. No one will buy them if I took such to market. But here—I said to my bedfellows—here I have brought them along for you, and since you know me, and we live

together, and we have concluded a bond of comradeship, perhaps you will buy again, as you did the first time. I hope you will not refuse.

"And, indeed, my bedfellows did not refuse this time, either. Only they asked me to show them my little candlesticks, which I had said were only toys, playthings for children. And since it was now night, like the first time we had discussed this matter, sitting together on my bed, and our window was already dark, and in the sky there were only little buttons to be seen, I extended my hand towards those buttons, and indicated that they were mine.

"And my bedfellows were agreeable this time, too, and they bought, and they went to their own beds, and gave me their leavings, bread, hard crusts, and I stuffed my coat full of it, and ran off to you bears, right away with the whole lot, and fed you. And I thought that would finish it. You see that I have no more and I possess no more, and my comrades have done me this last kindness, and more such favours I cannot demand from them—they have purchased from me the last paltry little candlesticks I had left, that nobody else would have bought from me. 'Look,' I said to you bears, 'it was very humiliating and annoying to have to worry my comrades to induce them to buy things they did not need (something entirely contrary to my character), and the result is that I have lost all my hair, and now I am quite bald, And if you come here again, I shall really not be able to do anything more for you. Unless, unless, my ten fingers. Perhaps that.

"And you bears devoured the crusts, and as you ate, you half heard me, and half didn't hear me, and you finished eating, and went away. And for a time you left me alone, and for a time I thought you would not come to worry me any more, so that I need not worry other people.

"I was poor, terribly poor at that time, and my bright kingdoms were in total darkness, and when I walked through them I felt like in a cemetery. There was no vestige left of my beautiful big candlesticks. And of the little puny ones, too, there were only a few left. And the candles which I had stuck in them were tiny, and the flames were paltry, and they gave very little light, only they flickered and spluttered.

"I felt like a gravedigger, walking around there, and dead sorrow rested on my head, and my avenues were in darkness, and the roads were black, and I stumbled as I went, and I probably looked daft. I no longer believed in my road, and I did not think to find a palace there.

"And, indeed, the last time I wandered around there I only knocked into a little ramshackle hovel, with a roof on top of my head, and the entrance three steps down underground, and I walked down, and came to a dark and filthy door.

"And when I went inside I couldn't see anything for some time. The ceiling was black, the walls sloping, oozing and black, and flies on the walls, a host of them, thin and dried up, and the spiders in the corners also thin and dead, because there were no flies crawling around for them

to catch. And as I got accustomed to the dim light, I saw a table in the middle of the room, narrow and rather longish, and I saw you bears sitting round it, huddled against each other, and your eyes, too, gleamed with hunger.

"And you all turned your eyes on me, and demanded from me food. And I had nothing at all, not even any hair on my head, and you looked at my body, as much as to say—'If there isn't anything else you wouldn't make a bad meal yourself.'

"And I complained to you, and showed you the room and the walls and the spiders in the corners. 'Look,' I said, 'evcn the spiders are dead, and what can I do, and what is it in my power to do? My kingdom is extinguished, and my world is dark, and I myself am in a madhouse, and I don't get enough food, and the keeper is always in a temper. So what more can I do, and what more have I save only my fingers?'

"And you bears chewed up my fingers. My ten fingers would have sufficed for the ten of you, only the ninth of you snapped off the tenth finger as well, so there was nothing left for the tenth, and he saw my breast, and my heart, and he won't listen to reason, but insists that he is hungry, and I must give him my heart.

"And more than one I have not got, and then you will have nothing either. So remember, bears. I begged you to give me this hearing, and that is why I have told you this tale, so that you should realise that this is really the end. Only one hope is left to me—my bedfellows, and though they, too, are poor, and they have already given me all they had, yet I shall not hold back, I shall go to them again, and try once more, and perhaps they will dig up something else, or get something from somebody else, but let me go now, and trust me, and I shall speak to them, and you wait here a bit, and perhaps I shall be able to get some more from them.

"And if you are afraid, and if you think I shan't get anything from my friends, leave me for a while, and perhaps I shall in time get out of the madhouse, and who can say, perhaps I shall be lucky, and again find the ladder and climb up into the kingdom of mud and there become rich again, and again buy a lot of things, and we shall have banquets and balls, and I won't let myself be hurled down from the heights any more. Perhaps——"

And here, the Nistor concludes, the bears were persuaded by his plan, and the tenth bear, the hungry one, forgave him that his belly was empty, and let him go to the madhouse, and quietly and furtively he called together his comrades, and told them the whole story, and asked them to advise him about the bears, what he should do if they came again. This time he had bought them off with a tale. But he would not be able to do that again.

And truly his comrades realised the Nistor's plight, and more help they could not give him, and more to sell the Nistor did not have, and the

comrades had no more to buy with. And they consulted long, examined every possibility, and it was agreed (there was no other way out) that the Nistor should write it all down for the doctor of the madhouse, and complain to him about his uninvited visitors and their too-frequent visits. And that was the decision, and that was how it was left, and the Nistor wrote it down. And since he had no more fingers, he described the whole story to the doctor in great smears of blood. And he is waiting for an answer from the doctor.

Yes, and he still has his heart. As long as he keeps well—if only he keeps well. Till the doctor's answer comes he will probably have to wait a long time.