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Solenoid



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PART ONE

1

I HAVE LICE, AGAIN. IT DOESN'T SURPRISE ME anymore, doesn't disgust me. It just itches. I find nits constantly, I pull them off in the bathroom when I comb my hair: little ivory eggs, glistening darkly against the porcelain around the faucet. The comb collects bunches of them, I scrub it with the worn-out bristles of an old toothbrush. I can't avoid lice—I teach at a school on the edge of town. Half the kids there have lice, the nurse finds the bugs at the start of the year, during her checkup, when she goes through the kids' hair with the expert motions of a chimpanzee—except she doesn't crush the lice between her teeth, stained with the chitin of previously captured insects. Instead, she recommends the parents apply a cloudy liquid that smells like lye, the same one the teachers use. Within a few days, the entire school stinks of anti-lice solution.

It's not that bad, at least we don't have bedbugs, I haven't seen those in a while. I remember them, I saw them with my own eyes when I was about three, in the little house on Floreasca where we lived around 1959–60. My father would hoist up the mattress to show them to me. They were tiny black seeds, hard, and as shiny as blackberries, or those ivy berries I knew I shouldn't put in my mouth. When the seeds between the mattress and the bedframe scattered into the dark corners, they looked so panicked that it made me laugh. I could hardly wait for my dad to lift the heavy mattress up (as he did when he changed the sheets), so I could see the chubby little bugs. I would laugh with such delight that my mother, who kept my curly hair long, would scoop me up and spit on me, so I wouldn't catch the evil eye. Dad would get out the pump and give them a foul-smelling lindane bath, slaughtering them where they hid in the wooden joints. I liked the smell of the wood bed, the pine that,

still reeked of sap, I even liked the smell of lindane. Then my father would drop the mattress back in place, and my mother would bring the sheets. When she spread them over the bed, they puffed up like a huge donut, and I loved to throw myself on top. Then I would wait for the sheet to slowly settle over me, to mold itself around my little body, but not all of the sheet, it also fell in a complicated series of folds and pleats. The rooms in that house seemed as big as market halls to me, with two enormous people wandering around, who for some reason took care of me: my mother and father.

But I don't remember the bites. My mother said they made little red circles on your skin, with a white dot in the middle. And that they burned more than itched. That may be, all I know is that I get lice from the kids when I lean over their notebooks; it's an occupational hazard. I have worn my hair long ever since my attempt to become a writer. That's all that's left of that career, just the hair. And the turtlenecks, like those worn by the first writer I ever saw, the one who is still my glorious and unattainable image of a Writer: the one from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. My hair always hangs down onto the girls' downy, lice-filled hair. Along these semitransparent cables of horn, the insects climb. Their claws have the same curvature as the strands of hair, and they attach to it perfectly. Then they crawl onto the scalp, dropping excrement and eggs. They bite the skin that has never seen the sun, immaculate and parchment-white: this is their food. When the itching becomes unbearable, I turn on the hot water and prepare to exterminate them.

I like how the water resounds in the bathtub, that chaotic churning, that spiral of billions of twisting jets and streams, the roaring vertical fountain inside the green gelatin of infinitesimally rising water conquering the sides of the tub with checked swells and sudden invasions, as though countless transparent ants were swarming in the Amazon jungle. I turn off the faucet and there is quiet, the ants melt into each other, and the soft, jelly sapphire lies silent, it looks at me like a limpid eye and waits. Naked, I slide into the water. I put my head under right away, feeling the walls of water rise symmetrically over my cheeks and forehead. The water grasps me, it presses its weight all around me, it makes me float in its midst. I am the seeds of a fruit with green-blue flesh. My hair spreads toward the sides of the bathtub, like a blackbird opening its wings. The strands repel each other, each one is independent, each one suddenly wet,

floating among the others without touching, like the tentacles of a sea lily. I pull my head from one side to the other so I can feel them resist; they spread through the dense water, they become heavy, strangely heavy. It is hard to pull them from their water alveoli. The lice cling to the thick trunks, they become one with them. Their inhuman faces show a kind of bewilderment. Their carcasses are made of the same substance as the hair. They become wet in the hot water, but they do not dissolve. Their symmetrical respiratory tubes, along the edges of their undulating abdomens, are completely shut, like the closed nostrils of sea lions. I float in the bathtub passively, distended like an anatomical specimen, the skin on my fingertips bulges and wrinkles. I am soft, as though covered in transparent chitin. My hands, left to their own will, float on the surface. My sex rises vaguely, like a piece of cork. It seems strange that I have a body, that I am in a body.

I sit up and begin to soap my hair and skin. While my ears were underwater, I could clearly hear the conversations and thumps in the neighboring apartments, but as though in a dream. My ears still feel plugged with gelatin. I pass my soapy hands over myself. My body is not, for me, erotic. My fingers, it seems, move across not my body but my mind. My mind dressed in flesh, my flesh dressed in the cosmos.

As with the lice, I am not that surprised when my soapy fingers come to my navel. This has been happening for a few years. Of course I was scared when it started, because I had heard that sometimes your navel could burst. But I had never worried about mine, my navel was just a dent where my stomach "stuck to my spine," as my mother would say. At the bottom of this hollow there was something unpleasant to the touch, but that never worried me. My navel was no more than the indentation on top of an apple, where the stem comes out. We all grew like fruits from a petiole crossed with veins and arteries. But starting a few months ago, whenever I poked my finger in to clean this accident of my body, I felt something unusual, something that shouldn't have been there: a kind of protuberance scraping against my fingertip, something inorganic, not part of my body. It lay within the pale knot of flesh, like an eye between two lids. Now I looked more closely, under the water, pulling the edges of the crevasse apart with my fingers. I couldn't see well enough, so I got out of the tub, and the lens of water flowed slowly out of my navel. Good

lord, I smiled at myself, here I am, contemplating my navel . . . Yes, there was the pale knot, sticking out a little more than usual, because as you approach thirty the stomach muscles start to sag. A scab the size of a child's fingernail, in one of the knot's volutes, turned out to be some dirt. But on the other side, a stiff and painful black-green stump stuck out, the thing my fingertip had felt. I couldn't imagine what it could be. I tried to catch it with my fingernail, but when I did, I felt a twinge that frightened me: it might be a wart that I should leave alone. I tried to forget about it, to leave it where it had grown. Over the course of our lives, we excrete plenty of moles, warts, dead bones, and other refuse, things we carry around patiently, not to mention how our hair, nails, and teeth fall out: pieces of ourselves stop belonging to us and take on another life, all their own. I have, thanks to my mother, an empty Tic-Tac box with all my baby teeth, and also thanks to her I have my braids from when I was three. Photographs on cracked enamel, with little serrations along the edges like a postage stamp, are similar testimonies: our body really was once in between the sun and the camera lens, and it left a shadow on the film no different than the one the moon, during an eclipse, leaves across the solar disk.

But one week later, again in the bath, my navel felt unusual and irritated again: the unidentified piece had grown a little longer, and it felt different, more disturbing than painful. When we have a toothache, we rub our tongue against our molars, even at the risk of hitting a livid pain. Anything unusual on the sensitive map of our bodies makes us unsettled, nervous: we'll do anything to escape a constant discomfort. Sometimes, at night, as I'm going to bed, I take off my socks and touch the thickening, hornlike, transparent-yellow flesh on the side of my big toe. I pinch at the growth, I pull it, and after about a half hour I have the edge up, and I keep pulling, with the smarting tips of my fingers, as I become more irritated and more worried, until I remove a thick, shiny layer, with fingerprint-like striations, a whole centimeter of dead skin, now hanging disgracefully from my finger. I can't pull off any more, since I have already reached the living flesh underneath, the part where I feel pain, but still I have to put a stop to the irritation, the unease. I take a pair of scissors and cut it in half, then I examine it for a long time: a white shell that I made, without knowing how, just as I don't remember how I made my own bones. I fold it between my fingers, I feel it, it smells vaguely like ammonia: the piece

is organic, yet dead, dead even while it was a part of me, adding a few grams to my weight; it still makes me uneasy. I don't feel like throwing it out, I turn out the light and go to bed, still holding it between my fingers, only to forget everything the next day. Still, for a little while after that I limp slightly: the place I pulled it from hurts.

I tugged on the hard sliver coming out of my navel, until, unexpectedly, it was in my hand. A small cylinder, a half centimeter long and about as wide as a matchstick. It looked to have gotten darker over time, worn and sticky and tarnished with age. It was something ancient, mummified, saponified, who the hell knows. I put it under the faucet and washed away the layer of grime; I could see the thing had been a yellowish-green color, long ago, perhaps. I put it in an empty matchbox. It resembled, more than anything, the stub of a burnt match.

A few weeks later, my navel, again softened in hot water, yielded another fragment, twice as long this time, of the same hard substance. I realized that it was the flexible end of a piece of twine, I could even see its multitude of twisted fibers. It was string, ordinary string, the kind used for packages. The string with which, twenty-seven years earlier, they had tied my navel in the decrepit workers' maternity ward where I was born. Now my navel was aborting, slowly, a piece every two weeks, every month, then another after three more months. Today I'm removing the fifth piece, carefully, with a certain pleasure. I flatten it out, scrape it clean with my fingernail, wash it in the bathtub water. It is the longest piece so far, and I hope the last. I put it in the matchbox, alongside the others: they lie there politely, yellowish-greenish-black, their ends raveling. Hemp, the same material as homemade shopping bags, the kind that cut into your hands when filled with potatoes, the same material you use to tie packages. On Holy Mary's Day, my father's family in Banat would send me packages: poppy-seed and apple pastries. The brown-green string was my favorite part: I would tie the doorknobs together, so my mother wouldn't have another child. On each knob, I tied tens, hundreds of knots.

I stop worrying about the string from my navel and, as the water runs off my body, get out of the tub. I take the lice solution from behind the toilet and pour a little of the pungent substance over my head. I wonder what class gave me lice this time, as though it matters. Maybe it does, who knows. Maybe

different streets in the neighborhood and different classes in school have distinct species of lice, different sizes.

I rinse the revolting solution off my head and comb my hair, hanging over the brilliantly clean porcelain of the sink. And the parasites begin to drop out, two, five, eight, fifteen . . . They are tiny, each one in its own drop of water. Squinting, I can see their bodies, with wide abdomens and three still-moving legs on each side. Their bodies and my body, wet and naked, leaning over the sink, are made of the same organic tissues. They have analogous organs and anatomical functions. They have eyes that see the same reality, they have legs that take them through the same unending and unintelligible world. They want to live, just as I do. I wash them off the sides of the sink with a stream of water. They travel through the pipes below, into the sewers underground.

With my hair still wet, I go to bed beside my meager set of treasures: the Tic-Tac box with my baby teeth, pictures from when I was little and my parents were in the prime of their life, the matchbox of fibers from my navel, my journal. As I often do in the evenings, I pour the teeth into my hand: smooth little stones, still bright white, that were once inside my mouth, that I once used to eat, to pronounce words, to bite like a puppy. Many times have I wondered what it would be like to have a paper bag with my vertebra from when I was two, or my finger bones from age seven . . .

I put the teeth away. I would like to look at some of the pictures, but I can't stay up any later. I open the drawer in the nightstand and put everything inside, in the yellowed "snakeskin" box that used to house a razor, a shaving brush, and a box of Astor razor blades. Now I use it for my lowly treasures. I pull the blanket over my head and try to fall asleep as fast as I can, perhaps forever. My scalp doesn't itch anymore. And, since it's happened so recently, I hope it won't happen again tonight.

2

I meant my dreams, the visitors, all that insanity, but this is not the time to talk about it. For now, let me turn again to the school where I've worked more than three years already. "I won't be a teacher all my life," I told myself, I remember

like it was yesterday, when I was taking the tram home, late one summer night under rosebud clouds, from the end of Șoseaua Colentina, where I had been to see the school for the first time. But no miracle has happened; I very likely will be a teacher all my life. In the end, it hasn't been all that bad. The afternoon I visited the school, just after I received my assignment, I was twenty-four in years and maybe twice as many kilograms in weight. I was incredibly, impossibly thin. My mustache and long hair, slightly red at that time, did nothing but infantilize my appearance, such that, if I glanced at myself in a shop or tram window, I would think I was looking at a high school student.

It was a summer afternoon, the city was brimming with light, like a glass whose water arches above its lip. I took the tram from Tunari, in front of the Directorate General of the Militia. I passed my parents' apartment building on Ștefan cel Mare, where I lived too, and as usual I searched the endless facade for my window, lined with blue paper to keep out the sun, then I passed the wire fence of Colentina Hospital. The hospital wings were lined up over the vast grounds like brickwork battleships. Each one had a different shape, as though the tenants' various diseases had determined their building's bizarre architecture. Or perhaps each wing's architect had been chosen for his disease, and he had attempted to create an allegory of his suffering. I knew each one and had stayed in at least two of them. At the right end of the grounds, I shuddered at the sight of a pink building with paper-thin walls, the neurology wing. I had stayed there for a month, eight years earlier, for a facial paralysis that still bothered me from time to time. Many are the nights in which I wander in my dreams through the wings of Colentina Hospital, I enter unknown, hostile buildings, their walls covered with anatomical diagrams . . .

Next, the tram passes along the former ITB workshops, where my father worked for a while as a locksmith. Some apartment blocks have gone up in front of them, you can barely see the workshops from the street. The ground floor of one block was once a clinic, right at the Doctor Grozovici stop. For a time, I went there for my injections, vitamin B1 and B6, following my facial paralysis at age sixteen. My parents would put the vials in my hand and tell me not to come back with them unopened. They knew me too well. At first, I would drop them down the elevator shaft and tell my parents I had done them, but this didn't work for long. In the end, I had to get it done for real. I would

set off for the clinic, at dusk, my heart full of dread. I walked the two tram stops as slowly as I could. Like when I had to go to the dentist, I would hope that some miracle would happen and I would find the office was closed, the building demolished, the doctor deceased, or that there was a blackout and the drill couldn't run or the lights above the chair would go out. No miracle ever happened, however. The pain waited for me, all of it, with its blood-colored aura. The first nurse at Grozovici who, late one night, gave me the injection was pretty, blonde, very neat, but I soon became terrified of her. She was the type who treated your bare bottom with complete disdain. Not the thought of the pain that was to come, but this woman's disdain for the kid with whom she was about to have an intimate relationship (albeit just sticking a needle in his butt cheek) quickly eliminated the vaguest excitement, and my sex gave up its efforts to lift its head and take a look. I waited next for the inevitable wetness on the soon-to-be martyred flesh, the three or four smacks of the back of her hand, then the shock of the needle stuck into flesh, its tip always sure to hit a nerve, a vein, to hurt you somehow, a lasting, memorable pain, then increased by the poison that traveled down the channel of the needle to spread, like sulfuric acid, throughout your hip. It was horrible. The blonde nurse's injections would make me limp for a week.

Luckily, this nurse, who was probably into S&M in bed, traded off with another nurse at the clinic, this one just as difficult to forget, though for different reasons. She scared you to death when you first saw her because she had no nose. But she did not wear a bandage or a prosthetic, she simply had, in the middle of her face, a large orifice vaguely partitioned into two compartments. She was as small as a gosling, brown-haired, with eyes whose tenderness might have seemed attractive if the skull-like appearance of her face did not overwhelm you. When I came on the blonde nurse's night, I was seen right away. The wind whistled through the waiting room. But the noseless little person seemed unusually popular: the waiting room was always full of people, as full as a church on Easter. I wouldn't get home from the clinic until two in the morning. Many of the patients brought her flowers. When she appeared in the doorway, everyone smiled happily. I could understand why: no one, probably, had ever had a lighter touch. When my turn came and I sat with my pants down on the rubber of her examination table, I would become dizzy from the

smell of flowers, a row of seven or eight bouquets, still in cellophane, along the wall. That extraordinary brunette woman spoke calmly and measuredly, then touched my hip for a moment and . . . that was about it. I didn't feel the needle, and the serum diffused through my muscle with nothing but a gentle warmth. Everything happened in a few minutes, and I went home happy and full of energy. My parents looked at me suspiciously: maybe I had thrown out the vial again?

Next came the Melodia movie theater, just before Lizeanu, and I got off at the next stop, Obor, where I transferred to a tram going perpendicular to Ștefan cel Mare, from Moșilor toward the depths of Colentina.

I knew these places well, it was, in a way, my neighborhood. My mother used to shop at Obor. She would take me with her, when I was little, into the sea of people filling the old market. The fish hall that stank until you couldn't take it anymore, then the great hall, with bas-reliefs and mosaics showing unintelligible scenes, and finally the ice plant, where the workers handled blocks of ice that were white in the middle and miraculously transparent on the sides (as though constantly dissolving into the surrounding air)—to my child's eyes these were fantastical citadels of another world. There at Obor, one desolate Monday morning, I saw a poster that stayed with me for a long time: a giant squid in a flying saucer reached out its arms toward an astronaut walking a red, rocky terrain. Above, the words *Planet of Storms*. "It's a movie," my mother said to me. "Let's wait for it to come somewhere closer, to the Volga or the Floreasca." My mother was afraid of the center of town, she didn't leave her neighborhood unless she had no choice, for example when she had to go to Lipsani to buy my school uniform, with the checkered shirt and pants already sagging in the knees, as though someone had been wearing them at the factory.

Even Colentina looked familiar to me, with its run-down houses on the left and the Stela soap factory on the right, the place where they made Cheia and Cămila laundry detergents. The smell of rancid fat spread from here over the entire neighborhood. Next came the brick building of the Donca Simo textile factory, where my mother once worked at the loom, then came some lumberyards. The wretched and desolate street drove toward the horizon, in the torrid summer, under those enormous, white skies you only see above,

Bucharest. As it happened, I had been born in Colentina, on the edge of town, in a decrepit maternity ward thrown together in an old building that had been half gambling house, half bordello in the years before 1944, and I had lived my first years somewhere on Doamna Ghica, in a tangle of alleyways worthy of a Jewish ghetto. Much later, I went back to Silistra with a camera, and I took a few pictures of my childhood home, but they didn't turn out. Now Silistra isn't even there, it was bulldozed, my house and everything else wiped off the face of the earth. What took its place? Apartment blocks, of course, like everywhere else.

Once tram 21 passed over Doamna Ghica, I entered a foreign country. There were fewer houses, more dirty ponds where women with pleated skirts washed their rugs. Seltzer shops and bread shops, wine stores, fish stores. An endless, desolate street, seventeen tram stops, most without wind shelters or any reason to be there, like the whistle stops trains make in the middle of a field. Women in print dresses, a daughter on each arm, walking nowhere. A cart full of empty bottles. Propane tank centers where people lined up in the evening for the store to open the next day. Perpendicular streets, dusty, like a village, lined with mulberries. Kites caught in the electric lines, strung between wooden poles treated with gasoline.

I reached the end of the line after an hour and a half of rocking in the tram. For the last three or four stops I may have been the only one in the car. I exited into a large circle of track, where the trams turned around to go again, like Sisyphus, toward Colentina. The day was tilting toward night, the air was amber-colored and, on account of the silence, ghostly. Here, at the end of line 21, there was not a soul in sight. Industrial halls, long and gray, with narrow windows, a water tower in the distance, and in the middle of the tram turn-about, a grove of trees literally black from the heating oil and exhaust fumes. Two empty trams stood one beside the other, without drivers. A closed ticket booth. Marked contrasts between the rosy light and the shadows. What was I doing there? How was I going to live in such a remote place? I walked toward the water tower, I came to its base to find a padlocked door, I tilted my head back to look toward its sphere glittering in the sky, at the end of a white, plastered cylinder. I walked farther toward . . . nothing, toward the emptiness . . . This wasn't, it seemed to me, where the city ended, but where reality ended.

A street sign to the left had the name I was looking for: Dimitrie Herescu. Somewhere on this street should be the school, my school, my first job, where I should appear on the first of September, more than two months from that moment. The green and pink building of an auto mechanic did nothing to destroy the rural atmosphere of the place: houses with tile roofs, yards with rotting fences, tied-up dogs, tacky flowerpots. The school was on the right, a few houses down from the mechanic, and it was, of course, empty.

It was a small school, an L-shaped hybrid, with an old central section, plaster cracking, broken windows, and at the other end of a small courtyard, a new section, even more desolate. In the yard, a basketball hoop without a net. I opened the gate and entered. I took a few steps on the courtyard pavement. The sun had just begun to go down, a halo of rays settling on the roof of the old building. From there, it sprayed out sadly and, in a way, darkly, since rather than illuminate anything it increased the inhuman loneliness of the place. My heart grew worried. I was going to enter this school that looked as stiff as a morgue, I was going to walk, the register under my arm, down its dark green halls, I was going to go upstairs and enter an unknown classroom where thirty strange kids, stranger than another species, were waiting for me. Maybe they were waiting for me even at that moment, sitting silently on their benches, with wooden pencil boxes, their notebooks with blue paper covers. At the thought of this, the hair on my arms stood up and I practically ran into the street. "I won't be a teacher all my life," I told myself as the tram took me back into the known world, as the stations passed behind me, the houses became more frequent, and people repopulated the earth. "A year at most, until some literary magazine asks me to be an editor." And in the first three years I taught at School 86, I truly did nothing but feed on this illusion, just as some mothers breastfeed their children long after they should have been weaned. My illusion had grown as large as myself, and still I couldn't—and in a way I can't even today—resist opening my shirt, at least now and then, and letting it voluptuously cannibalize me. The first years passed. After another forty, I'll retire from this same school. In the end, it hasn't been that bad. There were long stretches when I didn't have lice. No, if I stop to think about it, it hasn't been bad at this school, such as it is, and maybe even a little bit good.

Sometimes I lose control of my hands, from the elbows down. It doesn't scare me, I might even say I like it. It happens unexpectedly, and luckily, only when I'm alone. I'll be writing something, correcting papers, drinking a coffee, or cutting my nails with a Chinese nail trimmer and suddenly my hands feel very light, as though they were filled with volatile gas. They rise on their own, pulling my shoulders up, levitating happily through the dense, glittering, dark air of my room. I smile, I look at them as though for the first time: long, delicate, thin-boned, some black hair on the fingers. Before my enchanted eyes, they begin to make elegant and bizarre gestures of their own accord, to tell stories that perhaps the deaf can understand. My fingers move precisely and unmistakably, making a series of unintelligible signs: the right hand asks, the left responds, the ring finger and thumb close in a circle, the little fingers page through some text, the wrists pivot with the supple energy of an orchestra conductor. I should be scared out of my mind, because someone else, within my own mind, directs these movements, skilled motions desperate to be deciphered, and yet I am seldom ever so happy. I watch my hands like a child at a puppet show who doesn't understand what is happening on the minuscule stage but is fascinated by the agitation of wooden beings in crepe dresses with yarn for hair. The autonomous animation of my hands (thank God, it never happens when I'm in class or on the street) quiets down after a few minutes, the motions slow, they begin to resemble the mudras of Indian dancers, then they stop, and for two or three minutes more I can enjoy the charming sensation that my hands are lighter than air, as though my father had used the gas line to inflate not balloons but two thin rubber gloves, and put them in place of my hands. And how can I not be disappointed when my real hands—crude, heavy, organic, chafed, with their striated muscles, the white hyaline of the tendons, and their veins throbbing with blood—reenter their nail-tipped skin gloves, and suddenly, to my amazement, I can make my fingers move as I want, as though I could, through concentration alone, break a twig from the ficus in the window or pull my coffee cup toward me without touching it.

Only later does the fear come, only after this fantasy (that happens about once every two or three months) becomes a kind of memory do I begin to wonder if somehow, among all the anomalies of my life—because this is my topic—the fantastical independence of my hands is further proof that . . . everything is a dream, that my entire life is oneiric, or something sadder, graver, weirder, yet truer than any story that could ever be invented. The cheery-frightful ballet of my hands, always and only here, in my boat-shaped house on Maica Domnului, is the smallest, least meaningful (and in the end the most benign) reason for me to write these pages, meant only for me, in the incredible solitude of my life. If I had wanted to write literature, I would have started ten years ago. I mean, if I had really wanted to, without the effort of consciousness, the way you want your leg to take a step and it does. You don't have to say, "I order you to step," you don't have to think through the complicated process by which your will becomes deed. You just have to believe, to have belief as small as a mustard seed. If you are a writer, you write. Your books come without your knowing how to make them come, they come according to your gift, just as your mother is made to give birth, and she really does give birth to the child who grew in her uterus, without her mind participating in the complicated origami of her flesh. If I had been a writer, I would have written fiction, I would have had ten, fifteen novels by now without making any more effort than I make to secrete insulin or to send nourishment, day by day, from one orifice of my digestive system to another. I, however, at that moment long ago when my life still could have chosen one of an undefined multitude of directions, ordered my mind to produce fiction and nothing happened, just as futilely as if I had stared at my finger and shouted, "Move!"

When I was a teenager, I wanted to write literature. Even now I don't know what happened—if I lost my way somehow or if it was just bad luck. I wrote poems in high school, I have them in a notebook somewhere, and I wrote some of my dreams as prose, in a large school notebook with a thick cover, full of stories. Now is not the moment for me to write about that. I took part in the school competitions for Romanian, on rainy Sundays in unknown schools. I was an unreal young man, almost schizophrenic, who, during the breaks between classes, would go into the schoolyard to the long-jump pit, sit on the edge, and read my poems out loud from ragged