

HERCULES

I am named Konrad, a man without legs at all; by the use of wooden crutches I propel myself through this world. People step aside for me on the sidewalk as if I were a king, but all the awkward politeness I encounter is only fear, I am not ashamed though; no, when I see the storming skies, gray, and the wind takes the hats off our heads, I imagine the storm reflected in my eyes and feel the weight of nature lift within me.

I was been this way: at the age of eleven I remember wondering if I had any right to reside on this earth. Yet I have great confidence in nature and am now a healthy thirty-two; just to look at the power in my arms, which must support most of my weight, leaves even me admiring. I imagine to unbare my chest would create such a disturbance that I would have a crowd flocked behind me and honking like geese.

But let me not digress. My parents were mutes, I can imagine well their shock when I was born and have thought long over the scene at my birth, their arms waving about futilely lamenting over the troubles they couldn't close my eyes to – yet my eyes were always as powerful as an animal's. When I went to school, I wasn't segregated and went to the same one all the other children went to, were my situation, as the called it, acted as magnifying glass that's slowly strengthened in me. I hear the whole world chattering its teeth from the cold, finally, after all these years of living in the midst of this blizzard, I feel my triumph. I do nothing but plop one wooden leg in front of the other and laugh. Do I deny anything to anyone? Let them look if they wish, for them all I would unclasp my legs, ma trousers would be pulled down. My responsibility is only limited. If one is forced to do something, work for example, then one suits it to one's own purposes, form everything one cannot flee – this is obvious.

We all have much in common, let me not deny anyone their due. I have been loathed. What hope have I to change? I wish to thank people outright, I sometimes feel as though I could have three, even four legs for what's granted me. Do you seek protection? Go ahead, seek solace, extend the gesture. I haven't those sort of plans.

My grandfather often complained of his afflictions and spoke of the unfairness of fate, the position he'd been placed in, lamenting to my grandmother, who listened

patiently shaking her head. How I sympathized with him, in a land where he hardly spoke the tongue, whose customs were as strange to him and as abhorrent as if he were caught in the midst of an ant colony. What did it demand but that he himself become another person, for how could it not? All the while I thought of his incorruptibility, his piety as it were, saw him as the dam that kept all out; he was born whole. It must have been some strange germ of heredity that created my parents and I, some miscegenation of long ago that had come out with us, but I can't hope to explain it, for how can one reason with these things – I only utter these squeaks and ease the load I feel. One morning I had to bring him the lunch he'd forgotten that day, for he rose early, before the sun even shone, and the whole family lived together then – as a child the apartment seemed unimaginably huge, an entire world; I hobbled on my crutches to where he worked, in a bakery (he would come home covered with white flour, his shirt wet with sweat from the heat of the ovens). As I approached I thought to stay outside for a moment, simply to listen to what they talked about, for I could hear from the window that I stood under it lunchtime; they made merciless humor of my grandfather, of his habits and talk, his very name, and he, for I heard his voice distinctly, was laughing along. I dropped the sandwich in the dirt outside, howling. Was there no way out?

Yet now I have become an example for others, in my business affairs I am already famous here for my great shrewdness and the ability I have to take something which seemed dying and bring life to it, speaking in monetary terms. Yet I have other ambitions, other plans. I am photographed in my wheelchair or standing on my crutches, going through paperwork or talking with underlings, posed gesturing with my hand as if I were in conversation or deeply concentrated on what pile of receipts are lying before me. I have followed a median way, for though I don't go by leaps ahead I progress in my own fashion and nature reigns.