

THE GENERAL

My father, the General, is ill. He is unaware of the pestilence but I can see it clearly. I've watched his eyes sink into his skull held to his face only by dark circles that appeared this winter. And his back is curling under the weight of his sickness. His hands are unsteady, awkward and unsure of themselves. I smell crying on his breath. His sorrow is deep. He mourns for something, a thing that he holds as a secret deep in some recess of his psychology. It is not mother he mourns. She's been gone for some time. No it's not my mother he mourns. It's the loss of a star, a beacon in the sky of a chaotic universe, a star he wore on his shoulder, a star that was the source of pride for a man who came from little and scratched his way to freedom. It was a freedom that he fought for on beaches, in ice laden hibernal forests where the dead lay frozen to glass and in sweaty jungles in remote zones of the world.

His illness is a leprosy of sorts. It's the eating away of a man's flesh by a silent bacterium, a furtive pathogen that ultimately devours the muscle of the heart and the sanctuary of the soul. My father is being consumed by his own love, a deepest affection for liberty, the freedom of word and an openness to all.

Father's illness is his country, a parent in whom he believed and for whom he fought with the fiber of himself. It's America that is his bacillus, his leprosy of self, where only scraps of his soul are left. His love for God's country has turned bitter on his tongue. In purple majesty he now sees only the umber of decay. In the leadership he sees not only an ineptitude but also the malignancy of ego, a cancer that has metastasized disturbing the elegant physiology of democracy. The roots of division have been revived and now more than ever separate the black and white, the rich and poor and those born to good fortune from those born with the ache of a Sisyphusian hardship.

I ask myself every day if Father can be cured or is he to suffer an infanticide at the hands of a parent now deranged with man's inherent corruption, now divided and driven to the black schism of violence and now playing the part of the imposter, the character of deceit, the shadow of what was once substance and is now dissolved into the vapors of time. The answer to my question remains obscure. Meanwhile I go on praying for a vaccine that will treat father and confer on the rest of us an immunity of the pathogen of a power and a glory gone mad.