

Mariano's claim

It was a dark evening of winter's possession, and a man called Mariano stood ten steps away, facing a fire that he had started, his eyes staring into the soul of that element—a fire that flicked and flew, upwards, downwards, heaven, hell, a dichotomy he knew all too well. “My war. My war. Tell me. What was my war?” he said. There was no sound.

Mariano now moved three steps forward, only to spot a little leaf—a four-leaf clover, in fact—at the edge of his smart white shoes, and with his right hand, he picked up the clover slowly with an evident intent no mystery could derive, all while sensing an uptake in the wind's pressure: a wind that blew blazingly against the fire he had looked at, and such a fire now danced—danced a great dance. A great flame's dance that seemed to call out to Mariano's heart with no sense of intended belittlement. Mariano clasped the clover in his hand and looked back at that fire, now swishing and swaying and somehow even swooning the very illumination provided by the moon, all to create a sight of fire and flame only capable under one trade.

“War,” uttered Mariano. “War.”

As he spoke, he looked up, a regiment of tears walking out, blurring that great white ball in the night sky that even the simmering air wouldn't dare obstruct.

He smiled.

“The notion's a true one,” he said, “a true one indeed, and no matter how much I try, even the nature of this world won't let me forget.” Mariano now brought the clover in close to his face, and he spat onto the ground once, twice, now from the left side of his mouth, following up such actions with a forceful kicking of the branches around him, twice, thrice now, towards that fire, with no manner of remorse for the earth that he was subjecting to the will and wiles of his growing emotions.

The fire increased at the behest of Mariano's actions, and this seemed to frustrate the man all the more, who now moved in closer to the fire. Mariano breathed in and out and then looked at the flame with cyan-coloured eyes accompanied by piercings around the corners of his eye sockets, which seemed to excrete blood slowly but surely, forcing a curse out of Mariano, who didn't seem to want, nor desire, nor believe in the idea of turning away from that very same fire. For what reason? For what ideal? Only he knew.

“Yes,” said Mariano, who proceeded to lower his body onto the ground. “My war was indeed my war. Yes. Yes. And it has bred many a boon plague that beckons.” Mariano now tightened his grip upon the clover. He brought it closer to his chest, covered in the trinkets and charms of the rich man's craft for his century, and as he did so, the fire seemed to flicker far more violently than before, wild and wrought with nature's intent upon her soil. The paradox of life.

“The paradox of my life,” said Mariano. “What is the nature of life, of my life, of the life that I have lived? What is the nature of such?” Mariano sighed and now started to move his eyes left to right, right to left, as if he were picking up some sort of sight, a suspicious vision that had grabbed his attention, and the pairing of the moon mounting its prominence upon the plain with the fire as its noble ally brought into sight a visual that begot a widening of Mariano's eyes.

“What. What.” Mariano rubbed his eyes with his left arm, lathered in a textured brown-black fine linen cloth of a quality only greed would know of, yet the vision in front of him did not deceive his eyes. It remained.

“How. Just how. The war is over. You played your part. So why? Why do I see you now?!” said Mariano.

He closed his eyes and opened them once more, looking around him now to see that which the world had to offer: trees, rocks, and the blackest night of the darkest dreams, emoted by two sole lights yet resonant within the souls of all those he had made subject to the heart of his vocation—a vocation buried in the past but not truly dead in the present—a vocation that the fire had seemed to take hold of right in front of Mariano, in the form of a human body, that of a male general, towering and indeed possessing a terrific towering over all that was in Mariano’s sight.

“You lie. God, you lie!!!” he shouted. “What kind of sorcery is this! What kind of power! What right do you have!” The fire remained as it was.

Mariano stood up and spat.

“You mock the trade of my past by showing me such a sight. What kind of god are you—you who created all, fashioned all, made all as it is. You cannot hide behind this.” Mariano now raised his left arm, pointing at the fire-made man, his index-ringed finger taut and true in the path of its direction.

“I accuse you.” Mariano clenched his left hand, bringing it back nearer to his face. “And in fact, I hold no responsibility. Man did not create war. Man did not create death. Man did not create suffering.” Mariano chuckled cautiously to himself. “So who is responsible for all these things? Tell me, God. Tell me.” The fire remained as it was.

Mariano stepped two steps closer to the fire, his chuckle no more, and instead his arms outstretched laterally, his head cocking back and his eyes looking upwards, joined by a laugh—a low but growing laugh. “You want me to feel as I did back then. Don’t you.” Mariano winced, smiled, and broke into a laugh once again. “You know what you are. Evil—yes, I said it—you are evil. You have no right to feign ultimate holiness. You have no right!” Mariano now twisted his head to his right-hand side, still clenching the clover. “My war, you see, it was never my war. No—in fact, it was all yours, yours indeed, and hence all that I have lost and gained is a fated entailment of your power, your action, your grace.”

The fire intensely blazed forward, with the image of the general growing greater and greater. Mariano opened his left hand, placing it in front of the rest of his body as if to stop the fire’s growing advance, his face marked now by tension.

“No. I won’t let your presence make me fear once again! You shall witness what you have created. The man you made. The true man.” Mariano moved three steps closer to the fire, only five away, giving greater light to his dark, tight-fit trousers that spoke a story only success would know, yet delight in the vice-ridden history of.

Mariano sat down once more, unclenching his right hand as he did so, and he placed the clover just in front of him so that the fire would sense a prey the annals of its kind had known all too well.

“Destruction,” Mariano said. “Yes, your trade. The very thing you made young men like me indulge in. The very thing. You can’t hide. I won’t allow it, as you didn’t allow me or them.”

The clover began to catch fire, increasing in its fierceness. “Yes,” he said. “Yes.” The clover was now no more, and it had joined that greater fire present—a fire that had escalated as a result.

Mariano looked down at the ground, scrunching his mouth as if restraining words within.

He breathed out. He licked his smooth lips and reached into his left trouser pocket, bringing out a cigar pipe that he lit against the tip of that great fire in front of him, and he sat back smoking, smiling in between. "You and me," he said. "We are brothers." He puffed out a gust of smoke, looking up into the sky and back down at the fire, nodding slowly. "From the moment I was born till the moment you killed me on that day, till now and forevermore, we shall remain brothers until the ends of this earth and then proceed onwards to the ends of the next. Yes. That is the fate you have ordained." Mariano now stood up and bowed as he spoke, smiling. "And that is the fate I will embrace. As they couldn't."

Mariano now turned around, his demeanour calm and composed like that of a master spokesman true to the crux of his trade, and Mariano began to walk—seven steps, nine steps—away from that fire of fires that seemed to grow more and more like the presence of a dark devil, deified in the workings of its tasks upon an earth all so aware, yet unaware, of its being whole and entire throughout its body.

"And my war," Mariano chuckled and looked up to the sky, tearless. "Let it be known as our war." As he said those words, he looked back at that which was before him, proceeding to stare into the soul of that vast, darkened expanse of nature's conjuring.

And he said, "Our war shall find no peace. Whether man looks upon his birth, his peak, and his end, he shall find no trade that unveils that greater hidden battle, nor a work that reveals who man truly is, shall be and shall remain: a boy who has uncovered his father's game and the weakness therein.