

INFERNO

CANTO XXII

I have seen the cavalry break camp,
prepare for an attack, make their muster
and at times fall back to save themselves. 3

I have seen outriders in your land,
O Aretines. I have seen raiding-parties,
tournaments of teams, hand-to-hand jousts 6
begun with bells, trumpets, or drums,
with signals from the castle,
with summons of our own and those from foreign lands. 9

But truly never to such outlandish fanfare
have I seen horsemen move, or infantry,
or ship set sail at sign from land or star. 12

On we went, escorted by ten demons.
What savage company! But, as they say,
'in church with saints, with guzzlers in the tavern.' 15

My attention was fixed upon the pitch
to note each detail of this gulch
and of the people poaching in it. 18

Like dolphins, when they arch their backs
above the water, giving sailors warning
to prepare to save their ship, 21
so from time to time, to ease his pain,
one of the sinners would show his back
and, quick as lightning, hide it once again. 24

And just as in a ditch at water's edge
frogs squat with but their snouts in sight,
their bodies and their legs all hidden, 27
so were the sinners scattered everywhere.
But they, at the approach of Barbariccia,
withdrew back down beneath the boiling. 30

There I saw -- and my heart still shudders at it --
one who lingered, as it can happen
that one frog stays while yet another plunges, 33

and Graffiacane, who was nearest him,
 caught a billhook in his pitchy locks
 and hauled him out, looking like an otter. 36

By now I knew their names,
 since I had noted these when they were chosen
 and when they called to one another. 39

'Set your claws to work, Rubicante,
 see you rip his skin off,'
 shouted all the accursèd crew together. 42

And I: 'Master, if you can do it,
 find out the name of this poor wretch
 caught in the clutches of his enemies.' 45

My leader got up close beside him
 and asked him where he came from. He replied:
 'I was born in the kingdom of Navarre. 48

'My mother, who had conceived me by a wastrel --
 destroyer of himself and all his goods --
 put me in service with a man of rank. 51

'Then I joined the retinue of worthy Thibaut:
 there first I set myself to taking bribes,
 for which I pay the reckoning in this heat.' 54

And Ciriatto, from whose jaw curved up
 on either side a tusk, like the wild boar's,
 made him feel how one of these could rip. 57

The mouse had fallen in with wicked cats.
 But Barbariccia blocked them with his arms
 and said: 'Stand back and let me jab him,' 60

then turned to face my master:
 'Speak up, if you are eager to learn more,
 before I let him have a mangling.' 63

And my leader: 'Of the other sinners in the pitch,
 tell me, is anyone Italian?'

And he: 'I just now came from one 66

'who hailed from near those parts. I wish
 I still were with him in the pitch --
 then I'd have no fear of hook or claw!' 69

Then Libicocco said: 'This is just too much,'
 caught him with his grapple by the arm
 and, ripping, gouged out a hunk of flesh. 72

Draghignazzo, too, wanted to catch him up, by the legs, at which their captain wheeled round on them with an ugly look.	75
After their fury had subsided, my leader seized this chance to ask the one still staring at his wound:	78
'Who is the one you spoke of, from whom you parted so unwisely when you came ashore?'	
And he replied: 'It was Fra Gomita	81
'of Gallura, a vessel full of fraud, who had his master's enemies in hand but dealt with them so each one sings his praises.	84
'He took their money and discreetly let them off, as he himself admits. And in his other actions he was no small-time swindler but a king.	87
'Don Michel Zanche of Logudoro keeps company with him and, when speaking of Sardegna, their tongues are never weary.	90
'Oh, look at that one there, gnashing his teeth! -- I would say more, but I'm afraid that demon's getting set to give my mangle a scratching.'	93
And the great marshal, turning to Farfarello, who was rolling his eyes, ready to strike, said: 'Back off, you filthy bird!'	96
'If you would care to see or hear,' the frightened spirit then began again, 'Tuscans or Lombards, I can make some come.	99
'But let the Malebranche stand away so that the sinners have no fear of vengeance, and, keeping to my place right here,	102
'for one of me, I will make seven come if I whistle, as is our custom when one of us pulls free out of the pitch.'	105
At this Cagnazzo lifted up his snout and said, shaking his head: 'Hear the cunning stunt he has contrived to throw himself back in!'	108
And he, with artifice in store, replied: 'I must indeed be cunning if I procure still greater anguish for my friends.'	111

Alichino couldn't stand this any more and said, in opposition to the others: 'If you dive back in I won't pursue you on the run --	114
'oh no! I'll beat my wings above the pitch. Let's leave the ridge and hide behind the bank. We'll see if you alone can take us on.'	117
Now, reader, you shall hear strange sport. All turned their backs to where the sinner stood, he first who'd most opposed the plan.	120
The Navarrese chose his moment well, planted his feet and in a second leaped and escaped from their designs.	123
At this they all were angry at their blunder, but most of all the one whose fault it was, so that he darted up and cried: 'Now you are caught!'	126
It did him little good, for even wings could not catch up with terror: the sinner dove and the devil turned up his breast in flight,	129
just as the wild duck, when the falcon nears, dives for the bottom, and the bird of prey must fly back up, angry and outsmarted.	132
Calcabrina, furious at this trick, was winging close behind him, eager for the sinner to break away as an excuse to scuffle,	135
and, since the barrator had vanished, he turned his claws against his fellow and came to grips with him above the ditch.	138
But the other was indeed a full-fledged hawk, fierce with his talons, and the pair of them went tumbling down into the scalding pond.	141
The heat unclutched them in a moment, but they had so beglued their wings there was no way to rise above the pitch.	144
Barbariccia, lamenting with the rest, had four of them fly to the other bank, each with his hook in hand, and in no time	147
on this side and on that they clambered down to their posts, reaching out their grapples to the pitch-trapped pair, already cooked to a crust.	150

And that is how we left them in that broil.

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