

# INFERNO

## CANTO XXV

Then, making the figs with both his thumbs,  
the thief raised up his fists and cried:  
'Take that, God! It's aimed at you!' 3

From that time on the serpents were my friends,  
for one of them coiled itself around his neck  
as if to say, 'Now you shall speak no more,' 6  
while another enmeshed his arms and held him fast,  
knotting itself so tight around his front  
he could not even twitch his arms. 9

Ah, Pistoia, Pistoia, why won't you resolve  
to burn yourself to ashes, cease to be,  
since you exceed your ancestors in evil? 12

Through all the gloomy rounds of Hell  
I saw no soul so prideful against God,  
not even him who toppled from the walls at Thebes. 15  
He ran away without another word.  
And then I saw a centaur full of rage  
come shouting: 'Where, where is that unripe soul?' 18

Maremma does not have as many snakes,  
I think, as he had on his back,  
from where the human part begins down to the rump. 21

On his shoulders, just at the nape of the neck,  
crouched a dragon with its wings spread wide  
that sets on fire whatever it encounters. 24

My master said: 'That is Cacus,  
who in the cave beneath the Aventine  
many times over has made a lake of blood. 27

'His road is different from his brothers'  
because he stole, with wicked cunning,  
the herd of cattle he found near at hand. 30

'For that his wily ways were ended  
beneath the club of Hercules, who struck perhaps  
a hundred blows, though he felt not the tenth.' 33

While my master spoke the centaur had run past.  
Below where we were standing, three new souls  
had neared, although we did not see them 36  
until we heard their shouts: 'You,  
who are you?' At that he stopped his tale  
and we gave heed to them alone. 39  
I knew none of them, and yet it happened --  
as often happens by some chance --  
that one had cause to speak another's name, 42  
asking: 'What's become of Cianfa?'  
And then, to catch my guide's attention,  
I held my finger up from chin to nose. 45  
If, reader, you are slow to credit  
what I'm about to tell you, it's no wonder:  
I saw it, and I myself can scarce believe it. 48  
While I stood staring, with raised brows,  
a reptile with six legs propelled itself  
at one of them, and fastened itself to him. 51  
It grabbed his belly with its middle claws,  
then with its forepaws held his arms  
and bit him on both cheeks. 54  
It stretched its hind feet down the other's thighs,  
thrusting its tail between them  
and curled it up behind, above the buttocks. 57  
Never did clinging ivy fix itself  
so tight upon a tree as did that fearful beast  
entwine itself around the other's limbs. 60  
Then they fused together, as if made  
of molten wax, mixing their colors  
so that neither seemed what it had been before, 63  
as over the surface of a scrap of parchment,  
before the flame, a brownish color comes  
that is not black, yet makes the white die out. 66  
The other two were looking on and each  
was shouting: 'Oh my, Agnello, how you change!  
Look, now you are neither two nor one!' 69  
Already the two heads had been united,  
two sets of features blending,  
both lost in a single face. 72

Four separate limbs combined to form two arms.  
 The thighs and calves, the stomach and the chest  
 turned into members never seen before. 75

All trace of their first aspect was erased  
 and the unnatural figure seemed both two  
 and none; and off it went, at its slow pace. 78

As the green lizard beneath the scorching lash  
 of dog-day heat, between one hedge and the next,  
 seems lightning as it streaks across the road, 81  
 just so appeared -- darting toward the bellies  
 of the other two -- a little fiery reptile,  
 black and livid as a peppercorn. 84

That part where first we are nourished  
 it transfixed in one of them  
 and then fell prone before him. 87

The one transfixed just stared, said nothing.  
 Indeed, with his feet stock-still, he yawned,  
 as if deep sleep or fever had assailed him. 90

He and the reptile stared at one another.  
 Both gave out dense smoke, one from its wound,  
 the other from its mouth. Then their smoke merged. 93

Let Lucan now fall silent where he tells  
 of poor Sabellus and Nasidius,  
 and let him wait to hear what comes forth now! 96

Let Ovid not speak of Cadmus or Arethusa,  
 for if his poem turns him into a serpent  
 and her into a fountain, I grudge it not, 99  
 for never did he change two natures, face to face,  
 in such a way that both their forms  
 were quite so quick exchanging substance. 102

Their corresponding changes went like this:  
 the reptile split its tail into a fork  
 and he that was wounded drew his feet together. 105

First his calves and then his thighs began  
 to knit so that in but a moment  
 no sign of a division could be seen. 108

The cloven tail assumed the shapes  
 the other one was losing, and his skin  
 was turning soft while the other's hardened. 111

I saw the man's arms shrinking toward the armpits  
and the brute's forepaws, which had been short,  
lengthen, precisely as the other's dwindled. 114

Then the hind-paws, twisting together,  
became the member that a man conceals,  
and from his own the wretch had grown two paws. 117

While the smoke veils one and now the other  
with new color and grows hair here  
and elsewhere strips it off, 120

one of them rose to his feet, the other fell,  
but neither turned aside his baleful glare  
under which each muzzle changed its shape. 123

In the one erect it shrank in to the temples,  
and, from the excess flesh absorbed,  
two ears extruded from smooth cheeks. 126

Whatever did not recede, left over  
from that excess, made a nose for the face  
and gave the lips a proper thickness. 129

The one prone on the ground shoves out his snout  
and draws his ears into his head  
as a snail draws in its horns, 132

and his tongue, till now a single thing  
and fit for speech, divides, and the other's  
forked tongue joins, and the smoke stops. 135

The soul just now become a brute takes flight,  
hissing through the hollow, and the other,  
by way of speaking, spits after him. 138

Then he turned his new-made shoulders and he said  
to the third: 'I want Buoso to run, as I have done,  
down on all fours along this road.' 141

Thus I saw the seventh rabble change  
and change again, and let the newness of it  
be my excuse if my pen has gone astray. 144

And though my eyes were dazed  
and my mind somewhat bewildered,  
these sinners could not flee so stealthily 147

but I with ease discerned that Puccio Lameshanks,  
and he alone, of the three companions  
in that group, remained unchanged. 150

The other was the one, Gaville, you lament.

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