

INFERNO

CANTO IV

A heavy thunderclap broke my deep sleep so that I started up like one shaken awake by force.	3
With rested eyes, I stood and looked about me, then fixed my gaze to make out where I was.	6
I found myself upon the brink of an abyss of suffering filled with the roar of endless woe.	9
It was full of vapor, dark and deep. Straining my eyes toward the bottom, I could see nothing.	12
'Now let us descend into the blind world down there,' began the Poet, gone pale. 'I will be first and you come after.'	15
And I, noting his pallor, said: 'How shall I come if you're afraid, you, who give me comfort when I falter?'	18
And he to me: 'The anguish of the souls below us paints my face with pity you mistake for fear.	21
'Let us go, for the long road calls us.' Thus he went first and had me enter the first circle girding the abyss.	24
Here, as far as I could tell by listening, was no lamentation other than the sighs that kept the air forever trembling.	27
These came from grief without torment borne by vast crowds of men, and women, and little children.	30
My master began: 'You do not ask about the souls you see? I want you to know, before you venture farther,	33

'they did not sin. Though they have merit,
 that is not enough, for they were unbaptised,
 denied the gateway to the faith that you profess. 36
 'And if they lived before the Christians lived,
 they did not worship God aright.
 And among these I am one. 39
 'For such defects, and for no other fault,
 we are lost, and afflicted but in this,
 that without hope we live in longing.' 42
 When I understood, great sadness seized my heart,
 for then I knew that beings of great worth
 were here suspended in this Limbo. 45
 'Tell me, master, tell me, sir,' I began,
 seeking assurance in the faith
 that conquers every doubt, 48
 'did ever anyone, either by his own
 or by another's merit, go forth from here
 and rise to blessedness?' 51
 And he, who understood my covert speech:
 'I was new to this condition when I saw
 a mighty one descend, crowned, with the sign of victory. 54
 'Out of our midst he plucked the shade
 of our first parent, of Abel his son, of Noah,
 and of Moses, obedient in giving laws, 57
 'the patriarch Abraham, and King David,
 Israel with his father and his sons,
 and with Rachel, for whom he served so long, 60
 'as well as many others, and he made them blessed.
 And, I would have you know, before these
 no human souls were saved.' 63
 We did not halt our movement as he spoke,
 but all the while were passing through a wood --
 I mean a wood of thronging spirits. 66
 We had not yet gone far from where I'd slept
 when I beheld a blaze of light
 that overcame a hemisphere of darkness, 69
 though still a good way from it,
 yet not so far but I discerned
 an honorable company was gathered there. 72

'O you who honor art and knowledge, why are these so honored they are set apart from the condition of the rest?'	75
And he answered: 'Their honorable fame, which echoes in your life above, gains favor in Heaven, which thus advances them.'	78
Just then I heard a voice that said: 'Honor the loftiest of poets! His shade returns that had gone forth.'	81
When the voice had paused and there was silence, I saw four worthy shades approach, their countenances neither sad nor joyful.	84
The good master spoke: 'Take note of him who holds that sword in hand and comes as lord before the three:	87
'He is Homer, sovereign poet. Next comes Horace the satirist, Ovid is third, the last is Lucan.	90
'Since each is joined to me in the name the one voice uttered, they do me honor and, doing so, do well.'	93
There I saw assembled the fair school of the lord of loftiest song, soaring like an eagle far above the rest.	96
After they conversed a while, they turned to me with signs of greeting, and my master smiled at this.	99
And then they showed me greater honor still, for they made me one of their company, so that I became the sixth amidst such wisdom.	102
Thus we went onward to the light, speaking of things that here are best unsaid, just as there it was fitting to express them.	105
We came to the foot of a noble castle, encircled seven times by towering walls, defended round about by a fair stream.	108
Over this stream we moved as on dry land. Through seven gates I entered with these sages until we came to a fresh, green meadow.	111

People were there with grave, slow-moving eyes
 and visages of great authority.
 They seldom spoke, and then in gentle tones. 114
 When we withdrew over to one side
 into an open space, high in the light,
 we could observe them all. 117
 There before me on the enameled green
 the great spirits were revealed.
 In my heart I exult at what I saw. 120
 I saw Electra with many of her line,
 of whom I recognized Hector, Aeneas,
 and Caesar, in arms, with his falcon eyes. 123
 I saw Camilla and Penthesilea.
 Seated apart I saw King Latinus,
 and next to him Lavinia, his daughter. 126
 I saw that Brutus who drove out Tarquinius,
 Lucretia, Julia, Marcia, and Cornelia.
 And Saladin I saw, alone, apart. 129
 When I raised my eyes a little higher,
 I saw the master of those who know,
 sitting among his philosophic kindred. 132
 Eyes trained on him, all show him honor.
 In front of all the rest and nearest him
 I saw Socrates and Plato. 135
 I saw Democritus, who ascribes the world
 to chance, Diogenes, Anaxagoras, and Thales,
 Empedocles, Heraclitus, and Zeno. 138
 I saw the skilled collector of the qualities
 of things -- I mean Dioscorides -- and I saw
 Orpheus, Cicero, Linus, and moral Seneca, 141
 Euclid the geometer, and Ptolemy,
 Hippocrates, Avicenna, Galen,
 and Averroes, who wrote the weighty glosses. 144
 I cannot give account of all of them,
 for the length of my theme so drives me on
 that often the telling comes short of the fact. 147
 The company of six falls off to two
 and my wise leader brings me by another way
 out of the still, into the trembling, air. 150

And I come to a place where nothing shines.

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