

INFERNO

CANTO VIII

To continue, let me say that long before we reached the foot of that high tower our eyes had noted at its top	3
two flaming lights displayed up there to which another, so far off the eye could hardly make it out, sent back a signal.	6
And turning to that sea of wisdom, I asked: 'What does this mean? And that other fire, what does it answer? And who made it?'	9
And he to me: 'Over the filthy waves you may already glimpse what is to come, if the marsh-fumes do not hide it from you.'	12
Never did a bowstring loose an arrow that whipped away more swiftly through the air than, even as I watched, a skiff came skimming	15
toward us on the water, under the guidance of a single helmsman, crying: 'Now you are caught, damned spirit!'	18
'Phlegyas, Phlegyas, this time you shout in vain,' replied my lord. 'You will have us no longer than it takes to cross this bog.'	21
Like one who learns of a deceitful plot hatched against him and begins to fret, Phlegyas became in his stifled wrath.	24
My leader stepped into the boat, and had me follow after.	27
And only then did it seem laden.	27
As soon as he and I were in the bark the ancient prow moves off, cutting deeper through the water than when it carried souls.	30
While we crossed the stagnant swamp one cloaked in mud rose up to say: 'Who are you that come before your time?'	33

And I to him: 'If I come, I do not stay.
 But you, who are you, now become so foul?'
 He answered: 'As you can see, I am one who weeps.' 36
 And I to him: 'In weeping and in misery,
 accursèd spirit, may you remain.
 I know you, for all your filth.' 39
 When he stretched both his hands toward the boat,
 the wary master thrust him off, saying:
 'Away there with the other dogs!' 42
 Then my master put his arms around my neck,
 kissed my face and said: 'Indignant soul,
 blessed is she that bore you in her womb!' 45
 'In the world this man was full of arrogance.
 Not one good deed adorns his memory.
 That is why his shade is so enraged.' 48
 'How many now above who think themselves
 great kings will lie here in the mud, like swine,
 leaving behind nothing but ill repute!" 51
 And I: 'Master, I would be most eager
 to see him pushed deep down into this soup
 before we leave the lake.' 54
 And he to me: 'Before the shore
 comes into view you'll have your satisfaction.
 Your wish deserves to be fulfilled.' 57
 Soon I watched him get so torn to pieces
 by the muddy crew, I still give praise
 and thanks to God for it. 60
 All cried: 'Get Filippo Argenti!'
 And that spiteful Florentine spirit
 gnawed at himself with his own teeth. 63
 Of him I say no more. Then we moved on,
 when such a sound of mourning struck my ears
 I opened my eyes wide to look ahead. 66
 The good master said: 'Now, my son,
 we approach the city known as Dis,
 with its vast army and its burdened citizens.' 69
 And I: 'Master, I can clearly see its mosques
 within the ramparts, glowing red
 as if they'd just been taken from the fire.' 72

And he to me: 'The eternal fire
 that burns inside them here in nether Hell
 makes them show red, as you can see.' 75

At last we reached the moats
 dug deep around the dismal city.
 Its walls seemed made of iron. 78

Not until we'd made a wide approach
 did we come to a place where the boatman bellowed:
 'Out with you here, this is the entrance.' 81

At the threshold I saw more than a thousand angels
 fallen from Heaven. Angrily they shouted:
 'Who is this, who is not dead, 84
 'yet passes through the kingdom of the dead?'
 At this my prudent master made a sign
 that he would speak with them apart. 87

Then they reined in their great disdain
 enough to say: 'You come -- alone. Let him be gone,
 who has so boldly made his way into this kingdom. 90
 'Let him retrace his reckless path alone --
 let him see if he can, for you shall stay,
 you who have led him through this gloomy realm.' 93

Reader, how could I not lose heart
 at the sound of these accursèd words,
 for I thought I would never make it back. 96

'O my dear leader, who seven times and more
 have braced my confidence and saved me
 from the dangers that assailed me, 99
 'do not leave me,' I cried, 'helpless now!
 If going farther is denied us,
 let us at once retrace our steps.' 102

But the mentor who had brought me there replied:
 'Have no fear. None can prevent our passage,
 so great a power granted it to us. 105

'Wait for me here. Comfort your weary spirit
 and feed it with good hope.
 I will not forsake you in the nether world.' 108

He goes away and leaves me there,
 my gentle father, and I remain in doubt,
 'yes' and 'no' at war within my mind. 111

I could not hear what he proposed,
but it was not long he stayed with them
before they pushed and scrambled back inside. 114

Then our adversaries slammed shut the gates
against my master, who, left outside,
came back to me with halting steps. 117

He had his eyes upon the ground, his brows
shorn of all confidence. Sighing, he muttered:
'Who dares deny me access to the realm of pain?' 120

To me he said: 'Be not dismayed
at my vexation. In this contest I'll prevail,
whatever they contrive to keep us out. 123

'This insolence of theirs is nothing new:
they showed it once before, at another gate.
It still stands open without lock or bolt. 126

'Over it you saw the deadly writing.
Even now, making his unescorted way
down through the circles, one descends 129
by whom the city shall be opened.' 130