

PURGATORIO

CANTO XIV

'Who is this, circling our mountain
before he has been given wings by death,
who can open his eyes at will and shut them?' 3

'I don't know who he is but know he's not alone.
Question him, since you are closer,
and greet him courteously that he may answer.' 6

Thus two spirits, their faces almost touching,
conversed about me over to the right,
then turned their faces up to speak to me. 9

One said: 'O soul still rooted in the body,
making your way toward Heaven,
for the sake of charity relieve us, let us know 12

'where you come from and who you are,
for the grace bestowed on you has so amazed us
as something must that never was before.' 15

And I: 'Through the middle of Tuscany there flows
a winding stream that springs in Falterona--
a hundred miles of flowing do not slake its thirst. 18

'From somewhere on its banks I bring this form.
To tell you who I am would be to speak in vain,
for my name as yet does not resound.' 21

'If my wit has truly grasped your meaning,'
he who had spoken first then answered,
'it is the Arno that you speak of.' 24

And the other asked him:
'Why did he conceal that river's name
just as one hides some dreadful thing?' 27

And the interrogated shade thus paid his debt:
'I do not know, but it is only fitting
that the name of such a valley perish, 30

'for from its source, where the wild mountain range,
from which Pelorus was broken off, rises to such height
that higher places are but few, 33

'down to where it surrenders to restore what the sky draws from the sea, so that the rivers are supplied in turn,	36
'all flee from virtue as if it were a snake, an enemy to all, whether some curse is on the place or evil habits goad them on,	39
'and those who live in that unhappy valley are so altered in their nature it is as though Circe were grazing them at pasture.	42
'Among filthy hogs, more fit to feed on acorns than on any food that is prepared for men, the water first directs its feeble course.	45
'Then, coming lower, it finds whelps that snarl more than their powers warrant, and so in scorn the river turns its snout from them.	48
'It goes on falling and the more it swells the more does the accursed, ill-omened ditch find that these dogs have been transformed to wolves.	51
'Having fallen through dark and deep-cut gorges, it then finds foxes so very full of fraud they have no fear that any trap can take them.	54
'Nor will I hold my peace because another hears me. It will be wise of him to keep in mind the truth the Spirit has revealed.	57
'I see your grandson, who becomes a hunter of the wolves that gather on the banks of that wild stream and puts them all in terror.	60
'He sells their living flesh, then slaughters them like old and useless cattle. Many he robs of life and robs himself of honor.	63
'Covered in blood, he leaves that wretched wood in such a state that not one thousand years will make the trees grow green as once they were.'	66
As at the forecast of impending harm the face of one who hears it shows distress, no matter where the threat may bare its fangs,	69
the other soul, who had turned to listen, became troubled and disheartened once he had listened to these words.	72

The speech of one and the expression of the other made me wish to know their names and I asked, entreating their response.	75
The spirit that had spoken first began again: 'You would have me do for you what you do not consent to do for me.	78
'But since God wills His grace shine forth in you, I will no longer hoard my answer: Know, then, I was Guido del Duca.	81
'My blood was so consumed by envy that, had I seen a man take joy in life, you would have seen my skin turn livid.	84
'As I sowed, so now I reap such straw. O race of men, why do you set your hearts on things that of necessity cannot be shared?	87
'This man is Rinier, this is the pride and honor of the house of Càlboli, where no one since has made himself an heir to his true worth.	90
'And not his blood alone--between Po and the mountains, between Reno and the sea--is stripped of virtues consonant with deeper thought and courtly pastime.	93
'For the land within these boundaries is grown so dense with poisonous shoots that even proper tillage now would come too late.	96
'Where is good Lizio, where Arrigo Mainardi, Pier Traversaro and Guido di Carpigna? O people of Romagna, how you've turned to bastards!	99
'When, in Bologna, will another Fabbro grow? When, in Faenza, a Bernardin di Fosco, noble branch sprung from a lowly weed?	102
'Do not marvel, Tuscan, if I weep when, along with Guido da Prata, I recall Ugolin d'Azzo, who lived among us,	105
'Federico Tignoso and his companions, the house of Traversaro and of Anastagi-- both families now spent, without an heir--	108
'the ladies and the knights, the toils and sport that love and courtesy inspired, where now is found a waste of evil hearts.	111

'O Bertinoro, why do you not disappear,
since your best family, along with many others,
has fled you to escape corruption? 114

'Bagnacavallo does well to breed no more,
Castrocaro poorly and Conio worse,
obstinate in breeding such degenerate counts. 117

'The Pagani will do better when their "Devil"
shuffles off, yet not so well
that they will leave behind a stainless slate. 120

O Ugolin de' Fantolin, your name is safe,
since no more sons are looked for
who might blacken it with their depravity. 123

'But now, Tuscan, be on your way,
for I would rather weep than speak,
so has our discourse wrung my mind.' 126

We knew those kindly spirits heard us moving off.
Their silence, for that reason,
confirmed that we were keeping to our path. 129

As we moved on by ourselves, a voice,
like lightning when it cleaves the air,
came down upon us, saying: 132

'Whoever finds me shall slay me,'
and fled, as thunder fades away,
after the sudden rending of its cloud. 135

As soon as our ears had some relief
a new voice followed with such clamor that it seemed
a thunderclap, delayed but for an instant: 138

'I am Aglauros who was turned to stone.'
At that, to draw closer to the poet,
I took a step to my right and not ahead. 141

Now that the air was quiet all around us,
he said to me: 'That was the bit and bridle
to keep a man within his bounds. 144

'But you mortals take the bait, so that the hook
of your old adversary draws you to him,
and then of little use is curb or lure. 147

'The heavens call to you and wheel about you,
revealing their eternal splendors,
but your eyes are fixed upon the earth. 150

For that, He, seeing all, does smite you.'

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