

PURGATORIO

CANTO VIII

It was now the hour that melts a sailor's heart and saddens him with longing on the day he's said farewell to his beloved friends,	3
and when a traveler, starting out, is pierced with love if far away he hears a bell that seems to mourn the dying light,	6
and I began to listen less and fix my gaze, intent upon a soul who suddenly stood up and signaled for attention with his hand.	9
He lifted his clasped palms and fixed his eyes upon the east as if he said to God: 'For nothing else do I have any care.'	12
' <i>Te lucis ante</i> ' came forth from his lips with such devotion and with notes so sweet it drew me out from all thoughts of myself.	15
The others joined him then and sang the whole hymn through with sweet devotion, keeping their eyes upon the heavenly wheels.	18
Here, reader, set your gaze upon the truth, for now the veil is drawn so thin that piercing it is surely easy.	21
I watched that noble gathering grow silent as they raised their eyes, humble and pale with expectation.	24
And I saw issue from above and then descend two angels holding flaming swords, their pointed blade-tips broken off.	27
Green as newly opened leaves, their garments, stirred and fanned by their green wings, swirled and billowed out behind them.	30
One came and took his stand there just above us and one alighted on the other bank, so that the company was set between them.	33

I could discern the angels' flaxen hair,
 but looking at their faces dazzled me,
 my power of sight undone by so much brightness. 36

'Both come from Mary's bosom,'
 said Sordello, 'to guard the valley
 from the serpent that will soon appear.' 39

Not knowing by what path,
 I turned around, all chilled with fear,
 and huddled closer to the trusted shoulders. 42

Sordello continued: 'Let us now go down
 into the valley and speak with those great shades.
 They will be pleased to have you join them.' 45

It seemed I had taken only three steps down
 when I saw one who stared at me alone,
 as if he tried to bring my name to mind. 48

It was now the hour when the air grows dark,
 yet had not turned so dark it failed to show
 his eyes and mine what had been hidden. 51

He moved toward me and I moved toward him.
 Noble Judge Nino, what joy it was to me
 when I saw that you were not among the damned! 54

Between us no fair greeting went unsaid.
 Then he asked: 'How long is it since you came
 over far waters to this mountain?' 57

'Oh,' I said to him, 'I came this morning
 from the doleful regions. I am in my first life,
 though by coming here I gain the other.' 60

And when they heard my answer
 Sordello and he drew back,
 like men suddenly bewildered. 63

One turned to Virgil, and the other called
 to someone seated there: 'Rise, Currado,
 come and see what God by His good grace has willed,' 66

then, turning to me: 'By that special gratitude
 you owe to Him who hides His primal purpose
 so deep we cannot fathom it, 69

'when you are far from these wide waters,
 ask my Giovanna to direct her prayers for me
 to where the innocent are heard. 72

'I think her mother has not loved me
 since she stopped wearing her white wimple,
 which, in her coming misery, she may long for. 75

'There is an easy lesson in her conduct:
 how short a time the fire of love endures in woman
 if frequent sight and touch do not rekindle it. 78

'The viper that leads the Milanese afield
 will hardly ornament her tomb as handsomely
 as the cock of Gallura would have done.' 81

He spoke these words, his face stamped
 with a look of righteous indignation
 that burns with proper measure in the heart. 84

My hungry eyes were lifted toward the sky,
 to that zone where the stars move slowest,
 as does the spoke of a wheel close to the axle. 87

And my leader: 'Son, what are you staring at?'
 And I replied: 'At those three torches
 with which this pole is all aflame.' 90

'The four bright stars you saw this morning,'
 he said, 'are low upon the unseen sky
 and these have risen where those others were.' 93

As he spoke, Sordello drew him closer,
 saying: 'Behold our adversary,'
 and pointed with his finger where to look. 96

In that place where the little valley
 has no rampart, a snake appeared,
 perhaps the one that gave to Eve the bitter fruit. 99

Through grass and flowers slid the evil streak,
 turning its head from time to time to lick its back
 like a beast that sleeks itself. 102

I did not see and therefore cannot tell
 how the celestial falcons started up,
 but I could plainly see them both in motion. 105

Hearing the green wings cleave the air,
 the serpent fled. The angels wheeled around
 and flew back up together to their posts. 108

The shade, who had drawn closer to the judge
 when he called out, had not through that assault
 at any time removed his gaze from me. 111

'So may the lantern leading you above have ample wax in the candle of your will to bring you to the enameled summit,'	114
he said, 'if you have true news of Valdimagra or of the parts around, please tell me, for there I once was great.	117
'I was called Currado Malaspina, not the old Currado but descended from him. To my own I bore the love that here is purified.'	120
'Oh,' I said to him, 'never have I been there, in your country. But where do men dwell, anywhere in Europe, that it is not renowned?	123
'The fame that crowns your house with honor proclaims alike its lords and lands-- even those who have not been there know them,	126
'and, as I hope to go above, I swear to you your honored race does not disgrace the glory of its purse and of its sword.	129
'No matter how a wicked chief may warp the world, privileged both by nature and by custom, your race alone goes straight and scorns the evil path.'	132
Then he said: 'Enough. Not seven times shall the sun return to rest in the bed the Ram covers and bestrides with all four feet	135
'before this courteous opinion shall be nailed within your brain by stronger nails than the words of others,	138
if the course of Judgment is not stayed.'	139