

THE DIVINE  
COMEDY:  
INFERNO

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## Canto I

Midway upon the journey of our life  
I found myself within a forest dark,  
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.

Ah me! how hard a thing it is to say  
What was this forest savage, rough, and stern,  
Which in the very thought renews the fear.

So bitter is it, death is little more;  
But of the good to treat, which there I found,  
Speak will I of the other things I saw there.

I cannot well repeat how there I entered,  
So full was I of slumber at the moment  
In which I had abandoned the true way.

But after I had reached a mountain's foot,  
At that point where the valley terminated,  
Which had with consternation pierced my heart,

Upward I looked, and I beheld its shoulders,  
Vested already with that planet's rays  
Which leadeth others right by every road.

Then was the fear a little quieted  
That in my heart's lake had endured throughout  
The night, which I had passed so piteously.

And even as he, who, with distressful breath,  
Forth issued from the sea upon the shore,  
Turns to the water perilous and gazes;

So did my soul, that still was fleeing onward,  
Turn itself back to re-behold the pass  
Which never yet a living person left.

After my weary body I had rested,  
The way resumed I on the desert slope,  
So that the firm foot ever was the lower.

And lo! almost where the ascent began,  
A panther light and swift exceedingly,  
Which with a spotted skin was covered o'er!

And never moved she from before my face,  
Nay, rather did impede so much my way,  
That many times I to return had turned.

The time was the beginning of the morning,  
And up the sun was mounting with those stars  
That with him were, what time the Love Divine

At first in motion set those beauteous things;  
So were to me occasion of good hope,  
The variegated skin of that wild beast,

The hour of time, and the delicious season;  
But not so much, that did not give me fear  
A lion's aspect which appeared to me.

He seemed as if against me he were coming  
With head uplifted, and with ravenous hunger,  
So that it seemed the air was afraid of him;

And a she-wolf, that with all hungerings  
Seemed to be laden in her meagreness,  
And many folk has caused to live forlorn!

She brought upon me so much heaviness,  
With the affright that from her aspect came,  
That I the hope relinquished of the height.

And as he is who willingly acquires,  
And the time comes that causes him to lose,  
Who weeps in all his thoughts and is despondent,

E'en such made me that beast withouten peace,  
Which, coming on against me by degrees  
Thrust me back thither where the sun is silent.

While I was rushing downward to the lowland,  
Before mine eyes did one present himself,  
Who seemed from long-continued silence hoarse.

When I beheld him in the desert vast,  
"Have pity on me," unto him I cried,  
"Whiche'er thou art, or shade or real man!"

He answered me: "Not man; man once I was,  
And both my parents were of Lombardy,  
And Mantuans by country both of them.

'Sub Julio' was I born, though it was late,  
And lived at Rome under the good Augustus,  
During the time of false and lying gods.

A poet was I, and I sang that just  
Son of Anchises, who came forth from Troy,  
After that Ilion the superb was burned.

But thou, why goest thou back to such annoyance?  
Why climb'st thou not the Mount Delectable,  
Which is the source and cause of every joy?"

"Now, art thou that Virgilius and that fountain  
Which spreads abroad so wide a river of speech?"  
I made response to him with bashful forehead.

"O, of the other poets honour and light,  
Avail me the long study and great love  
That have impelled me to explore thy volume!

Thou art my master, and my author thou,  
Thou art alone the one from whom I took  
The beautiful style that has done honour to me.

Behold the beast, for which I have turned back;  
Do thou protect me from her, famous Sage,  
For she doth make my veins and pulses tremble."

"Thee it behoves to take another road,"  
Responded he, when he beheld me weeping,  
"If from this savage place thou wouldst escape;

Because this beast, at which thou criest out,  
Suffers not any one to pass her way,  
But so doth harass him, that she destroys him;

And has a nature so malign and ruthless,  
That never doth she glut her greedy will,  
And after food is hungrier than before.

Many the animals with whom she weds,  
And more they shall be still, until the Greyhound  
Comes, who shall make her perish in her pain.

He shall not feed on either earth or pelf,  
But upon wisdom, and on love and virtue;  
'Twixt Feltro and Feltro shall his nation be;

Of that low Italy shall he be the saviour,  
On whose account the maid Camilla died,  
Euryalus, Turnus, Nisus, of their wounds;

Through every city shall he hunt her down,  
Until he shall have driven her back to Hell,  
There from whence envy first did let her loose.

Therefore I think and judge it for thy best  
Thou follow me, and I will be thy guide,  
And lead thee hence through the eternal place,

Where thou shalt hear the desperate lamentations,  
Shalt see the ancient spirits disconsolate,  
Who cry out each one for the second death;

And thou shalt see those who contented are  
Within the fire, because they hope to come,  
Whene'er it may be, to the blessed people;

To whom, then, if thou wishest to ascend,  
A soul shall be for that than I more worthy;  
With her at my departure I will leave thee;

Because that Emperor, who reigns above,  
In that I was rebellious to his law,  
Wills that through me none come into his city.

He governs everywhere, and there he reigns;  
There is his city and his lofty throne;  
O happy he whom thereto he elects!"

And I to him: "Poet, I thee entreat,  
By that same God whom thou didst never know,  
So that I may escape this woe and worse,

Thou wouldst conduct me there where thou hast said,  
That I may see the portal of Saint Peter,  
And those thou makest so disconsolate."

Then he moved on, and I behind him followed.

## Canto II

Day was departing, and the embrowned air  
Released the animals that are on earth  
From their fatigues; and I the only one

Made myself ready to sustain the war,  
Both of the way and likewise of the woe,  
Which memory that errs not shall retrace.

O Muses, O high genius, now assist me!  
O memory, that didst write down what I saw,  
Here thy nobility shall be manifest!

And I began: "Poet, who guidest me,  
Regard my manhood, if it be sufficient,  
Ere to the arduous pass thou dost confide me.

Thou sayest, that of Silvius the parent,  
While yet corruptible, unto the world  
Immortal went, and was there bodily.

But if the adversary of all evil  
Was courteous, thinking of the high effect  
That issue would from him, and who, and what,

To men of intellect unmeet it seems not;  
For he was of great Rome, and of her empire  
In the empyreal heaven as father chosen;

The which and what, wishing to speak the truth,  
Were stablished as the holy place, wherein  
Sits the successor of the greatest Peter.

Upon this journey, whence thou givest him vaunt,  
Things did he hear, which the occasion were  
Both of his victory and the papal mantle.

Thither went afterwards the Chosen Vessel,  
To bring back comfort thence unto that Faith,  
Which of salvation's way is the beginning.

But I, why thither come, or who concedes it?  
I not Aeneas am, I am not Paul,  
Nor I, nor others, think me worthy of it.

Therefore, if I resign myself to come,  
I fear the coming may be ill-advised;  
Thou'rt wise, and knowest better than I speak."

And as he is, who unwill's what he willed,  
And by new thoughts doth his intention change,  
So that from his design he quite withdraws,

Such I became, upon that dark hillside,  
Because, in thinking, I consumed the emprise,  
Which was so very prompt in the beginning.

"If I have well thy language understood,"  
Replied that shade of the Magnanimous,  
"Thy soul attainted is with cowardice,

Which many times a man encumbers so,  
It turns him back from honoured enterprise,  
As false sight doth a beast, when he is shy.

That thou mayst free thee from this apprehension,  
I'll tell thee why I came, and what I heard  
At the first moment when I grieved for thee.

Among those was I who are in suspense,  
And a fair, saintly Lady called to me  
In such wise, I besought her to command me.

Her eyes where shining brighter than the Star;  
And she began to say, gentle and low,  
With voice angelical, in her own language:

'O spirit courteous of Mantua,  
Of whom the fame still in the world endures,  
And shall endure, long-lasting as the world;

A friend of mine, and not the friend of fortune,  
Upon the desert slope is so impeded  
Upon his way, that he has turned through terror,

And may, I fear, already be so lost,  
That I too late have risen to his succour,  
From that which I have heard of him in Heaven.

Bestir thee now, and with thy speech ornate,  
And with what needful is for his release,  
Assist him so, that I may be consoled.

Beatrice am I, who do bid thee go;  
I come from there, where I would fain return;  
Love moved me, which compelleth me to speak.

When I shall be in presence of my Lord,  
Full often will I praise thee unto him.'  
Then paused she, and thereafter I began:

'O Lady of virtue, thou alone through whom  
The human race exceedeth all contained  
Within the heaven that has the lesser circles,

So grateful unto me is thy commandment,  
To obey, if 'twere already done, were late;  
No farther need'st thou ope to me thy wish.

But the cause tell me why thou dost not shun  
The here descending down into this centre,  
From the vast place thou burnest to return to.'

'Since thou wouldst fain so inwardly discern,  
Briefly will I relate,' she answered me,  
'Why I am not afraid to enter here.

Of those things only should one be afraid  
Which have the power of doing others harm;  
Of the rest, no; because they are not fearful.

God in his mercy such created me  
That misery of yours attains me not,  
Nor any flame assails me of this burning.

A gentle Lady is in Heaven, who grieves  
At this impediment, to which I send thee,  
So that stern judgment there above is broken.

In her entreaty she besought Lucia,  
And said, "Thy faithful one now stands in need  
Of thee, and unto thee I recommend him."

Lucia, foe of all that cruel is,  
Hastened away, and came unto the place  
Where I was sitting with the ancient Rachel.

“Beatrice” said she, “the true praise of God,  
Why succourest thou not him, who loved thee so,  
For thee he issued from the vulgar herd?

Dost thou not hear the pity of his plaint?  
Dost thou not see the death that combats him  
Beside that flood, where ocean has no vaunt?”

Never were persons in the world so swift  
To work their weal and to escape their woe,  
As I, after such words as these were uttered,

Came hither downward from my blessed seat,  
Confiding in thy dignified discourse,  
Which honours thee, and those who’ve listened to it.’

After she thus had spoken unto me,  
Weeping, her shining eyes she turned away;  
Whereby she made me swifter in my coming;

And unto thee I came, as she desired;  
I have delivered thee from that wild beast,  
Which barred the beautiful mountain’s short ascent.

What is it, then? Why, why dost thou delay?  
Why is such baseness bedded in thy heart?  
Daring and hardihood why hast thou not,

Seeing that three such Ladies benedight  
Are caring for thee in the court of Heaven,  
And so much good my speech doth promise thee?”

Even as the flowerets, by nocturnal chill,  
Bowed down and closed, when the sun whitens them,  
Uplift themselves all open on their stems;

Such I became with my exhausted strength,  
And such good courage to my heart there coursed,  
That I began, like an intrepid person:

“O she compassionate, who succoured me,  
And courteous thou, who hast obeyed so soon  
The words of truth which she addressed to thee!

Thou hast my heart so with desire disposed  
To the adventure, with these words of thine,  
That to my first intent I have returned.

Now go, for one sole will is in us both,  
Thou Leader, and thou Lord, and Master thou.”  
Thus said I to him; and when he had moved,

I entered on the deep and savage way.