

Inferno: Canto 2

Rome: Virgil and Beatrice - Good Fri. Sunset

[Day was departing](#) and the dusk drew on, 1
Loosing from labor every living thing
Save me, in all the world; I - I alone -

Must gird me to the wars - rough traveling, 4
And pity's sharp assault upon the heart -
Which memory shall record, unfaltering;

Now, Muses, now, high Genius, do your part! 7
And Memory, faithful scrivener to the eyes,
Here show thy virtue, noble as thou art!

I soon began: "Poet - dear guide - 'twere wise 10
Surely, to test my powers and weigh their worth
Ere trusting me to this great enterprise.

Thou sayest, the author of young Silvius' birth, 13
Did to the world immortal, mortal go,
Clothed in the body of flesh he wore on earth

Granted; if Hell's great Foeman deigned to show 16
To him such favor, seeing the vast effect,
And what and who his destined issue - no,

That need surprise no thoughtful intellect, 19
Since to Rome's fostering city and empery
High Heaven had sealed him as the father-elect;

Both these were there established, verily, 22
To found that place, holy and dedicate,
Wherein great Peter's heir should hold his See;

So that the deed thy verses celebrate 25
Taught him the road to victory, and bestowed
The Papal Mantle in its high estate.

Thither the Chosen Vessel, in like mode, 28
Went afterward, and much confirmed thereby
The faith that sets us on salvation's road.

But how should I go there? Who says so? Why? 31
I'm not Aeneas, and I am not Paul!
Who thinks me fit? Not others. And not I.

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Say I submit, and go - suppose I fall Into some folly? Though I speak but ill, Thy better wisdom will construe it all."	34
As one who wills, and then unwills his will, Changing his mind with every changing whim, Till all his best intentions come to nil,	37
So I stood havoring in that moorland dim, While through fond rifts of fancy oozed away The first quick zest that filled me to the brim.	40
"If I have grasped what thou dost seem to say," The shade of greatness answered, "these doubts breed From sheer black cowardice, which day by day	43
Lays ambushes for men, checking the speed Of honorable purpose in mid-flight, As shapes half-seen startle a shying steed.	46
Well then, to rid thee of this foolish fright, Hear why I came, and learn whose eloquence Urged me to take compassion on thy plight.	49
While I was with the spirits who dwell suspense, A Lady summoned me - so blest, so rare, I begged her to command my diligence.	52
Her eyes outshone the firmament by far As she began, in her own gracious tongue, Gentle and low, as tongues of angels are:	55
'O courteous Mantuan soul, whose skill in song Keeps green on earth a fame that shall not end While motion rolls the turning spheres along!	58
A friend of mine, who is not Fortune's friend, Is hard beset upon the shadowy coast; Terrors and snares his fearful steps attend,	61
Driving him back; yea, and I fear almost I have risen too late to help - for I was told Such news of him in Heaven - he's too far lost.	64
But thou - go thou! Lift up thy voice of gold; Try every needful means to find and reach And free him, that my heart may rest consoled.	67

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Beatrice am I , who thy good speed beseech; Love that first moved me from the blissful place Whither I'd fain return, now moves my speech.	70
Lo! when I stand before my Lord's bright face I'll praise thee many a time to Him.' Thereon She fell on silence; I replied apace:	73
'Excellent lady, for whose sake alone The breed of men exceeds all doings that dwell Closed in the heaven whose circles narrowest run	76
To do thy bidding pleases me so well That weren't already done, I should seem slow; I know thy wish, and more needs not to tell.	79
Yet say - how can thy blest feet bear to know This dark road downward to the dreadful center, From that wide room which thou dost yearn for so?'	82
'Few words will serve (if thou desire to enter Thus far into our mystery),' she said, 'To tell thee why I have no fear to venture.	85
Of hurtful things we ought to be afraid, But of no others, truly, inasmuch As these have nothing to give cause for dread;	88
My nature, by God's mercy, is made such As your calamities can nowise shake, Nor these dark fires have any power to touch.	91
Heaven hath a noble Lady, who doth take Ruth of this man thou goest to disensnare Such that high doom is canceled for her sake.	94
She summoned Lucy to her side, and there Exhorted her: "Thy faithful votary Needs thee, and I commend him to thy care."	97
Lucy, the foe to every cruelty, Ran quickly and came and found me in my place Beside ancestral Rachel, crying to me:	100
"How now, how now, Beatrice, God's true praise! No help for him who once thy liegeman was, Quitting the common herd to win thy grace?"	103

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Dost thou not hear his piteous cries, alas? Dost thou not see death grapple him, on the river Whose furious rage no ocean can surpass?"	106
When I heard that, no living wight was ever So swift to seek his good or flee his fear As I from that high resting-place to sever	109
And speed me down, trusting my purpose dear To thee, and to thy golden rhetoric Which honors thee, and honors all who hear.'	112
She spoke; and as she turned from me the quick Tears starred the luster of her eyes, which still Spurred on my going with a keener prick.	115
Therefore I sought thee out, as was her will, And brought thee safe off from that beast of prey Which barred thee from the short road up the hill.	118
What ails thee then? Why, why this dull delay? Why bring so white a liver to the deed? Why canst thou find no manhood to display	121
When three such blessed ladies deign to plead Thy cause at that supreme assize of right, And when my words promise thee such good speed?"	124
As little flowers, which all the frosty night Hung pinched and drooping, lift their stalks and fan Their blossoms out, touched by the warm white light,	127
So did my fainting powers; and therewith ran Such good, strong courage round about my heart That I spoke boldly out like a free man:	130
O blessed she that stooped to take my part! O courteous thou, to obey her true-discerning Speech, and thus promptly to my rescue start!	133
Fired by thy words, my spirit now is burning So to go on, and see this venture through. I find my former stout resolve returning.	136
Forward! henceforth there's but one will for two, Thou master, and thou leader, and thou lord." I spoke; he moved; so, setting out anew,	139

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I entered on that savage path and froward.

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