

### **Canto 30**

As we went on towards that goal which eludes night  
all who seek to reach it, we came upon a mountain in the distance,  
as high as that great peak Pisanino, and  
as that once most magnificent creature rose directly  
out of the frozen plain, so too did this earthen tower  
fly straight up from the somber path of ash on which we tread.  
And as a boulder, propelled along an even expanse does  
begin with Mercury's full blessing, but as it goes on falters and  
slows as it is dragged to the Earth by its own weight,  
so did my master lose his vigor and gain a perplexed  
countenance as we did approach that stoney wall, and seeing  
his confusion I too slowed to keep him from falling behind.  
Then, as I gazed onwards, I saw within that previously solid face of rock,  
a ladder rising up towards the peaked sun, and just as that path taken  
by he who fooled his own father with a brotherly coat had seventy  
rungs, so too did this road have upon it seventy steps, and as the gap  
between the bright spark in the sky and the thunderous clap grows shorter with proximity,  
so too did the distance between each hole in that barrier grow as the summit neared.  
Then we did reach the colossal obstacle, and,

seeing that my guide still had upon his face a  
troubled visage, I did inquire, “Master, what pains you so for your once peaceful  
appearance to be so marred?”

And he, “My son, I appear to you so, because I know not how,  
or whether ‘tis possible to advance past this solid earthen sheet.

In my portals of vision I see nothing, and I  
feel my limbs become heavy.

I fear that I may no longer accept that title of leader, for I know not how to guide you.”

I to him, “Surely my friend you can see laid clearly before  
you the path we must take. Is not the ladder towards the light  
clear before your shrewd eyes?”

“No, I see but a blank surface, as empty  
as the mind of a newborn child, yet to see the world  
or to learn the truth of life.”

“Come then mighty Roman, let me show you where I mean for us to ascend this height.”

And so I directed him to the hole-ridden cliff-face, which he approached questioningly,  
as a farmer, who knows not how to write his ‘a’ nor ‘b’  
might approach that holiest of books.

His hands slid along the deep openings without finding any hold,  
and, seeing that he was lost on his own, I went  
towards him with my wise counsel,

“If you cannot find your way, then place yourself upon mine back, as  
I rested upon your shoulders many times

before, in that dark place.”

He replied, “No, my fellow, I cannot stand upon you, for as rapidly as your weight has fallen, rising up this mountain that purges all sin, so has mine grown ever higher, for the pressure of wrong only grows greater the closer to Heaven we go.

Nor could I pull myself up this steep slope even if I knew of this escalator which you speak of, for even as my darkness has soared, my strength and will have not.”

“Then fair Mantuan, how shall we proceed? Surely on the point opposite this there is an easier way to our lofty goals above.”

Then he, “NO, gentle pilgrim, do you not remember the lesson you learned before I even became your chosen guide? Have you so soon forgotten the perils of seeking the path of least resistance?

Besides, I will not perceive that path any more clearly than I see this one.

Already have I known far more than is my right, and the way to Heaven cannot be conceived of by

me, or any of my creed, for only those

purified in those holiest of waters and taught the lessons of that

Emperor of All can see His light and follow it to salvation.

You have no more need of me, for I know nothing of the

realm above us, and truly belong in the place

where our odyssey began.”

Then, as a boat so laden with goods that it is pushed below the

waves slowly descends into the murky depths towards the hulking leviathan,  
so too did my master suddenly begin to sink into the ground.

I called out, “Master, please, I beg you, do not to leave me, I am not yet a full being!  
Your presence is all that has kept me strong, and  
once you have gone, I will never reach Him.”

And he, “Quiet now, you have seen how some of the greatest transgressors have  
gone up this high mountain. None are more filled with fear than those who sin,  
but they have found their way.

Now you must draw your strength from yourself, your brothers  
on this path, and from His love, which extends to all, and is given more freely  
than the light of the moon.

You have nothing to  
fear once you embrace Him, as I wish I could have.

Do not mourn for me as a paragon of virtue as I begin my somber descent,  
but rather remember me for who I was, and tell the world, for the truth  
is the greatest gift you can give to mankind.

Remember that for as long as your light  
still dwells within your temple of mortality  
Farewell, my son.”

Then did his mouth sink below the stones, and as I grasped for his  
hand, still outstretched, I felt myself pulled towards the pit of doom, and  
with one final look I let go, watching him disappear.

Before I could shed a single tear, I heard that heavenly voice, which

was cause for my entire journey,  
rain down upon me as the morning dew, saying,  
“Come now, sweet pilgrim, it is time for us  
to meet again.

Your master may have followed  
false gods in his time, but his advice to you  
was wise beyond his faith.

All you must do is ascend  
and you will be freed from your sorrows.”

Compelled by my heavenly guardian’s words, I rose from  
the ashen ground, and began the climb  
up to the glory of the light.