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The Inferno - Dante Alighieri

Translated by Robert Pinsky in the book The Inferno of Dante  
Canto I

Upon my mind's return from swooning shut  
At hearing the piteous tale of those two kin,  
Which confounded me with sadness at their plight,

I see new torments and tormented ones again  
Wherever I step or look. I am in the third  
Circle, a realm of cold an heavy rain -

A dark, accursed torrent eternally poured  
With changeless measure and nature. Enormous hail  
And tainted water mixed with snow are showered

Steadily through the shadowy air of Hell;  
The soil they drench gives off a putrid odor.  
Three-headed Cerberus, monstrous and cruel,

Barks doglike at the souls immersed here, louder  
For his triple throat. His eyes are red, his beard  
Grease-black, he has the belly of a meat-feeder

And talons on his hands: he claws the horde  
Of spirits, he flays and quarters them in the rain.  
The wretches, howling like dogs where they are mired

And pelted, squirm about again and again,  
Turning to make each side a shield for the other.  
Seeing us, Cerberus made his three mouths yawn

To show the fangs - his reptile body aquiver  
In all its members. My leader, reaching out  
To fill both fists with as much as he could gather,

Threw gobbets of earth down each voracious throat.  
Just as a barking dog grows suddenly still  
The moment he begins to gnaw his meat,

Struggling and straining to devour it all,  
So the foul faces of Cerberus became -  
Who thundered so loudly at the souls in Hell

They wished that they were deaf. We two had come  
Over the shades subdued by the heavy rain -  
Treading upon their emptiness, which seem

Like real bodies. All lay on the ground but one,  
Who sat up, seeing us pass. "You who are led  
Through this Hell - recognize me if you can:

You who were made before I was unmade."  
And I to him: "The anguish you endure  
Perhaps effaces whatever memory I had,

Making it seem I have not seen you before;  
But tell me who you are, assigned so sad  
A station as punishment - if any is more

Agony, none is so repellent." He said:  
"Your city, so full of envy that the sack  
Spills over, held me once when I enjoyed

The bright life above. The name I took  
Among you citizens was Ciacco; the sin  
Of gluttony brought me here. You see me soak

The ruin in battering rain - but not alone,  
For all of these around me share the same  
Penalty for the same transgression as mine."

Then he fell silent, but I answered him,  
"Ciacco, I feel your misery; its weight  
Bids me to weep. But what of things to come? -

Tell if you can the divided city's fate,  
And of the citizens: is any one just?  
And tell me why such schism threatens it."

He answered, "After long argument they must  
Descend to bloodshed, and the rustic bloc  
With much offense will expel the other first.

Then, through the power of one who while we speak  
Is temporizing, that party too will fall  
Within three years, the ousted coming back

With head held high; and long will they prevail  
Despite the others' cries of shame and despair  
Under their burdens. Only two men of all

All truly just - whose words the rest ignore,  
For the triple sparks of envy, greed, and pride  
Ignite their hearts." "I'd have you tell me more,"

I pleaded, once his grievous words were said,  
"Farinata, Mosca, Tegghiaio, men of good reason,  
Jacopo Rusticucci, Arrigo: the good

Was their hearts' purpose in life, so tell what portion  
Their souls inherit now. I long to know  
If they feel Heaven's sweetness, or Infernal poison."

He said, "Their souls are among the blackest in Hell,  
With different faults that weigh them to the pit.  
If you descend that far you may see them all -

But pray you: when you return to the earth's sweet light,  
Recall my memory there to the human world.  
Now, I respond and speak no more." With that,

His eyes went crooked and squinted, his head rolled;  
He regarded me a moment, then bent his head  
And fell back down with the others, blind and quelled.

"He will not wake again," my master said,  
"Until the angel's conclusive trumpet sounds  
And the hostile Power comes - and the waiting dead

Wake to go searching for their unhappy tombs:  
And resume again the form and flesh they had,  
And hear that which eternally resounds."

So with slow steps we traversed that place of mud  
Through rain and shades commingled, once or twice  
Speaking of the future life: and so I said,

"Master, these torments - tell me, will they increase  
After the Judgment, or lessen, or merely endure,  
Burning as much as now?" He said, "In this,

Go back to you science, which teaches that the more  
A creature is perfect, the more it perceives the good -  
And likewise, pain. The accurs'd people here

Can never come to true perfection; instead,  
They can expect to come closer than that now."  
Traveling the course of the encircling road,

And speaking more than I repeat, we two  
Continued our way, until the circuit came  
To where the path descends - and there we saw

Plutus, the great Enemy, and confronted him.