

## CANTO IX

THE STORY. Dante, waking from a dream in which he is snatched away by an Eagle, finds that he has actually been carried up, in his sleep, by St Lucy to the Gate of Purgatory itself. Here Virgil and he are challenged by the Porter, who, hearing that Lucy has sent them, invites Dante to climb the three steps that lead to the Gate, marks the sign of the Seven Capital Sins upon his forehead, and opens the Gate with the Keys of Peter. On entering Purgatory the Poets are greeted by the strains of the Te Deum.

Now, glimmering on her eastward balcony,  
Came the white leman of Tithonus old  
Forth of her lover's arms reluctantly;

4 Her brow was starred with jewels manifold,  
Set in the likeness of the beast whose tail  
Smites on the people, and whose blood is cold.

7 Already, on the stair night has to scale,  
Two paces, in that sky of ours, were slept,  
And now the third flagged on the wing as well,

10 When I -- in whom old Adam's nature kept  
Its share -- began to nod, and on the lawn  
Where all we five now sat, I sank and slept.

13 About the hour when the sad swallow, drawn  
In memory back, maybe, to her old woes,  
Pipes out her mournful lay to greet the dawn,

16 And when the pilgrim soul a-roving goes  
So far from flesh and thought's entangling snare  
That half-divine her dreaming vision grows,

19 I dreamt I saw an eagle in mid-air,  
Plumed all in gold, hovering on wings outspread,  
As though to make his swoop he poised him there.

22 Meseemed me in the place whence Garrymeade  
Up to the high gods' halls was snatched one day,  
Leaving his comrades all discomfited.

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First Dream. St Lucy: Ascent to the Gate -- E. Mon. 6 a.m.

25 I thought: Perhaps this eagle strikes his prey  
Always just here; his proud feet would think shame  
Elsewhere to seize and carry it away.

28 Then, in my dream, he wheeled awhile and came  
Down like the lightning, terrible and fast,  
And caught me up into the sphere of flame,

31 Where he and I burned in one furnace-blast;  
The visionary fire so scared me through,  
It broke my sleep perforce, and the dream passed.

34 Not otherwise, I think, Achilles drew  
Wild eyes about him, waking with a start,  
Wondering what place he had awakened to,

37 When his fond mother, cradled on her heart,  
Brought him from Chiron unto Scyros' coast,  
Whence the Greeks caused him later to depart,

40 Than I so stared and started and felt lost  
When the dream fled and left the face of me  
Pale, as of one whom fear congeals like frost.

43 Beside me sat my Comfort -- only he;  
And lo! the sun was now two hours and more  
Risen; and my eyes were turned toward the sea.

46 "Fear nothing," said my lord, "sit thou secure  
At heart; we've come into a good estate,  
Faint not, but be the more alert therefore.

49 Thou hast reached Purgatory; see, the great  
Rampart of rock that compasses it round;  
And where the cleft shows yonder, there's the gate.

52 In the white daybreak hour just now, when sound  
Thy soul slept in thee down below, thy head  
Lodged on the flowers which there adorn the ground,

55 A lady came: 'I am Lucy' -- thus she said;  
'Come, let me take this sleeper; I've a mind  
To help him on the road he has to tread.'

58 Sordel and all those shades of princely kind  
Were left; but thee she took and bore thee hither  
Up with the daylight, and I came behind.

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