

Frank Morgan

Too long I'd languished on the side
Where shallow flows the river wide;
Enough it was to gaze across.

But when the fall winds colder grew
And sleepless nights had chilled me through,
I saw him waiting, with his books.

I found I was too weak to stand.
He firmly took me by the hand
And only said, "Now come and see."

We walked the bridge, so weak and old,
Towards the dome, which grew so bold
By halfway it half filled the sky.

I stumbled then, looked down, and fell,
And read beneath "HALFWAY TO HELL,"
And all the world whirled upside down.

I, falling, upside down, could see
A black dome, rightside up to me,
And deep, below the other tall.

I fainted then and would have died
Had not the arms of my good guide
Held me and brought me to the dome.

We entered free to brilliant light,
Which, far from blinding my dim sight,
It rather soothed to better see.

Rich music played, full loud and clear,
But I could somehow better hear
My guide, who spoke now proud and kind:

"We stand in the great library
Of thinkers of eternity.
Here science, beauty, art are one."

The hope, the joy, interest in truth,
Whose promise I had felt in youth,
Filled full my heart and hungry soul.

And then I heard in voices low
Dostoevski and Thoreau;
Then Shakespeare spoke, and laughter rang.

And to the side another band,
Old Newton, Leibnitz, hand in hand!
Discussing points with Dirichlet.

And future men I did not know
Held conversation with Plateau,
While students listened eagerly.

But then my guide turned me away
And answered when I begged to stay,
"We must see much in little time;

"Look here." And 'midst these thinkers grand
I saw a small and sorry band,
Bound up and forced to watch T.V.

One mourned, his head held in a vise,
With forceps opening up his eyes,
A tiny screen pushed in his face.

Nearby another pinball played
In metal suit that heavy weighed
And only let two fingers move.

All struggled wildly to be free
And join the room's activity,
Til drenched in blood, but all in vain.

"Why have these the worst fate?" I asked.
My guide: "Much worse will follow fast.
Now come, Procrastinators see."

I saw, as we were passing out,
The room's perimeter about
Was lined with solitary cells.

Each had a window, clear, broad, true
To give a panoramic view
Of the great room and its events.

So I could not my patience keep
To see upon each floor asleep
The dweller there, and had to knock.

One rose and rushed to catch the view,
Face bright with joy and interest new,
Alive with curiosity.

At once his cell began to shrink,
And with a terrifying clink
The ceiling moved toward the floor.

He kicked and screamed, nor could decide
To die on front or back or side,
But thrashed about, in horror black.

I heard his terrifying moans
As iron crushed his flesh and bones
And left dark powder, thin and dry.

The ceiling lifted from the floor,
And winds did from the dust restore
His sleeping form; we left him so.

"Dear Guide, these worst of all have fared."
But he, "Come see the unprepared
(For lecture and for recitation)."

Now as between the great dome's shells
White steps led up to higher cells,
So black steps probed the pit below.

From these a horrid clamor rose:
The screams and bangs and thuds of those
Who frenzied, tried to dash upstairs,

But halfway took such flying falls
That, crashing into stony walls,
Their bones all shattered into pulp.

As they fell flights down to the base,
The stumbling and relentless race
Of others trampled them to mush.

My guide: "Turn here to stairs more kind,
That these took not the time to find;
Descend where the Unthinking dwell.

"Who rarely thought of self or soul,
Nor dreams, purpose, nor beckoning goal,
But lived from meal to work to sleep."

At last the bottom of the pit
We reached, and found grotesquely lit
By lightning flashes, orange, red.

And though I tried to peer above,
I could not recognize my love
Obscured by sickening, searing glow.

Great roars, bleatings, and clangs broke out,
So none could speak a word or shout,
So thunderous was the dissonance.

I saw them there in wire mesh,
A mountain of vibrating flesh,
Whose shakings threw off skin and blood.

And there in agonizing pain,
Eyes closed, and hands on ears in vain,
They could not have one single thought.

Sick, trembling, overcome with fear,
Unknowing my own death was near,
Senseless and dumb, I bitter wept.

My guide eased me down to the floor
And pulled me through a small trap door
And said, "Take heart, you must be strong:

"There's yet one other cell below!
Where only the worst Cynics go.
So foul's the air, to breathe is death."

A crawlspace, only ^{puss} two feet deep,
Where slime and ~~did~~ flow and seep,
We found beneath the black pit's base.

I saw one squirm in but a tee
Shirt labeled I.H.T.F.P.
It oozed upon him excrement,

Which coated all his body deep
And in his ears and eyes did seep,
Which stank although I held my breath.

And when in pain he tried to speak,
It flowed into his mouth to keep
Him silent, retching in the slime.

My lungs and mind about to burst,
My good guide grabbed me firmly first,
And thrust me to the black dome's face,

And whispered, "You must change ^{no} hope."
Agreeing, I slid up that slope,
Til in a gorgeous court I lay
And found *it* registration day.