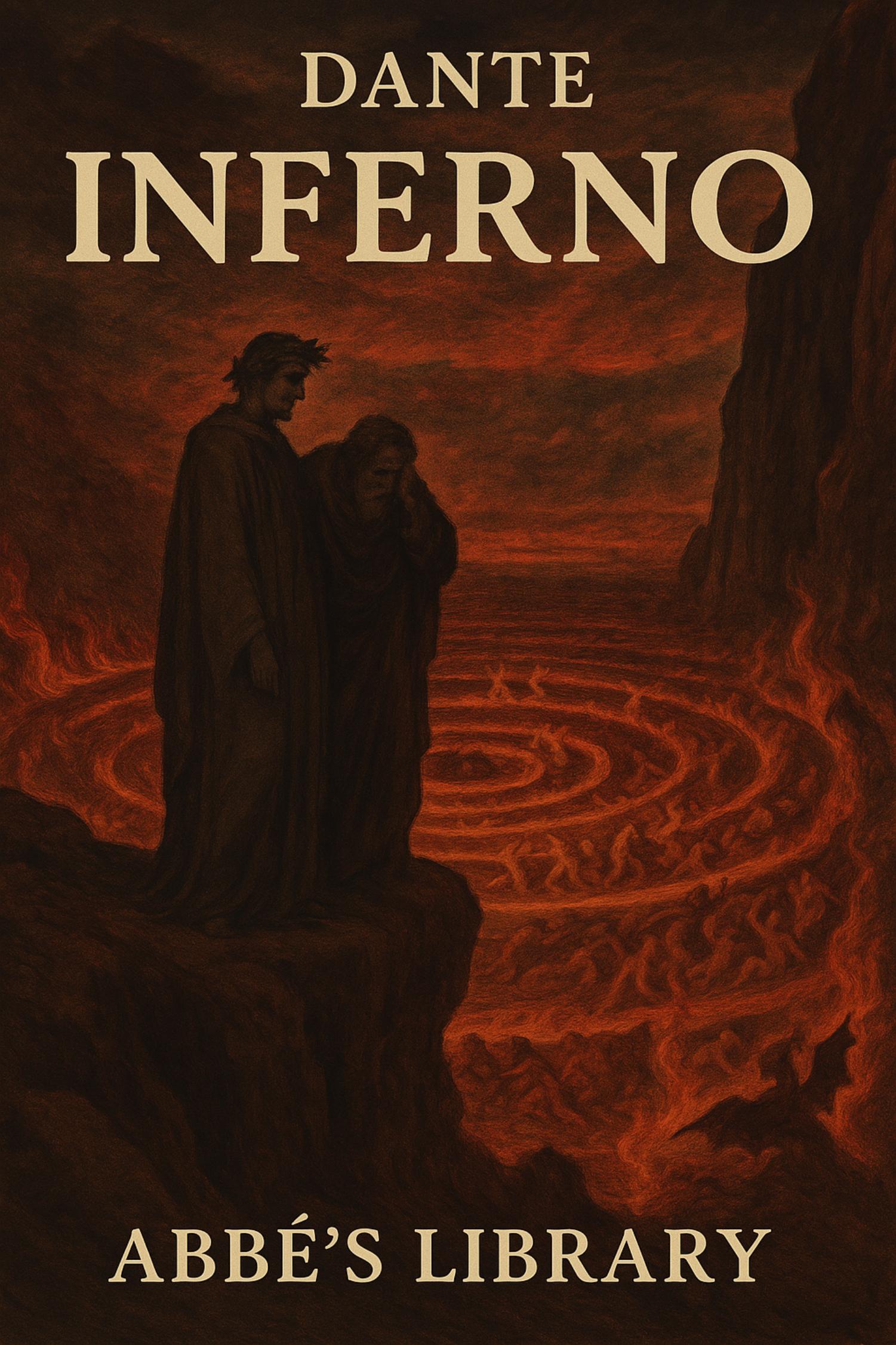


DANTE INFERN

A dark, red-tinted illustration depicting a scene from Dante's Inferno. In the foreground, the silhouettes of Dante Alighieri and his guide Virgil are seen from behind, walking down a set of stone steps that descend into a vast, swirling abyss. The steps are illuminated by a faint light at the bottom, revealing a chaotic landscape of fire and torment where figures are seen running and suffering. The background is a deep, turbulent red, suggesting the infernal flames.

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The Divine Comedy

Inferno

By Dante Alighieri
(Abbé's Library)

INFERNO
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CONTENTS

<i>Inferno: Canto I</i>	2
<i>Inferno: Canto II</i>	5
<i>Inferno: Canto III</i>	8
<i>Inferno: Canto IV</i>	11
<i>Inferno: Canto V</i>	14
<i>Inferno: Canto VI</i>	17
<i>Inferno: Canto VII</i>	19
<i>Inferno: Canto VIII</i>	22
<i>Inferno: Canto IX</i>	25
<i>Inferno: Canto X</i>	27
<i>Inferno: Canto XI</i>	30
<i>Inferno: Canto XII</i>	32
<i>Inferno: Canto XIII</i>	34
<i>Inferno: Canto XIV</i>	36
<i>Inferno: Canto XV</i>	38
<i>Inferno: Canto XVI</i>	40
<i>Inferno: Canto XVII</i>	42
<i>Inferno: Canto XVIII</i>	44
<i>Inferno: Canto XIX</i>	46
<i>Inferno: Canto XX</i>	49
<i>Inferno: Canto XXI</i>	52
<i>Inferno: Canto XXII</i>	55
<i>Inferno: Canto XXIII</i>	57
<i>Inferno: Canto XXIV</i>	59
<i>Inferno: Canto XXV</i>	61
<i>Inferno: Canto XXVI</i>	63
<i>Inferno: Canto XXVII</i>	66
<i>Inferno: Canto XXVIII</i>	69
<i>Inferno: Canto XXIX</i>	71
<i>Inferno: Canto XXX</i>	73
<i>Inferno: Canto XXXI</i>	75
<i>Inferno: Canto XXXII</i>	77
<i>Inferno: Canto XXXIII</i>	79
<i>Inferno: Canto XXXIV</i>	81

Inferno: Canto I

At the halfway point of my life's journey, I found myself lost in a dark forest. The straight path I had been following was completely gone.

How hard it is to describe this wild, rough, and frightening forest! Just thinking about it fills me with fear.

It was so bitter that death hardly seemed worse. But I'll talk about the good things I found there, and leave the other things I saw aside.

I can't even properly explain how I ended up there. I was so overwhelmed by sleep when I left the right path.

But after I reached the bottom of a mountain, where the valley ended, I looked up and saw its peak already glowing with the light of the planet that guides everyone along the right path.

At that moment, the fear that had filled my heart throughout the entire night began to ease just a little.

It was like someone, struggling to breathe, finally reaching the shore and then looking back at the dangerous sea with uncertainty.

My soul, still running away, turned around to look again at the path I had left behind, one that no living person had ever returned from.

After resting my tired body, I started climbing the steep slope again, keeping my lower foot steady.

There, just as the climb began, I saw a light, fast panther, covered in spots, standing in front of me.

It didn't move, but blocked my way so much that I had to turn back many times.

It was early morning, and the sun was rising along with the stars that had been with it when everything was first set in motion by Divine Love.

The spotted coat of that wild animal, the time of day, and the pleasant season gave me some hope. But it wasn't enough to erase the fear I felt from seeing a lion.

It looked like the lion was coming straight for me, its head raised and hungry, so that the very air seemed to fear it.

Then, a she-wolf appeared, so thin and hungry that it had caused many people to live in despair.

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She made me so afraid that I gave up any hope of reaching the mountain's summit.

It was like someone who works hard to acquire something, but when the time comes to lose it, falls into despair and weeps in their thoughts.

That restless beast pushed me further and further back until I was headed toward the dark place where the sun doesn't shine.

As I rushed downward into the lowland, I saw a figure standing before me. He seemed to have been silent for a long time.

When I saw him in the vast desert, I called out, "Have pity on me, whoever you are, whether shade or real man!"

He answered, "I am not a man; I was once a man. Both of my parents were from Lombardy, and I'm from Mantua.

I was born under Julius, though it was late, and I lived in Rome during the reign of Augustus, when false gods ruled.

I was a poet, and I sang about that just son of Anchises, who left Troy after the city was burned.

But why are you going back to such trouble? Why don't you climb the Mount of Joy, which is the source of all happiness?"

I responded, feeling bashful, "Are you Virgil, the one who inspired so many with your writing? You're my master, and you gave me the beautiful style that has brought me honor.

Look at the beast that made me turn back. Please protect me from her, wise guide, because she makes my veins tremble."

He said, seeing my tears, "You need to take another road if you want to escape this wild place.

This beast, the one you're crying out against, lets no one pass. She harasses everyone she meets and destroys them.

She's so evil that she'll never be satisfied, and even after feeding, she becomes hungrier.

She has many partners, and will have more, until a Greyhound comes who will make her perish in pain.

This Greyhound won't be interested in wealth or power but will focus on wisdom, love, and virtue. His homeland will be between Feltro and Feltro.

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He will save low Italy, the land where Camilla, Euryalus, Turnus, and Nisus died, from her.

He will hunt her down through every city until he drives her back to Hell, where she first came from.

So, I think it's best for you to follow me, and I will guide you through the eternal place where you'll hear the desperate cries of souls who mourn the second death.

You'll see those who are content in the fire because they hope, someday, to join the blessed people.

If you want to ascend, a soul more worthy than I will guide you. When I leave, I'll leave you with her.

The Emperor who rules above has commanded that no one can enter his city through me, as I was rebellious to his law.

He rules everywhere, and his city and throne are in heaven. How happy are those whom he chooses!"

I asked, "Poet, I beg you, by that God whom you never knew, please help me escape this misery and worse.

Please lead me to the place you mentioned, so I can see the gate of Saint Peter and those souls who are so full of sorrow."

He then moved on, and I followed him.

Inferno: Canto II

Day was coming to an end, and the air, now darkened, allowed the animals on earth to rest from their labors. I, however, was the only one preparing myself to face the journey ahead, one that would involve both the difficulties of the path and the suffering that would come with it. These are the memories that will not fail to be recalled.

I called on the Muses, asking for help, and I asked for the aid of the memory that recorded everything I saw. Here, my memory shall be made clear.

I began by speaking: "Poet, who are guiding me, consider my strength, if it is enough, before you lead me into such a difficult place."

You spoke of the parent of Silvius, who, while still mortal, went to the world of the immortals, and there, in his physical form, made his mark. But if the enemy of all evil was so courteous, thinking of the high purpose that would come from his actions, then his reasoning does not seem wrong. After all, he was from great Rome, chosen in the heavens as the father of her empire, which was to be established as the holy place where the successor of the greatest Peter sits.

In this journey, you say, he heard things that were both part of his victory and the papal authority he took on. Later, the Chosen Vessel went to bring comfort to that faith, which is the beginning of salvation.

But as for me, why should I be part of this journey, or who gave me the permission? I am not Aeneas, nor am I Paul, nor do I think that I or anyone else deserves such a task.

So, if I choose to continue, I fear it may be a mistake, for you are wise and know better than I do."

As I thought about this, I began to doubt myself, feeling the courage I had once had fading away in the face of the overwhelming task ahead.

The shade of the noble soul then replied, "If I understand your words correctly, your soul is burdened with cowardice, which often holds a person back from honorable actions, just like a false sight holds back an animal that is too timid.

To ease your mind, I will tell you why I came here and what I heard when I first felt pity for you.

I was among those who were waiting, when a beautiful and saintly lady called to me. She spoke in a gentle, angelic voice, saying in her own language:

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‘O spirit of Mantua, whose fame still endures in the world and will last as long as the world itself, a friend of mine, one who is not fortunate in the ways of the world, is so impeded on his journey that he has turned back out of fear.

And he may already be lost, as I have only now risen to help him, hearing of his plight from Heaven.

Act now, with your eloquent speech and with everything necessary to free him, so that I may be comforted.

I am Beatrice, who sends you on this mission. I come from the place where I long to return. It is love that moves me to speak, and when I stand before my Lord, I will often praise you for helping him.’

After speaking, she paused, and I began to respond: ‘O Lady of virtue, through whom humanity exceeds all that is contained within the heavens, your command is so dear to me that I would obey it even if it had already been completed. You need not explain further to me.

But tell me, why are you not afraid to descend into this dark place from the vast light you dwell in?’

She replied, ‘Since you wish to understand, I will briefly tell you why I am not afraid to come here. Only those things which have the power to harm others should be feared. The rest, no. They are not capable of causing fear.

God, in His mercy, created me in such a way that your suffering does not touch me, nor does the fire here harm me.

There is a gentle lady in Heaven who grieves for this situation and has sent me to you, breaking through the stern judgment above.

She begged Lucia, saying, “Your faithful one needs your help. He is at the place where I was sitting with the ancient Rachel. Go to him.”

Lucia, the enemy of cruelty, quickly went to the place where I was and said to Beatrice: ‘Why do you not help him, the one who loved you so, the one who left his ordinary life for you?

Don’t you hear his cries? Don’t you see the death that threatens him, by the river where the ocean has no power to help him?’

No one worked faster to secure their own well-being or to escape from woe than I did after hearing these words.

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I came swiftly, descending from my blessed seat, trusting in your words, which honor you and all who listen to them.'

After speaking, she wept, turning her shining eyes away, making me even more eager to follow her request.

Now, I have come as she asked, to free you from the wild beast that blocked your path to the beautiful mountain."

Then, the poet said, "What is holding you back now? Why delay? Why is such fear in your heart, when three such blessed ladies are looking out for you in Heaven and my words offer so much hope?"

Just as flowers close up in the night, only to open again when the sun warms them, so too did I feel my strength return. My heart was filled with courage, and I spoke with renewed determination:

"O compassionate one, who helped me, and you, courteous guide, who have followed the words of truth, my heart is now set on this adventure. I return to my original purpose.

Now, go, for we are united in this goal: you are the leader, the Lord, and the master."

With these words, I said to him, and when he moved, I entered into the dark and dangerous path.

Inferno: Canto III

“Through me, you enter the sorrowful city; through me, you enter eternal grief; through me, you enter the people who are lost.

Justice moved my creator to make me; it was divine omnipotence, the highest wisdom, and primal love that created me.

Before me, there were no created things, only eternity, and I am the last eternal being.

Abandon all hope, you who enter here!”

These words, written in dark letters, were visible at the top of a gate. I said, “Master, these words are hard for me to understand!”

He answered me like someone experienced: “Here, all suspicion must be left behind. All cowardice must be abandoned here.

We have reached the place where, as I told you, you will see the sorrowful souls who have given up the good of intellect.”

After placing his hand on mine, looking cheerful, which comforted me, he led me into the hidden realm.

There, I heard loud sighs, complaints, and wails that filled the air, a dark air without a star. I began to weep when I heard it.

Various languages, horrible dialects, cries of anger, words of agony, and high, hoarse voices mixed with the sound of hands hitting each other formed a tumult that spiraled forever in the dark, as the wind blows sand in a whirlwind.

I, with my head weighed down by horror, asked, “Master, what is this that I hear? Who are these people, so overwhelmed by pain?”

He replied, “These miserable souls suffer because they lived without infamy or praise.

They are mixed in with the fallen angels, those who were neither rebellious nor loyal to God, but only served themselves.

Heaven rejected them, not to make it less fair, nor does Hell accept them, as they bring no glory to the damned.”

I asked, “Master, what is so grievous to them that makes them lament so terribly?”

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He answered, "I will tell you briefly.

They have no hope of death anymore; this blind existence of theirs is so degraded that they envy every other fate.

The world has no place for them; mercy and justice both reject them. Let us not speak of them, but look and move on."

I looked again and saw a banner whirling around, running so fast that it seemed to be angry at all pauses.

Behind it came a long line of people, so many that I could hardly believe that Death had undone so many.

As I recognized some of them, I looked and saw the shadow of the one who, through cowardice, made the great refusal.

Immediately, I realized and was sure that these were the wretched souls who were hated by God and his enemies.

These souls, who were never alive, were naked and stung by flies and wasps that stung them painfully.

Their faces were drenched in blood, which mingled with their tears, and the disgusting worms gathered it at their feet.

As I continued looking, I saw people standing at the edge of a great river. I asked, "Master, please tell me who these are and what law makes them appear so ready to cross, as I see them in the dim light."

He said, "You will understand all of this once we stop on the dismal shore of Acheron."

With my eyes downcast in shame, I feared my questions might bother him, so I kept silent until we reached the river.

Then, from the boat, came an old man with gray hair, shouting: "Woe unto you, depraved souls! Never hope to see the heavens again. I come to take you to the other shore, to eternal darkness, where both heat and cold await you.

And you, living soul, stand back from these dead souls!"

But when he saw that I did not move, he said, "You will come to the shore by another route, through other ports. You must be carried by a lighter vessel."

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The Guide said to him, “Do not bother, Charon. It is willed by the one who has the power to do what is willed. Do not ask more.”

The ferryman, with his fiery eyes, calmed down. But all the souls, weary and naked, turned pale and gnashed their teeth when they heard those cruel words.

They blasphemed God, their ancestors, the human race, the place, the time, and the seed of their birth.

Then, they all retreated, bitterly weeping, to the cursed shore, where every man who fears not God will come.

Charon, the demon with fiery eyes, beckoned them, collecting them all and striking with his oar those who lagged behind.

Just like how the leaves fall off in autumn, one by one, until the branch gives up all its leaves, so too do the evil souls of Adam throw themselves into the river at Charon’s command.

They cross the dark wave, and before they reach the other shore, a new group assembles here on this side.

“My son,” the kind Guide said to me, “all those who perish in the wrath of God meet here from every land. They are ready to cross the river because celestial justice drives them, so their fear turns into desire.

No good soul passes this way. If Charon complains about you, you’ll understand the meaning of his words.”

When he finished speaking, the entire dark plain trembled so violently that the memory of that terror still makes me sweat.

A blast of wind came from the land of tears, and it emitted a red light, overwhelming me completely.

I fell as if seized by sleep.

Inferno: Canto IV

A heavy thunder broke the deep lethargy in my head, causing me to jump up, as if woken forcefully from sleep.

I moved my eyes around, still groggy, and gazed steadily to recognize where I was.

It was true that I had arrived at the edge of a deep, sorrowful valley, a valley that gathers the thunder of infinite wails.

The place was dark and foggy, so that when I tried to look deeper, I couldn't see anything at all.

The Poet began: "Let's descend now into this blind world. I will go first, and you shall follow."

Seeing his pale face, I said, "How can I go if you are afraid? You, who are usually the comfort to my fears?"

He replied, "The anguish of the people down here, which I can see in my face, is the pity that you feel for their terror.

Let's continue, for the long road calls us." With that, he went in, and I followed him into the first circle surrounding the abyss.

Here, as I listened, I heard no cries, but only sighs, that trembled the eternal air.

These came from sorrow without torment, the kind felt by the many, both men and women and children.

The good Master said to me: "Don't you wonder who these souls are? Let me tell you, before we go further.

They did no wrong, but they lacked baptism, which is the door to the Faith you hold. If they lived before Christianity, they did not worship God properly.

Among these, I am one.

For this lack, and not for other guilt, we are lost, living only in hope, without ever receiving redemption."

When I heard this, deep sorrow seized my heart, because I recognized many worthy people who were among these souls.

"Tell me, Master, tell me, my Lord," I asked, eager to understand the faith that overcomes all error, "Did anyone pass from here to heaven by their own merit, or through another's?"

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The Master, understanding my question, replied: "When I was still new to this place, I saw a Mighty One coming with a crown of victory.

He brought with him the shade of the First Parent, Abel, Noah, Moses the lawgiver, Abraham the patriarch, David the king, Israel with his father and children, and Rachel, for whose sake he did so much.

He made them blessed. And you must know that before these, no human souls were ever saved."

We continued our journey as he spoke, but we kept moving through the forest, the forest of crowded souls.

Not far from the top, I saw a light that pierced through the darkness, and I realized that this was the place of great honor.

We were still a little ways off, but not so far that I couldn't see that it was the place of distinguished people.

"O you who honor every art and science," I asked, "Who are these people, who hold such great honor, setting them apart from the rest?"

He replied: "The honor they have earned on earth is recognized in heaven, which elevates them."

As we stood there, I heard a voice: "All honor to the great Poet; his spirit returns once more."

When the voice died down and there was silence, I saw four mighty figures approaching us, their expressions neither sad nor happy.

The gracious Master said to me: "Look at him in front, with the falchion in his hand. He leads the three others, just as their lord.

That one is Homer, the sovereign poet; next comes Horace, the satirist; then Ovid, and lastly, Lucan.

These men are honored, because their names are among those spoken by the solitary voice we heard earlier."

Thus, I saw the brilliant school of the greatest poet, soaring above the rest like an eagle.

When they spoke for a while, they turned to me with gestures of greeting. My Master smiled at this, and more honor was given to me, because they made me one of their own, making me the sixth among them.

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We moved on, and soon came to the light. As we walked, they continued speaking, saying things that seemed appropriate for us to remain silent.

We came to the base of a noble castle, surrounded by seven tall walls, and defended by a beautiful river.

We crossed this river as though it were solid ground, entering through seven gates with these wise poets, and entered a meadow of fresh grass.

Here, I saw people of great dignity, walking slowly and with authority in their demeanor. They spoke little, and with gentle voices.

We moved aside into a higher, more luminous space, where they all could be seen clearly.

Opposite us, on the green plain, I saw the great spirits, the sight of whom made me feel exalted.

I saw Electra with many companions, including Hector and Aeneas, Caesar in armor with falcon-like eyes. I saw Camilla, Penthesilea, and King Latinus with his daughter Lavinia.

I also saw Brutus, who drove Tarquin away, along with Lucretia, Julia, Marcia, and Cornelia. And off by himself, I saw Saladin.

As I raised my eyes, I saw the Master of those who know, sitting with his philosophical family.

They all gazed at him, giving him honor. There, I saw Socrates and Plato standing near him, as did Democritus, Diogenes, Anaxagoras, and Thales, Zeno, Empedocles, and Heraclitus.

I also saw the good collector of qualities, Dioscorides, and Orpheus, Tully, Livy, moral Seneca, Euclid, Ptolemy, Galen, Hippocrates, Avicenna, and Averroes, the great commentator.

I cannot name them all, because my journey pushes me forward, and many times words fall short of what they truly deserve.

The group of six divided into two, and my wise Guide led me out of the quiet place, into the air that trembled, until we came to a place where nothing shone.

Inferno: Canto V

I descended from the first circle to the second, a place that is smaller but filled with much greater suffering, which leads to wailing.

There stands Minos, a terrifying figure, snarling as he examines the souls at the entrance. He judges them and sends them to their destined place in Hell, using his tail to indicate which level they will be sent to, wrapping it around himself as many times as necessary.

I say that when a spirit arrives before him, it fully confesses its sins, and Minos, this great judge of transgressions, determines where the soul belongs in Hell.

Many souls stand before him, each one taking their turn, speaking and hearing their judgment before being cast down.

Minos saw me and said, "O you who come to this sorrowful inn, take care how you enter and be cautious in whom you trust. Do not let the size of the portal deceive you."

My Guide replied, "Why do you shout? Do not block his journey, as it is fate's will, and where there is power to do what is willed, do not question further."

Now I began to hear the sorrowful sounds growing louder. We had arrived where much lamentation filled the air.

I entered a place where there was no light at all, but the sound of howling winds like those of a stormy sea.

The infernal hurricane that never rests hurls the souls forward in its violence, spinning them round and battering them.

When they reach the edge of the precipice, they scream, wail, and curse the divine power. I understood that these souls were those who, in life, were ruled by their carnal desires and ignored reason.

The wind pushed them around like flocks of starlings driven in the cold season, so that no soul could ever find rest or even the slightest relief from their suffering.

Just as cranes fly in a long line, crying out, I saw many souls being blown across the dark air, lamenting as they went.

I asked my Master, "Who are these souls that the black air so harshly punishes?"

INFERNO
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He replied, "The first one you wish to know, the empress of many lands, is Semiramis. She was so consumed by sensual vices that she made it lawful for lustful desires, to cover up the guilt she had fallen into. She succeeded Ninus and ruled the land that is now governed by the Sultan.

Next, we see she who killed herself for love, breaking her vow to Sichaeus' ashes, and Cleopatra, the one of excess.

Helen, who caused so many wars, and Achilles, who, in the end, battled Love, are also here. Paris, Tristan, and more than a thousand souls are here, all victims of love that took them from life."

As my Teacher spoke, pity overwhelmed me, and I nearly lost myself in it.

I turned to the spirits and asked, "O Poet, I would speak to those two souls who go together, light as the wind. Who are they?"

The Master responded, "You will see them as they come nearer. Call to them by the love that guides them, and they will come."

When the wind brought them close, I called out: "O you weary souls! Come speak to us if no one forbids it."

Just as doves, drawn by their desire, fly through the air to their nest, so did these souls come toward us, pulled by love.

They said: "O living soul, kind and compassionate, who travels through the air, pity us, we who stained the world with our blood.

If the King of the Universe is our friend, we pray that he grants you peace, for you show compassion for our suffering.

We will speak to you of what pleases you to hear, while the wind is still and calm."

They continued, "The city where I was born sits by the sea, where the Po river finds rest. Love, that quickly seizes the heart, caught this man for the beautiful person who was taken from me.

Love, which leaves no one untouched, gripped me with such strength that even now it has not left me.

Love led us both to one death; Caina waits for him who took our lives."

As I heard their suffering, I bowed my head, and held it there in sorrow until my Master spoke to me.

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He asked, "What are you thinking?"

I answered, "Alas, how many good thoughts and how much desire led these souls to this painful end!"

I turned to them and said, "Your agonies, Francesca, are so moving that I am filled with pity and sadness. But tell me, in those sweet moments when you sighed, what was it that made you fall so deeply in love? What was it that allowed you to give in to such desires?"

Francesca replied, "There is no greater sorrow than remembering happy times in misery, and your Teacher knows this well."

But, if you wish to understand how love first took root in us, I will tell you, as one who weeps while speaking.

One day, we read for our enjoyment the story of Launcelot, how love overcame him. We were alone, with no fear.

We read it many times, and each time it drained the color from our faces, but one part overwhelmed us.

When we read how the noble lover kissed the long-desired smile, this one, who will never leave me, kissed me on the mouth, trembling with emotion.

Galeotto was the book, and he who wrote it. That day, we read no further."

As she spoke these words, the other spirit wept so much that I fainted from pity, falling as a dead body falls.

Inferno: Canto VI

When I regained consciousness, it was as if the torment of those two souls, whose suffering had overwhelmed me with pity, had left me in a dazed state. New torments surrounded me, pressing in from all directions. No matter which way I turned, I was confronted by suffering.

We had now entered the third circle of Hell, where an eternal, cursed, cold, and heavy rain pours down. Its nature and torment are ever-present.

Huge hail, dark rain, and snow fell violently through the gloomy air, making the earth below sickening as it received this endless downpour.

Cerberus, the cruel and monstrous creature, stood there with three heads, barking furiously at the souls submerged in the filthy rain. His eyes were red, his beard slick and black, his belly large, and his claws sharp. He tore the souls apart, shredding them.

The souls howled as the rain made them behave like dogs—some took shelter from the storm, while others, tormented, turned and twisted in the endless storm.

When Cerberus saw us, he opened his mouths wide, revealing his tusks. Not a single part of his body was still.

My guide, with his hands outstretched, took some earth and threw it into Cerberus's ravenous mouths. The monster, like a dog that quiets when fed, stopped its howling, its heads now occupied with eating.

We passed through the storm of shadows, stepping on their emptiness. All the souls were lying on the ground, except one who sat up when he saw us pass by.

"Hey, you who are guided through Hell," he said to me. "Recall me, if you can; you were made before I was unmade."

I replied, "Your suffering has perhaps clouded my memory, so I don't recognize you. But tell me who you are, who are placed in such a sorrowful place, and in such punishment, if others suffer less."

He answered, "My city, full of envy that has now overflowed, kept me within its peaceful life. You called me Ciacco. For my gluttonous sin, I, as you see, am battered by this unrelenting rain.

And I am not the only one. All these souls suffer the same fate for the same sin," and with that, he fell silent.

INFERNO
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I responded, "Ciacco, your suffering weighs so heavily on me that I am moved to tears. But tell me, if you know, what will become of the citizens of your divided city? Will any of them be just? And tell me why such great discord afflicts it."

He said, "After much strife, they will come to bloodshed. The country folk will drive out the city folk with great violence. Afterward, one side will fall within three suns, while the other will rise again by the force of him who now resides on the coast.

The victorious side will keep its power for a long time, keeping the other under great hardship, no matter how much it weeps or resists.

The just are few and misunderstood, and envy, arrogance, and greed are the sparks that have ignited their hearts."

With that, Ciacco stopped speaking. I turned to him and said, "I still wish to know more. Tell me of Farinata, Tegghiaio, Jacopo Rusticucci, Arrigo, and Mosca, and others who were so focused on doing good. Where are they now? Are they in Heaven, or are they tormented here?"

He replied, "They are among the darkest souls. A different sin weighs them down, leading them further into Hell. If you descend that far, you can see them. But when you return to the living world, please remember me and speak of me to others. I can tell you no more."

With that, his eyes, once clear, turned away, and his head bowed. He fell prone like the other souls in Hell.

My guide spoke to me: "He will not rise again until the angelic trumpet sounds. When the great Potentate approaches, each soul will reclaim their body and figure, hearing what echoes through eternity."

We continued onward through the muddy mixture of rain and shadows, moving slowly, as we reflected on the future life.

I asked my guide, "Master, will the torment here grow greater after the final judgment? Or will it lessen, or remain the same?"

He replied, "Return to your studies, which teach that the more perfect something is, the more it feels pleasure and pain. Though these souls will never reach perfection, their torment will only increase after the final judgment."

We traveled in a circle for a while, speaking of many things that I will not repeat. Finally, we arrived at a point where the descent continues, and there we encountered Plutus, the great enemy.

Inferno: Canto VII

Plutus, the great enemy, began to cry out in his clucking voice, "Pape Satan, Pape Satan, Aleppe!" At this, my guide, the wise sage who knew all things, said to encourage me, "Do not let your fear hinder you; for any power that Plutus may have will not prevent us from continuing our descent."

Then, turning toward the bloated creature, my guide said, "Be silent, you cursed wolf; consume yourself with your own rage. This journey to the abyss is not without reason. It is willed by the heavens, where Michael cast down the rebellious angels."

As sails filled with wind collapse when their mast snaps, so did Plutus fall to the earth, defeated by my guide's words.

Thus, we descended further into the fourth chasm, moving closer to the sorrowful shore where all the suffering of the universe is gathered.

I wondered at the justice of God, asking why so many new sufferings and toils are piled upon these souls. Why do our transgressions weigh so heavily upon us?

As the waves of Charybdis crash against the rocks, so too did the souls in this circle clash against each other. I saw many souls, rolling heavy weights with their chests, howling in distress.

They collided, and then, at that point, each one turned backward, rolling in the opposite direction, shouting, "Why do you keep?" and, "Why do you squander?"

They repeated this endlessly, moving in a continuous cycle of torment, turning and shouting as they rolled their burdens back and forth.

As I watched, my heart was filled with pity, and I asked my guide, "Who are these souls? If they are all clerics, then who are those with the shaven crowns on the left side of us?"

The guide replied, "All these souls were intellectually blind in their previous lives, to such an extent that they could not measure their own actions. Their voices make it clear when they reach the two points of the circle where they turn, where their opposite defects separate them."

The ones with shaved heads are clerks, popes, and cardinals, in whom greed has taken root and grown unchecked."

I responded, "Master, I recognize a few of these who suffered from these vices."

He replied, "You are mistaken. The life they led, which made them greedy, now renders them blind to all discernment. They will continue in this torment, forever returning to these turning points. They will rise from their graves with their fists clenched or their heads shorn."

INFERNO
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The world, in both giving and receiving, took from them what was fair and placed them here, in this endless struggle. No words can explain it.

Now you can understand the farce of worldly goods, which are governed by fortune. The human race fights for them, and all the gold beneath the moon could never make a single soul find rest.”

I asked, “Master, please explain this Fortune that controls the world's goods, that has such power over people.”

He answered, “O foolish creatures, what ignorance you have! Let me teach you my view of her.

He who transcends all wisdom created the heavens and set their movements in place so that every part of the universe shines in its own way. Likewise, he gave control of worldly riches to Fortune, to be her minister and guide.

She shifts the world's treasures from one race to another, beyond the reach of human wisdom. Some people rise to triumph, and others fall, all according to her judgment, which is hidden like a serpent in the grass.

You cannot understand her, for she makes decisions and pursues her plans with no pause, driven by necessity. She is swift, and when her time comes, she acts, regardless of human interference.

This is why she is so often criticized by those who should praise her. She is blissful, and she does not hear their complaints. She continues her work, joyful in her eternal movements.”

My guide continued, “Now let's descend further into greater suffering. The stars that were rising when we first started our journey are now sinking, and we must not delay.”

We crossed the circle to the other side, near a spring that boiled and poured itself into a gully.

The water was darker than any color I could imagine, and we walked alongside the murky waves, making our way down an unfamiliar path.

This river, called the Styx, flowed through a swamp, where the souls of the angry were immersed in its filthy waters. They were naked and had angry expressions.

They struck each other not only with their hands but with their heads, chests, and feet, tearing each other apart with their teeth.

The guide explained, “Son, these are the souls of those overtaken by anger in their lives. They are trapped here, submerged in the water, where their anger continues to burn.

You can see those who are submerged beneath the surface, sighing and causing the water to bubble, as the bubbles rise to the surface.

INFERNO
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They were sullen in the world, and now they remain sullen in the mire. They mutter their hymn of sorrow, but they cannot speak it fully, for their words are always broken."

We continued our journey, circling the swamp, with our eyes fixed on the souls who gorged themselves on the mire. We eventually came to the foot of a tower.

Inferno: Canto VIII

As we continued our descent, before we reached the foot of the high tower, our eyes were drawn upward to the top, where two flames were visible. From afar, another flame answered them, so distant that it was barely discernible to the eye.

I asked, "What do these flames mean, and who are the ones who made them?"

My guide replied, "You can now understand what is expected here if the swampy fog does not hide it from you."

Just as an arrow swiftly shot from a bow, so did a small boat race toward us across the water. It was steered by a single pilot who shouted, "Are you here, damned soul?"

The guide then spoke to the pilot, saying, "Phlegyas, Phlegyas, you cry in vain this time. You will have us only until we pass through the swamp."

Phlegyas, enraged, turned toward us, his anger growing like someone who has been deceived and now resents it.

My guide stepped into the boat, and I followed him. The boat, though small, seemed to carry us both without difficulty.

As soon as we were in the boat, the prow cut through the water, moving faster than the boats I had seen before.

While we sailed down the dark canal, a filthy soul rose up before me and asked, "Who are you that come before the appointed time?"

I answered, "Though I have come, I do not stay long. But who are you, who are so defiled?"

The soul replied, "I am one who weeps," and I recognized him as one who had lived in misery.

With a firm hand, my guide pushed him away, saying, "Go back, you cursed soul, and join the others who wallow in filth."

The spirit then stretched out both hands toward the boat, but the guide pushed him away, saying, "Away with you! Return to the other dogs!"

At that moment, my guide embraced me, kissed my face, and said, "You are the proud one, and that arrogance has brought you to such a miserable place. Blessed is the one who bore you, for you have much to learn from such pride. The world is filled with many who, because of their arrogance, will fall into similar torment."

INFERNO
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I said, "Master, it would please me to see him submerged in this mud, before we leave the lake."

He replied, "Before we leave this shore, your wish will be fulfilled. It is fitting that you should be satisfied with this desire."

Soon after, I saw the souls in the mire causing such havoc to the defiled spirit that I thanked God for their punishment. They shouted, "At Philippo Argenti!" and the enraged Florentine spirit, filled with fury, turned on himself, biting himself with his own teeth.

We left him there, and I heard the wailing of other souls. I focused my eyes on the cries as we moved forward.

My guide said, "Now, my son, we are drawing near to the city of Dis, the place where the grave citizens dwell, where the great throng is found."

I replied, "Master, I already see the towers of the city. They glow red, as if they were lit by fire."

He explained, "The eternal fire within the city causes it to shine, as you see in this lower Hell."

We reached the deep moats that surrounded the city, and its walls appeared to be made of iron. We walked in a wide circle around the city, arriving at a place where the pilot called out, "Debark here, this is the entrance."

I saw more than a thousand souls at the gates, and they shouted angrily, "Who is this that comes through the realm of the dead without death?"

My guide made a gesture, signaling his desire to speak with them.

For a moment, their rage was quelled, and they said, "Come alone, and let the other go back. Let him try to return by his mad way, but you stay here, as you have guided him through these dark realms."

I was deeply troubled by their words, as I believed that we would never return. I said, "O my dear guide, who have saved me more than seven times, do not abandon me now. If we cannot go further, let us turn back together swiftly."

My guide, who had led me to this point, reassured me, "Do not fear. Our passage cannot be taken from us. It is granted by Him who has the power to do so. Here, wait for me, and I will give you comfort and hope for the journey. I will not leave you."

Then my guide went ahead and left me behind, standing in doubt, as both "No" and "Yes" battled in my mind. I could not hear what he discussed with the souls at the gates, but he did not linger long before turning back and walking away from me.

INFERNO
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They closed the gates behind him, and he stood outside, his gaze lowered and his forehead filled with frustration. He turned to me, saying with a sigh, “Who has denied me entry to this sorrowful place?”

Then he said, “Fear not. I will overcome their opposition. This arrogance is nothing new. It was once used at another gate, which still stands open to this day. You saw the inscription upon it, and now we descend to the gate where we can pass through, without escort.”

Inferno: Canto IX

As we continued on, I felt a deep sense of fear when I saw my guide turn back. The color of his face shifted, his composure temporarily disturbed by something that caught his attention. He stopped, his body tense, like a man listening intently, as if the thick air and fog before us blocked his sight.

He spoke, trying to reassure me: "We must still face this challenge, or else... Such a journey has presented itself to us... I long for someone to arrive here."

I noticed that, after starting his words, he quickly covered them with what came afterward, which seemed entirely different. Still, his words filled me with dread, for I feared I might have misunderstood the meaning of what he had started to say.

I asked him, "Who is it that descends to this deepest part of Hell, where hope is entirely cut off?"

He answered me, "It rarely happens that one of us undertakes the journey I am on. Once, I was summoned here by the ruthless sorceress Erictho, who called back the souls into their bodies. Just after I had been separated from my flesh for a short while, she made me enter the wall to bring forth a soul from the circle of Judas."

This is the lowest, the darkest region, farthest from Heaven. I know this path well, so fear not."

He continued, but I didn't remember his exact words, for my attention had been drawn toward the high tower with its fiery red summit, where I saw the flames of two fires at the top. A third flame, distant and hard to discern, seemed to answer them.

As I pondered these flames, my guide spoke again, drawing my focus back. "These are the Furies," he said, "the fierce Erinnys—Megaera, Alecto, and Tisiphone—whom you see here. They are surrounding the infernal gates."

I saw the Furies, bloodstained and filled with fury, their hair writhing with snakes. The sight of them made me draw close to my guide in fear.

The Furies cried out, "Medusa comes! We will turn him to stone!" Their voices were filled with rage as they looked down, and I could feel the intensity of their anger.

My guide, ever watchful, told me, "Turn away, and keep your eyes shut. If you see the Gorgon, you will never return to the world above."

He turned me around, trusting me not to open my eyes, and kept his own hands firmly on me, shielding me from the dreadful vision.

INFERNO
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We continued on, and as we did, I heard a terrible sound approaching from the dark waters ahead. It was as if a powerful wind had been unleashed by opposing forces, crashing through the forest, tearing branches from the trees, and scattering dust in all directions, driving the wild beasts and their shepherds away.

My guide released me from my blindness and pointed toward the turbulent waves, saying, "Look closely at the smoke rising from the water over there."

I turned my gaze to where the smoke was thickest and saw more than a thousand souls fleeing from a figure walking across the Styx with dry feet. He was fanning the air with his hand, looking weary but continuing onward, unmoved by the suffering around him.

I realized this figure was one sent by Heaven, and I turned to my guide. He motioned for me to remain still and bow to the figure, who had come to open the gate.

When the figure reached the gate, he spoke to the souls there, saying, "You who are cast out from Heaven, why do you resist the will of God? Why do you fight against the fate that will never be undone?"

With those words, he opened the gate with a little rod, for it offered no resistance. He then turned and began his return, leaving behind a figure of someone whose concern was more pressing than simply speaking to us.

We continued toward the city of Dis, and as we passed through the gates, I looked around at the condition of the fortress.

I saw a vast plain filled with suffering and torment, like the land around Arles where the Rhone river stagnates, or like Pola near the Quarnaro, where Italy's borders meet the sea.

The place was filled with sepulchers, and between them were flames, so intense they could heat iron more than any forge. The souls were trapped in these tombs, their cries of agony filling the air, and their coverings were lifted as they writhed in pain.

I asked my guide, "Who are these souls in the tombs? Why do they make such dreadful sounds?"

He replied, "These are the Heretics, along with their followers of all different sects. They are buried here according to their beliefs, and the tombs are heated to reflect the punishment for their sins."

As we continued on, we passed through a circle of the tormented, and I could see how bitter their fates had become. The fire between the tombs burned fiercely, scorching the souls trapped within. This suffering, I knew, was a consequence of their lives and the errors they had made while living.

Inferno: Canto X

We continued on, moving along a narrow path between the torments and the city wall. My guide led the way, and I followed close behind.

"O supreme power, who turns me through these impious circles," I began, "as you please, speak to me and fulfill my longings. The souls lying in these tombs—are they visible? The lids are all lifted, and no one guards them."

He answered me, "They will all be closed again when they return from the Valley of Jehoshaphat, bringing their bodies with them. Here, on this side, you find the cemetery of those who followed Epicurus, those who believed that the soul dies with the body."

As for your question, you will soon be satisfied with an answer. You will also find satisfaction in your unspoken wish."

I replied, "Good Master, I conceal nothing from you, but I am silent now to speak less, as you have encouraged me."

Suddenly, a voice rang out from one of the tombs. I moved closer to my guide in fear, and he said, "Look, there is Farinata, who has risen from his tomb. From the waist up, you will see him completely."

I fixed my gaze on him, and he rose, standing proudly with his chest and front exposed, as if he despised Hell itself. My guide pushed me forward, urging me, "Speak clearly to him."

As I stood at the foot of his tomb, Farinata looked at me with disdain and asked, "Who were your ancestors?"

I, eager to obey, revealed everything to him. He raised his eyebrows slightly at my response.

He then said, "Your ancestors were fiercely opposed to me, my family, and my party. Twice I scattered them."

I answered, "If they were exiled, they returned from all sides, the first time and the second. But your family never mastered the art of returning properly."

At this, another shadow rose from the tomb beside him, rising to the chin, and it seemed as though the spirit had risen on its knees. The shadow looked around, as if searching to see if anyone else was with me. After a moment, it became clear that the spirit's suspicion was satisfied, and it wept, saying, "If you go through this dark prison with the strength of your intellect, where is my son? Why is he not with you?"

INFERNO
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I answered, "I do not come on my own. He who is waiting for us ahead brought me here, the one whom your son perhaps scorned."

At my words, Farinata leaped up, crying out, "What did you say? Is he not still alive? Does the sweet light still shine upon his eyes?"

When he realized that I had not yet responded, he fell back into the tomb, and I no longer saw him.

The other spirit, calm and resolute, did not change his demeanor. He did not turn or bend in response to Farinata's words. He continued speaking, saying, "If they had learned the art you mention, it would trouble me more than this torment. But this place is not where that art is learned."

He added, "Fifty times the Lady who rules here will not turn her face toward them before you understand the weight of their misdeeds. And as you wish to return to the sweet world, tell me why your people are so pitiless toward mine, in every law they create."

I answered, "The slaughter and great carnage that stained the Arbia river cause such prayers to be made in our temple."

Farinata shook his head with a sigh and said, "I was not alone in this. My actions, though tragic, were not without cause. In the place I speak of, I was alone, and yet everyone there agreed to ruin Florence, even those who openly defended her."

I replied, "Ah! May your descendants find peace," and I begged him to explain the confusion that clouded my thoughts.

He responded, "We see only what is distant from us, like those with imperfect vision. Our intellect is powerless when things are near, and if no one tells us, we cannot know the present state of the living world."

I understood that their knowledge would remain entirely closed off when the future was locked away from them.

I then felt a deep sense of guilt for not having told the spirit about his son, and I said, "Now, tell that fallen spirit that his son still walks among the living. I may have hesitated, but please tell him I did it because I was already thinking of the answer you gave me."

My guide turned to me and reminded me, "Remember what you have learned here, for it will help you in the future."

INFERNO
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He raised his finger, as if preparing me for the journey ahead, and said, “When you stand before the radiant presence of her who sees all, you will know the path of your life.”

We then turned to the left and moved toward the center, along a path that led into a valley. The air there was thick with stench, and it felt as if the place itself was unpleasant even from a distance.

Inferno: Canto XI

We came upon a higher bank, where the rocks had broken into a circle, creating a deep chasm. At the edge, we saw another even more cruel group of souls, surrounded by a dreadful stench that seemed to rise from the abyss itself.

We moved aside to shelter ourselves behind a large tomb. On it, I noticed an inscription that read: "Pope Anastasius I hold, whom Photinus led astray."

The guide spoke to me, "We must descend slowly, so that your senses can adjust to the bitter winds here. Once you get used to it, you won't mind it as much."

I replied, "Master, find some way to keep us busy, so that time does not pass idly."

He then said, "Listen, my son. Within these rocks, there are three smaller circles, just like the ones we've left behind. Each circle is filled with souls who are damned, but you will soon understand why and how they are bound here."

He continued, "Of all the malice that angers God, injury is its ultimate form. Whether by force or fraud, people harm others. But because fraud is a uniquely human sin, it angers God the most. Therefore, the fraudulent are punished in the lowest circles of Hell."

"The first circle, the Violent, is divided into three parts: violence against God, against oneself, and against others. The violent against others, such as murderers, robbers, and freebooters, are tormented in the first round. Those who harm themselves—like those who waste their own property or commit suicide—are punished in the second. The third is for those who have committed violence against God, blaspheming Him or denying His nature."

I asked, "And the souls in the red city who are driven by the wind and rain? Why are they not punished as the others? If God is angry with them, why do they endure such torment here?"

He replied, "Do you not remember the three dispositions that Heaven abhors—Incontinence, Malice, and Bestiality? Incontinence offends God the least, while Malice and Bestiality are more grievous. Those who are punished in this red city are those who acted with Incontinence—though they are still punished, their punishment is less severe than that of the others."

I reflected on his words and said, "Sun, that cures all troubled vision, I am content now that you have explained this, for I now understand as much as I did not before."

I then asked, "Please, explain once more how usury offends God and why it is considered so wrong."

INFERNO
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He responded, "Philosophy teaches that Nature follows a divine course, guided by the Divine Intellect and its art. If you study Physics carefully, you will understand how human art follows Nature, just as a disciple follows their master. This is why usury, which goes against the natural course, offends both Nature and God."

He continued, "Now, let's move forward, for the Fish are shaking on the horizon, and the Wain is overhead, guiding us downward along the crag."

Inferno: Canto XII

We came to a steep, rocky bank, a place that was so dangerous and unsettling that no eye would willingly look upon it. The slope resembled the landslide that struck the Adige River near Trent, caused either by an earthquake or a collapse in the mountain, where rocks broke away and tumbled down to the plain, making a path for those above.

In the same way, the descent here was treacherous, and the area was filled with danger. At the edge of the broken chasm, the infamous Minotaur stood, who had been conceived in the false cow. As he saw us, he bit himself in rage, like one tormented by his own anger.

My guide shouted at the beast, "You think perhaps that the Duke of Athens is coming here, the one who brought you to your doom? But no, this man does not come in your sister's favor; he comes to witness your punishments."

As a bull, struck with a mortal blow, struggles and staggers, so did the Minotaur; he was wild with anger. My guide quickly warned me, "Run to the passage while he's distracted—now's the time to descend."

We carefully made our way down the slope, which was covered with loose stones that shifted under our feet because of the unusual weight we carried. As I thought about the destruction and the anger I had just witnessed, my guide said to me, "Perhaps you're thinking about this ruin, which is guarded by the fury I just quelled. I must tell you that when I descended here to Hell before, this cliff had not yet fallen. But shortly before the one who took the mighty spoil from Dis arrived, the valley trembled so violently that it seemed as though the entire universe was stirred with love. Some believe this was the moment when the world was turned into chaos."

He continued, "Now look ahead, for the river of blood is drawing near. It is where those who have shed blood by violence are boiling in eternal torment."

I saw a wide moat shaped like a bow, stretching across the plain as my guide had described. Along the edge of this moat, I saw a group of centaurs running, armed with bows and arrows, just like hunters pursuing their prey.

When they saw us, they stopped and three of them detached themselves from the group, advancing with their bows drawn. One of them called out, "Who are you, who descend the hillside? Tell us from there, or we'll shoot."

My guide replied, "We will explain ourselves to Chiron, who is near. Your impatience has always been your undoing."

INFERNO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

He then touched me and said, "This is Nessus, the centaur who perished for the lovely Dejanira, and for himself, he took revenge. The one in the middle is Chiron, the teacher of Achilles. The other is Pholus, who was so quick to anger."

When we reached them, Chiron took an arrow from his quiver and fitted it to his bow, but before he could shoot, he noticed us and said, "Do you know that the one behind you is moving whatever he touches? This is not the way the feet of the dead usually move."

My guide replied, "Yes, he lives, and it is only by necessity, not by choice, that he must walk this path. He is here not as a thief, but with a mission given to him by the one who sent him."

Then Chiron turned to Nessus and said, "Guide them, and if anyone tries to pass, warn them away."

We continued along the edge of the boiling river, where the souls of tyrants were immersed up to their eyebrows. Chiron pointed out some of the souls to us: "These are the tyrants, those who dealt in bloodshed and pillaging. Here is Alexander, and fierce Dionysius, who brought suffering to Sicily. The one with the black hair is Azzolino, and the other with blonde hair is Obizzo of Este, who was murdered by his stepson."

I turned to my guide, who said, "Now he is first, and I am second."

We walked a little farther, and Chiron stopped above a group of souls who were emerging from the river, their bodies covered in boiling blood up to their throats. Chiron pointed out one of them and said, "This soul split the heart of God in His divine presence. He still has the honor of being remembered on the Thames."

Then I saw souls rising from the river, and I recognized some of them. They were mournful and filled with regret for the lives they had taken.

As we moved onward, the blood in the river became shallower, covering only the feet, until we reached a place where the passage was clear.

Chiron, speaking again, said, "Just as this river diminishes here, it continues to fall in the lower part of Hell, where it reunites with the rest of the waters, and there, tyranny remains forever."

He continued, pointing to the figures suffering in the blood, "Here you see Attila, the scourge of the earth, Pyrrhus, and Sextus. They are tormented for the wars they waged and for the suffering they caused."

With that, Chiron turned away and crossed the ford, leading us onward into the depths.

Inferno: Canto XIII

We had barely crossed to the other side when we entered a dense, dark wood, where no path marked the way. The foliage wasn't green but dark and grim, and the branches twisted and tangled around us. It wasn't like apple trees; the trees here were thorny and poisonous.

The thicket was so dense and wild, much like the savage beasts that live in hatred between Cecina and Corneto, that even the wild creatures there couldn't compare. This place was home to the hideous Harpies, the same ones who drove the Trojans from the Strophades with their mournful predictions of doom. These creatures had broad wings, human faces and necks, claws for feet, and bloated bellies, crying out from the trees with laments.

My guide spoke to me: "Before you go any further, know that you've entered the second round of Hell, and you'll stay here until you reach the horrible sand. So look around, and you'll see things that will confirm what I say."

As we walked, I heard countless cries of sorrow from all directions, but I couldn't see anyone to account for them. I stood frozen, confused. My guide seemed to think that I might be wondering if these cries came from people hidden among the trees. He said to me, "If you tear off a branch from one of these trees, your confusion will be cleared up."

I reached out and plucked a branch from a great thornbush, but as soon as I did, the tree cried out, "Why are you hurting me?"

The branch turned red with blood, and it resumed crying, "Why do you tear me apart? Don't you feel any pity? We were once human, and now we've been turned into trees. You should be more compassionate, even if we had once been serpents."

As the branch bled and cried, it reminded me of a burning branch, with sap dripping and hissing. Terrified, I let go of the tip, as though I'd been struck with fear.

The guide, seeing my confusion, responded, "Had he been able to believe sooner, what he saw in my verses, this wouldn't have happened. But the unbelievable thing caused me to do something that grieves me."

Then the trunk of the tree spoke again, "Because of your sweet words, I can't remain silent. I'll tell you who I am, but don't be upset that I'm tempted to speak. I once held the keys to Frederick's heart, and I turned them gently, keeping many secrets from the world. I served faithfully, but envy led to my downfall."

He continued, explaining that his actions had caused harm to himself and others: "The woman who was always near Caesar turned my life upside down, stirring everyone against me. Even Augustus, whom I served, turned against me, and my honor became a source of grief."

INFERNO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

"I tried to escape this dishonor by dying," he said, "but it was in vain. I never broke faith with my lord, and I ask those in the world above to remember me, for envy destroyed my reputation."

After a pause, my guide urged me, "Don't waste time, but ask him more questions if you desire."

So I asked the spirit, "How is it that souls like you are trapped in these trees? Can anyone ever escape?"

The tree spoke again, "When a soul leaves its body in anger or vengeance, it is sent to the seventh circle by Minos. There, it falls into the forest and begins to grow into a sapling, like a seed cast by Fortune. The Harpies feed on its leaves, causing pain, and every soul in this forest suffers in the same way."

"The souls are bound here, never to escape," the tree continued. "No one can recover what has been cast away, and we drag our bodies along this cursed path."

We stood still, listening to the tree's words, when suddenly we heard a great commotion. It was like the noise a hunter hears when wild boars are charging through the brush. Two souls emerged from the forest, running desperately, their bodies scratched and torn. One cried out, "Help, Death, help!" and the other, struggling to keep up, shouted, "Lano, you're not fast enough!"

As they fled, they were pursued by wild dogs—savage and fast as greyhounds—that tore into the one who had fallen behind, tearing him apart piece by piece.

My guide quickly took me by the hand and led me to the wounded soul, who was weeping as he bled. The spirit, still hanging from the bush, spoke, "O Jacopo of Sant'Andrea, what good did it do you to use me as a shield? What did I have to do with your wicked life?"

The guide stopped and asked the spirit, "Who are you, that speak so from these many wounds?"

The spirit answered, "I was once part of the city that changed its patron to the Baptist. I worked for Frederick, but when my efforts were turned against me, I lost everything. Had it not been for the war brought by Attila, my people's efforts to rebuild would have been in vain."

"I ended my life in disgrace," he said, "and now my soul is condemned to suffer here for my crimes."

Inferno: Canto XIV

As soon as Nessus had crossed over to the other side, we entered a desolate, dark wood, where no path could be seen. The trees weren't green but had a dark, grim color, their branches twisted and tangled, and there were no apple trees but instead thorny, poisonous ones.

The thickets here were denser and more wild than those inhabited by savage beasts between Cecina and Corneto. The place was home to the terrifying Harpies, creatures with broad wings, human faces and necks, and claws for feet. These creatures had large bellies and wept as they perched on the trees.

My guide said, "Before you go any further, understand that you've entered the second round of Hell, and you'll remain here until you reach the horrible sand. Look around you now, and you'll see things that will confirm what I've said."

I heard sorrowful cries from all directions, but I couldn't see the source of them. I stood, bewildered, unsure of what was happening. My guide, sensing my confusion, said, "If you break off even a small branch from one of these trees, your confusion will be resolved."

I stretched my hand out and plucked a branch from one of the thorns. As soon as I did, the tree cried out, "Why are you hurting me?"

The branch began to bleed and continued, "Why are you tearing me apart? Don't you feel any pity? We were once human, and now we've been turned into trees. Even if we were serpents, your hand should be gentler."

The branch bled and cried, making me feel as though I was witnessing a burning tree, with sap dripping and hissing. I quickly let go of the branch, overcome with fear.

My guide, seeing my reaction, said, "If you had understood sooner what you saw in my verses, you would not have acted in such a way. But the incredible sight moved me to act in a way that saddens me."

Then the tree spoke again, "Your sweet words have moved me to speak. I am the one who once held the keys to Frederick's heart, and I turned them softly, keeping many secrets. But my work was undone by envy, and I was cast aside."

The spirit continued, explaining how his actions led to his downfall: "The courtesan, whose eyes never left Caesar, turned everyone against me, including Augustus. My efforts were turned into grief, and my honor was shattered."

INFERNO
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“Unable to bear this dishonor, I thought to escape by dying,” he said, “but that only worsened my plight. I never broke faith with my lord, and I ask those above to remember me, for envy destroyed my reputation.”

After a pause, my guide urged me, “Ask him more questions if you wish. Don’t waste this opportunity.”

So I asked, “How is it that souls are trapped in these trees? Is there any hope for release?”

The tree replied, “When a soul departs from its body, driven by anger or vengeance, it is cast into the seventh circle by Minos. There, it falls into the forest and begins as a sapling, just like a seed cast by Fortune. The Harpies feed on its leaves, causing pain, and every soul suffers in the same way.”

“The souls are bound here forever,” the tree continued. “No one can reclaim what has been cast off. We drag our bodies through this cursed place.”

We stood still, listening to the tree, when suddenly we were overtaken by a great commotion. It was like the noise a hunter hears when wild animals are charging through the underbrush. Two souls emerged from the forest, running desperately, their bodies scratched and torn. One cried out, “Help, Death, help!” while the other, struggling to keep up, shouted, “Lano, you’re not quick enough!”

As they fled, they were pursued by ravenous dogs—swift and fierce as greyhounds—that tore into the one who had fallen behind, ripping him apart.

My guide quickly took me by the hand and led me to the wounded soul, who was crying out in pain. The spirit, still hanging from the bush, spoke, “O Jacopo of Sant’Andrea, what good did it do you to use me as a shield? What did I have to do with your wicked life?”

My guide asked, “Who are you, that speak from so many wounds?”

The spirit answered, “I was once part of the city that changed its patron to the Baptist. I worked for Frederick, but when my efforts were turned against me, I lost everything. Had it not been for the war brought by Attila, my people’s efforts to rebuild would have been in vain.”

“I ended my life in disgrace,” he said, “and now my soul is condemned to suffer here for my crimes.”

Inferno: Canto XV

As we continued along the hard, barren edge, we were sheltered from the fire by the mist rising from the brook, which protected the water and the dikes from the flames.

It reminded me of how, between Cadsand and Bruges, the Flemings build their barriers against the flooding sea, or how the people of Padua, to protect their homes, prepare their defenses against the heat of Chiarentana. In a similar fashion, but not so tall or thick, the fortifications here were built to protect the souls in this place.

We had moved far enough from the forest that I could no longer tell where it was, even if I had looked back. That's when we encountered a group of souls who walked beside the dike, all gazing at us, just like people do when the new moon rises and everyone looks at each other curiously. They stared at us, as an old tailor might scrutinize a needle's eye.

Among them, one soul recognized me. He reached out and grabbed the hem of my garment, exclaiming, "What a marvel!" When I turned to face him, I saw the scorched, burnt face of Ser Brunetto. Without hesitation, I asked, "Are you here, Ser Brunetto?"

He responded, "Do not be displeased, my son. If you can spare me a moment, I will return with you and talk as we go forward. Let the journey continue afterward."

I replied, "I would be honored to walk with you, and if you wish me to sit down, I will gladly do so, as long as my guide approves."

Ser Brunetto said, "Be careful, my son. Whoever stops even for a moment in this place will be stuck here for a hundred years, and the fire will never cease tormenting him. So continue walking, and I will follow behind you. Afterward, I'll return to my group, which forever laments its fate."

I didn't dare leave the path and walk beside him. Instead, I bowed my head and walked reverently along the road, following my guide.

Ser Brunetto asked, "What fate has brought you down here? Who is this guide leading you?"

I answered, "I lost my way in a valley above, before my time had come. But yesterday I turned back, and this man appeared to me, showing me the way back."

Ser Brunetto said, "If you follow your star, you cannot fail to reach a glorious port. I would have helped you had I not died too soon. Heaven has shown you favor, and I would have guided you through your work."

INFERNO
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“But that ungrateful and wicked people from Fesole, which is still full of arrogance, will make an enemy of you for your good deeds. They are not suited to you, just as a fig tree is not suited to bear fruit among the sourness of crab apples.”

He continued, “Old rumors about them call them blind, and they are avaricious, envious, and proud. Take care to cleanse yourself of their customs.”

I responded, “If your advice had been fully given, I would not be in such banishment. You taught me how a man becomes eternal, and I am grateful for your teachings. I still carry the image of you, dear and good, from my time in the world.”

What you have told me, I will write down and keep, hoping that someone will eventually help me finish the work.”

He smiled at my words, and then said, “If only my request had been granted, we would be free. But fate is what it is. Now, go on, and I will follow. You will pass a river soon, and I want you to understand its significance.”

We walked on, and as we passed the river, he explained, “In the middle of the sea there is a land called Crete, once a place of purity. On this land is a mountain, Ida, where Rhea hid her son. There is an old man standing on the mountain, facing Damietta, looking at Rome as if it were his reflection. His body is made of various metals—gold for the head, silver for the arms, and brass for the torso. His lower parts are made of iron, and his right foot is made of clay.”

He continued, “The tears that fall from this statue form the rivers Acheron, Styx, and Phlegethon, which flow down into this valley and meet at the point where no more descent is possible. From there, they form the frozen lake of Cocytus, which you will soon see for yourself.”

I asked, “If the river flows from this land, why does it only appear here?”

My guide replied, “You still haven’t turned fully through the circle. The river flows from this point, and as you go down, it will appear to you again. I will answer more of your questions when you reach the proper place.”

He then added, “The river Lethe and Phlegethon you seek will come later, outside this current zone. Lethe will cleanse those who are repenting their sins.”

Inferno: Canto XVI

As we moved along the hard bank, the mist from the brook shielded us from the fire, keeping the water and the embankments safe. It reminded me of how the Flemings, between Cadsand and Bruges, build their barriers to protect themselves from the rising sea, or how the people of Padua, to guard their homes, prepare defenses against the heat of Chiarentana. In the same way, but not so tall or thick, the protective structures here had been built by a skilled hand.

We had moved far enough from the forest that I couldn't tell where it was anymore. Then we encountered a group of souls, walking beside the dike. They all looked at us, much like people do when the new moon rises and everyone gazes at each other. They scrutinized us, as an old tailor might inspect the eye of a needle before sewing.

Among them, one soul recognized me. He reached out and grabbed the hem of my garment, exclaiming, "What a marvel!" When I looked up, I saw the scorched face of Ser Brunetto. Without hesitation, I asked, "Are you here, Ser Brunetto?"

He replied, "Don't be upset, my son. If you can spare me a moment, I will walk with you, and we can continue the journey afterward."

I answered, "I would be honored to walk with you, and if you wish me to sit down, I will, as long as my guide agrees."

Ser Brunetto said, "Be careful, my son. Anyone who stops for even a moment here is condemned to remain for a hundred years. The fire will never cease tormenting him. So, continue on your way, and I will follow. Afterward, I'll return to my group, which forever laments its fate."

I didn't dare leave the path to walk beside him. Instead, I bowed my head and followed along, walking reverently with my guide.

Ser Brunetto asked, "What has brought you down here? Who is this guide leading you?"

I replied, "I lost my way in a valley above, before my time had come. But yesterday, I turned back, and this man appeared, showing me the way."

Ser Brunetto said, "If you follow your star, you cannot fail to reach a glorious end. Heaven has shown you favor, and I would have helped you had I not died prematurely. But your path will be difficult, as the people from Fesole, who are ungrateful and full of malice, will oppose you. They are not fit to be around you, just like a fig tree doesn't bear fruit among sour apples."

He continued, "The people from your city, Florence, are blind, proud, and greedy. You must cleanse yourself of their ways. Your fortune reserves great honor for you, but know that both sides will want something from you. But, despite their malice, you should avoid them."

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I responded, "If only your advice had been fulfilled, I would not be in such exile. You taught me how to become eternal, and I will forever be grateful for your teachings. I still hold your image dear in my heart."

He smiled at my words, and then said, "If only my request had been granted, we would have been free. But fate is what it is. Now, go on, and I will follow. Soon, you'll come to a river. Understand its significance."

We walked on, and soon we approached a river that was red in color. It reminded me of the stream from the Bulicame, which flows through the sinful women's baths. The red river had a similar flow, but instead of bathing, it was the stream of suffering.

My guide explained, "In the middle of the sea is a land called Crete, once pure and full of life. On this land is a mountain, Ida, where Rhea hid her son. There stands a giant, half-gold, half-silver, with brass for his torso. His lower parts are made of iron, and his right foot is made of clay. From the tears that fall from this statue, three rivers—Acheron, Styx, and Phlegethon—are formed, flowing into the valley and creating the frozen lake of Cocytus."

He continued, "You will see Lethe and Phlegethon, but they lie beyond this place. Lethe will cleanse those who repent their sins."

Inferno: Canto XVII

My guide pointed to the creature ahead and began to speak: "Behold the monster with the pointed tail, who splits mountains and breaks down walls and weapons. Behold him who poisons the world."

The creature slowly made its way to the shore, pushing its head and chest out of the water but not its tail. It had the face of a just man, appearing benign, while its body was like that of a serpent. It had two paws, hairy up to the armpits, and its back, chest, and sides were adorned with patterns resembling nooses and shields, designed with intricate detail. It resembled a beast that lurked on the edge of a rocky shore, its tail trembling in the void, shaped like a scorpion's stinger.

The guide said, "We must divert our path to avoid the beast, which lies ahead. We'll take a detour to the right side, away from the sand and flames."

As we descended, we encountered a group of souls sitting on the sand, their suffering visible as they struggled against the fire and hot ground. Their actions reminded me of dogs in the summer, scratching and biting at fleas or flies. Each soul wore a pouch, marked with colors and symbols, as if feeding their eyes upon the markings. I noticed one pouch that displayed a lion, another with a goose, and a third with a pregnant sow.

One soul, marked with a white pouch featuring an azure sow, spoke to me. He warned me to avoid the spot and mentioned Vitaliano, a fellow Paduan, who would soon join him. He cursed the people of Florence, complaining about their arrogance and pride, and finished by mocking the situation with a tongue flick.

My guide, aware that I was pondering the souls' plight, urged me to continue and not stay longer. "If you wish, we'll speak to these souls as we pass," he said. "But there is no time to linger."

As we walked, I turned to ask my guide about the souls we were seeing and what their fates meant. He replied, "The souls here, like the rest in this circle, are punished for their vices. Some of them were well-known in life for their virtues and now suffer the consequences of their actions in death. But pay close attention to them."

I turned to one soul, recognized it as a famous person from Florence, and asked my guide who these souls were. My guide responded, "These souls represent the pride and arrogance that have long plagued your city. It's sad to see their fates, but it is also a necessary punishment."

I asked further, "What about the fire, and how does it affect them?"

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The guide answered, “This is the seventh circle, and as we descend further, the punishments will become more severe, affecting them physically. But the souls in this circle also embody the pride that corrupted their lives, and that corruption remains after their death.”

As we spoke, we approached a river that was red like blood. My guide told me, “The river marks a separation from the previous circles, and as we cross, we’ll encounter more suffering and punishment.”

He described the importance of the river and what it represented, drawing comparisons to the mythological rivers of the underworld, like the Lethe, which cleanses souls of their sins.

Inferno: Canto XVIII

There is a place in Hell called Malebolge, entirely made of stone and an iron color, like the circle that surrounds it. In the middle of this evil field, there is a well, very wide and deep. The structure of this place will be explained soon. The area between the well and the foot of the high, hard bank is circular, with ten distinct valleys at the bottom.

It is similar to how many moats surround castles for protection, with each part of the moat forming a figure. In the same way, this area looks, and like the strongholds, there are little bridges extending from the gates to the outer bank. From the base of the cliff, crags extend out, crossing over dikes and moats, and leading to the well that collects them all.

We arrived in this place, having fallen from the back of the monster Geryon, and my guide, Virgil, took the left path, with me following behind. To my right, I saw new suffering, new torments, and new demons wielding lashes. The first ditch, or Bolgia, was filled with sinners who were naked and facing us on one side of the valley. On the other side, they walked in the opposite direction, with greater steps.

Just like how, during the Jubilee year in Rome, the Romans set up a bridge for the massive crowd to cross towards St. Peter's, while others walked in the opposite direction, this scene had the same arrangement. The sinners were in two groups: one group was facing us, while the other group was going the other way.

On both sides, I saw horned demons with large whips who cruelly beat the sinners. The sinners were made to lift their legs at the first lash, and not even the second or third blow was spared.

As I walked, my eyes met the eyes of one sinner, and I immediately recognized him. I paused to take a closer look, and Virgil followed my lead. The sinner, embarrassed, tried to hide his face, but I said, "If I'm not mistaken, you're Venedico Caccianimico. What brings you to such a place of suffering?"

He responded, "I didn't want to say it, but your words make me recall my past. I was the one who convinced Ghisola to satisfy the desires of the Marquis, though the shameful story is well known."

He continued, "I'm not the only one from Bologna here in Hell; this place is full of others. In fact, no one around here says 'sipa' anymore, and if you want proof, remember our greedy hearts."

Before he could say more, a demon struck him with a whip and said, "Get away, pander. There are no women here for sale."

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I moved on and joined Virgil again. We walked a little further and came to a crag that projected from the edge of the bank. It was easy to climb, and as we turned right along its ridge, we left the circles we had been passing through.

When we reached a place hollowed out beneath the crag, Virgil told me to wait and watch as I would soon see more of the damned, whose faces I hadn't yet seen because they were in a different group.

From the old bridge, we looked at a group approaching on the other side of the ditch. They were also being lashed by demons. Virgil pointed out one sinner in particular: "Do you see that tall one coming towards us? He seems to suffer without shedding tears. That is Jason, the man who used his heart and cunning to deprive the Colchians of the Ram."

Virgil explained, "Jason passed by the island of Lemnos after the women there, in their cruelty, had killed all their men. Jason deceived Hypsipyle, the maiden who had already deceived the others, and left her pregnant and abandoned. For such sins, he is being punished here, as is Medea, who also seeks vengeance."

With Jason, there were others who had committed similar deceptions, and this was just the first valley of Malebolge. Virgil then took me to the second ditch, where we could hear more people lamenting.

The crag we ascended led to another arch, and there we saw a sickening sight. The margins of the next ditch were covered in a thick mold, which was so offensive that it seemed to fight with their eyes and nostrils.

At the bottom of the ditch, which was so deep we couldn't see it without climbing higher, I saw people being suffocated in filth. It seemed to flow from human waste. I looked more closely and saw one sinner with his head so filthy I couldn't tell if he was a clerk or a layman.

He screamed, "Why do you look at me more than the others?"

I replied, "I recognize you. You're Alessio Interminei of Lucca. That's why I'm paying more attention to you."

The sinner responded, "It's the flatterers who drowned me here. I never got enough of that from my own tongue."

Virgil then said, "Look a little further, for you'll see the next soul, a woman who scratches herself with filthy nails and crouches, or stands, in the muck. That's Thais, the harlot who responded to her lover's question, 'Have I done well by you?' by saying, 'No, I've done better.'"

Virgil then told me that our sight was to be satisfied here, and we continued our journey.

Inferno: Canto XIX

O Simon Magus, O lost disciples, you who have prostituted the things of God—things that should be holy brides—now it is time for the trumpet to sound for you, because in this third Bolgia you remain.

We had already climbed to the next tomb and reached that part of the crag that hangs directly above the middle of the moat.

Supreme Wisdom, how great you show yourself in Heaven, on Earth, and in the evil world, and with what justice does your power distribute everything!

I saw on the sides and the bottom of the pit livid stone, filled with round holes, all the same size. They were not larger or smaller than those that in my beautiful Saint John are made for the baptisms, and one of them, not many years ago, I broke for someone who was drowning in it. Let this be a sign to undeceive everyone.

From each hole, the feet of a sinner protruded, with their legs up to the calf, the rest of their bodies remained inside the hole. The soles of their feet were on fire, which caused their joints to tremble so violently that it would have snapped any ropes or bands.

Just as the flame of oily things moves only on the surface, so the fire was there, burning from heel to toe.

“Master, who is that one who is writhing more than the others, with a redder flame licking him?” I asked.

“If you want to learn about him, come with me down to that lower part of the bank,” said Virgil, “and you’ll learn about his errors and who he is.”

“What pleases you, pleases me,” I replied. “You are my guide, and you know that I don’t deviate from your will. You know what I don’t say.”

We went down the fourth dike and turned to the left, descending to the bottom, which was full of holes and narrow.

Virgil did not set me down from his back until he brought me to the hole of the sinner who was lamenting with his legs exposed.

“Whoever you are, standing upside down, miserable soul stuck like a stake, if you can, speak,” I began.

I stood there like a friar hearing the confession of a false murderer, hoping to delay his execution.

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The sinner shouted, “Are you already standing there, Boniface? By many years, I was lied to.”

“Are you already satisfied with that wealth you gained by fraud? You took the beautiful Lady and worked her harm.”

I was confused, unsure of how to respond, like someone who doesn’t understand what has been said to them and is mocked.

Virgil said, “Say to him immediately, ‘I am not he, I am not Boniface.’”

I did as Virgil instructed.

The spirit writhed his feet in anger. Then, sighing, with a voice of lamentation, he said, “Then what do you want from me? If you care so much to know who I am, know that I was vested with the great mantle. And truly, I was the son of the She-bear, eager to advance the cubs. I pocketed both wealth above and here, for my greedy heart.

Under my head, others have been dragged down who preceded me in simony, flattened in the fissure of the rock. Below, I’ll fall as well, whenever that one arrives whom I believed you were. When I asked the question I asked, he shall come.

But I have been here longer than he will be, planted with red feet. After him, a worse pastor will come, a lawless one from the west, as wicked as the one who rules France. He will be the new Jason, as his king was pliant to him.”

I don’t know if I was too bold in answering him, but I said, “Please tell me, what treasure did our Lord demand of Saint Peter before giving him the keys? He didn’t ask for silver or gold, only ‘Follow me.’ Neither Peter nor Matthias asked for gold or silver when he was chosen by lot to take Judas’ place.”

“Therefore, stay here, for you’re justly punished, and guard the ill-gotten money that made you act against Charles. And if I weren’t still respectful of the supreme keys you once held, I would say harsher words. Your greed harms the world, trampling the good and elevating the wicked.”

“You pastors had the Evangelist in mind when she who sits on many waters fornicated with kings. You have made yourselves gods of gold and silver. What is the difference between you and the idolater, except that he worships one idol and you worship many?”

“Ah, Constantine! How much evil did your conversion bring about, not by your conversion but by that marriage dowry that the first wealthy Father took from you.”

As I spoke these words to him, either his anger or his conscience made him struggle violently with his feet.

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I think that Virgil was pleased with my response, as he listened with satisfaction to the truth of my words.

Virgil then took me up again, and when he had me fully on his chest, he remounted by the way he had descended. He did not tire of carrying me, and he bore me to the summit of the arch, which serves as a passage from the fourth dike to the fifth.

There, he gently set me down on the rough crag, which would have been a difficult passage for goats.

From there, I saw another valley revealed.

Inferno: Canto XX

A new kind of pain now compels me to write verses and add to the twentieth canto of the first part, which concerns the damned.

I was already fully prepared to look down into the exposed depth, which bathed itself in tears of suffering, when I saw people moving through the circular valley, silent and weeping, moving at a pace similar to the Litanies in this world.

As I looked further down at them, each of them seemed strangely distorted from their chin to the top of their chest. Their faces were turned toward their backs, and they had to walk backward, for they were no longer able to look forward.

Perhaps by the violence of paralysis, someone might be twisted this way, but I had never seen it before, nor do I think it could be.

As God allows you, Reader, to find wisdom in this reading, try now to think for yourself how I could have kept my face dry when I saw our own image, so distorted, with tears flowing down the back of the body.

Truly, I wept, leaning on a peak of the hard rock, and my guide said to me, "Are you also one of the other fools? Here, pity is dead. Who could be a greater sinner than one who feels pity for the divine judgment?"

"Lift up your head and see who the earth opened up before the Thebans' eyes, causing them to shout: 'Why are you rushing, Amphiaraus? Why leave the war?' And still he fell, as far as Minos, who controls the damned."

"Look, see how he's formed his chest into a shield! He wanted to look ahead too much, so he turned his back and went backward."

"Behold Tiresias, who changed his form when he became a woman from a man, and after that, struck the two entangled serpents with his rod to regain his male form."

"That is Aruns, who prophesied in Luni, where the Carrarese lived, and had a cave there among the white marbles. He lived in a place where he could see the stars and the sea."

"And she, who hides her breasts and has all the hair on one side of her body, is Manto, who wandered through many lands after her father died and the city of Bacchus was enslaved. She eventually came to my birthplace, and there I want to tell you a bit more."

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"After her father's death and the fall of the city of Bacchus, Manto traveled the world. In northern Italy, at the foot of the Alps, by the Tyrol, there is a lake called Benaco, which is fed by many springs. It sits between Garda and Val Camonica."

"In the middle of this lake is a place where the Trentine Bishop, the Bishop of Brescia, and the Veronese could bless the people who passed through. Peschiera sits there as a fortress against the Brescians and Bergamasks. It is on the lowest point of the bank."

"There, anything in the lake that can't stay falls into the river. It turns into the Mincio River, flowing until it meets the Po River. The river creates a marsh and becomes stagnant in the summer, making the air unhealthy."

"By the virgin land in the middle of the swamp, she wandered with her servants, practicing her arts, living and leaving her body behind. Men came, and they built their city over her remains. They named it Mantua, after her."

"At first, the city was full, but later it became corrupted by the deceit of Casalodi from Pinamonte. So, if you ever hear of my city by another name, don't let falsehood deceive you."

I said to my Master, "Your teachings are so clear and convincing that I can't argue with them. But tell me about those passing by. If you see anyone noteworthy, let me know, for that is what occupies my mind."

He replied, "Look at that tall one coming toward us, whose pain seems to make him shed no tears. That's Jason, the one who, through his wit and cunning, led the Colchians to give up the golden ram."

"He passed by the island of Lemnos after the women there had killed all their men. There, he deceived Hypsipyle, the maiden, just as she had once deceived the others. He left her pregnant and abandoned, which is why he is being punished here. This is his punishment for his betrayal, and Medea's vengeance is also here."

"With him go others who deceived in the same way. This is enough to understand the first valley and those it holds."

We reached the narrow path where the second dike crosses, creating a buttress for the next arch. There, we heard people moaning in the next Bolgia, beating their faces with their palms as they struggled through the filth.

The banks were covered in a thick, sticky substance from below, and the air was filled with a foul stench that attacked their eyes and nostrils.

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I looked down into the moat, but it was so deep that I had to climb the arch to get a better view. When we reached the arch, I saw people smothered in filth, as if it were coming from human waste.

While I looked, I saw one soul whose head was so covered in filth that I couldn't tell if he was a cleric or a layman. He shouted to me, "Why are you staring at me more than the others?"

I replied, "Because I think I recognize you. Aren't you Alessio Interminei of Lucca? That's why I'm watching you more closely."

He responded, "Flatterers like me are submerged here, where my tongue was never satisfied. You know how we are consumed by this."

Then Virgil said to me, "Look further ahead at that woman, scratching herself with filthy nails, who now crouches and now stands up. She's Thais, the harlot who once answered her lover when he asked, 'Do I have your gratitude?' 'No, marvelously so!' Let's look at her, and be done with it."

Inferno: Canto XXI

We walked from bridge to bridge, speaking of other things that my *Comedy* does not sing about. Eventually, we reached the summit and stopped to look at another opening in Malebolge, a place filled with more vain cries. It was incredibly dark.

As in the Venetian Arsenal, where they boil pitch in winter to repair ships, I saw something similar below us. The pitch wasn't boiling by fire, but by some divine craft. It covered the area on all sides, just as it would in the shipyards where they reseal vessels that have made many voyages. Workers there hammer at the prow, stern, and ribs, and make oars and rigging, just like what I saw in the boiling pitch.

I could only see the bubbles rising from the boiling pitch, swelling up and then sinking down again. While I watched, my Guide shouted, "Beware, beware!" and quickly pulled me away from where I stood.

I turned around, startled, as if some sudden terror had paralyzed me. Behind us, I saw a black devil running along the rock, approaching us. How fierce he looked! And how ruthless he seemed as he moved quickly, with wings spread and light on his feet!

His shoulders were sharp and high, and he carried a sinner on his back, gripping the sinner's legs with both hands. From the bridge, the devil shouted, "Look at one of Saint Zita's elders! Throw him down into the pitch, because I'll return for others from that town, which is full of corrupt people. Everyone there is a barrator, except Bonturo. In that place, 'No' is turned into 'Yes' for money."

He hurled the sinner down, and the devil turned around and sped off as fast as a mastiff chasing a thief.

The sinner sank, then surfaced again face down, while the demons beneath the bridge shouted, "Here the Santo Volto doesn't help! This is not the Serchio River. If you don't want to get caught by our hooks, don't try to rise above the pitch."

The demons seized him with more than a hundred hooks and said, "Here you must dance, covered in pitch, and if you can, you might steal from us secretly."

It was like how cooks use hooks to push the meat down into the cauldron so it doesn't float.

Then my Guide said to me, "To avoid being noticed here, crouch down behind one of these jagged rocks. Don't fear for any harm done to me because I know how to handle these situations. I've been in a similar scuffle before."

INFERNO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

We crossed over to the head of the bridge, and when we reached the sixth bank, we needed to stand firm.

The demons were furious, just like dogs that rush out at a beggar who suddenly asks for help, wherever he stops. They came out from under the little bridge, holding their hooks, but the sinner cried out, “Don’t be malicious! Before your hooks touch me, let one of you step forward and hear me. Then take counsel about how to handle me.”

They all shouted, “Let Malacoda go,” and one devil stepped forward, while the others stood still. The devil approached him and said, “What do you want?”

My Master replied, “Do you think I’ve come here by my own skill or without divine will and fate? Let me pass, for Heaven has decreed that I show this wild path.”

The devil’s arrogance was humbled, and he dropped his hook at his feet. He then told the other demons, “Don’t strike him.”

To me, my Guide said, “Now come, for you’re safe here. Don’t worry, you can return to me.”

I quickly went back to my Guide, and all the demons tried to get in front of me, but I pressed myself close to my Leader, not taking my eyes off their threatening faces.

They lowered their hooks, talking among themselves: “Shall we hit him on the back?” “Yes, make sure you nick him with it.”

But the devil who had been talking to my Guide turned quickly and said, “Be quiet, Scarmiglione! Stop it.”

Then he said to us, “You can’t go any farther along this crag because the sixth arch is broken at the bottom. But if you still want to continue, follow me along this rock, where there is another path.”

“Yesterday, five hours later than this time, one thousand two hundred sixty-six years ago, this way was broken. I’m sending some of my demons ahead to see if anyone is coming through. Go with them, because they’ll be harmless to you.”

The devil shouted, “Step forward, Alichino, Calcabrina, Cagnazzo, Barbariccia, and all of you. Go and search the boiling pitch. These two can pass safely as far as the next crag, where it’s still intact.”

I asked my Guide, “Master, do you not see that they are gnashing their teeth and threatening us? Should we not be afraid?”

INFERNO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

He replied, “Do not fear. Let them gnash their teeth all they want, because they are angry about the sinners in the boiling pitch.”

The demons moved toward the left-hand dike, each one making a sign of the tongue between their teeth to their leader, who then blew his rear end like a trumpet.

Inferno: Canto XXII

We went on our way with the ten demons—what a terrible group they were! But they seemed to fit right in, whether in a church with saints or in a tavern with gluttons. My main focus was on the pitch, to see the full condition of the Bolgia and the people who were being burned in it.

As dolphins signal sailors by arching their backs, showing them when to steer their ships to avoid danger, so too did the sinners in the pitch sometimes raise their backs to relieve their pain, but they quickly sank back down again.

The sinners stood, just like frogs at the edge of a pond, with only their muzzles out of the pitch to breathe. As the demon Barbariccia came near them, they quickly sank back under the boiling pitch.

I saw one sinner struggling like a frog that stays behind while the others dive down. The demon Graffiacane caught him by his hair, which was covered in pitch, and pulled him up like an otter.

I already knew the names of all the demons, and I had noted them when they were chosen. When they called to each other, I listened to how they spoke.

“Rubicante, grab him with your claws and skin him,” they all cried.

I said to my Guide, “Master, if you can, find out who this unfortunate soul is, who has fallen into the hands of his enemies.”

My Leader approached the sinner and asked him where he was from. The sinner answered, “I was born in the kingdom of Navarre. My mother put me to work as a servant for a lord, because she had given birth to me by a man who destroyed himself and everything he had.

Later, I became a servant of King Thibault, where I began practicing barratry, which is why I am being punished in this boiling heat.”

At that moment, Ciriatto, one of the demons, with his boar-like tusks, attacked the sinner and tore his flesh.

As I watched, I thought that this sinner had come into the wrong company, just as a mouse might fall among malicious cats. But the demon Barbariccia grabbed the sinner and said, “Step aside while I fork him.”

The demons were still furious. My Guide turned to the sinner and said, “Tell us about the other sinners. Do you know anyone from Latium who is here under the pitch?”

The sinner replied, “I recently separated from someone who was close to me. I wish I were still with him, because I wouldn’t fear the claws or hooks here!”

INFERNO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

Libicocco, another demon, seized the sinner by the arm, ripping his tendon with his grappling hook. Draghignazzo tried to grab him by the legs, but the leader of the demons, their Decurion, turned and looked at them with an evil eye.

When the demons were somewhat pacified, my Guide asked the sinner again, “Who was the one you left behind to come ashore?”

The sinner answered, “It was Friar Gomita, from Gallura. He was a vessel of all fraud, who took care of his Lord’s enemies and let them go free for money. He was a sovereign barrator.”

The sinner then continued, “He worked with Don Michael Zanche of Logodoro, and they never tired of gossiping about Sardinia.”

As the sinner spoke, Farfarello, one of the demons, glared at him. The demon turned to his comrades and said, “Let me tell you, this man is mocking us. He’s tricked us.”

“Whoever you are,” the sinner said, “I’ll make seven of you come when I whistle. But let the Malebranche stop for a while so that these people here can be safe.”

Cagnazzo, another demon, lifted his head and shook it, saying, “This trick he has thought of to throw himself into the pitch—let’s see how he fares!”

Alichino, one of the demons, ran after the sinner, but instead of diving into the pitch, he flew above it, keeping his wings spread out to block the sinner’s path. But the sinner was quick. He planted his feet on the shore and, in one swift movement, leapt free, escaping from the demons’ grasp.

The demons were furious. They tried to catch him again, but the sinner, like a duck diving under the falcon’s approach, swam under the pitch and shot up to the surface.

The demons were infuriated by the mockery, especially Calcabrina, who followed close behind, hoping the sinner would escape so that he could start a fight. But the sinner vanished, and in his fury, Calcabrina attacked the other demon, and they both fell into the boiling pitch.

The heat was so intense that neither could rise from the pitch. And so, the demons were busy with their hooks and started flying across the boiling pond to check on the sinners stuck in the pitch. We left them there, still working to catch and punish the sinners.

Inferno: Canto XXIII

We went on, silent and alone, with one walking ahead and the other behind, like the Minor Friars on their way. My thoughts turned to Aesop's fable about the frog and the mouse, comparing it to our situation. I thought how the frog and mouse are more alike than they might seem, especially when you carefully consider their similarities.

As I thought about this, another thought came to mind, one that made my fear double. I began to fear that those behind us would come after us with great anger and hatred, much like a dog chasing a rabbit. My hair stood on end at the thought of the Malebranche demons catching up to us.

I said to my Guide, "Master, if you don't hide us quickly, I fear the Malebranche will catch us. I can feel them coming after us already."

He replied, "If I were made of leaded glass, I wouldn't be able to reflect your thoughts more quickly than I do now. Your fear has entered my mind, just as mine has entered yours. If we can make our way down the right bank, we can escape them."

Before he could finish speaking, I saw them approaching with their wings outstretched, ready to seize us. My Guide, like a mother who suddenly wakes to see a fire and quickly grabs her child, picked me up and carried me down. He moved as swiftly as water rushing through a sluice, quickly bearing me away as his own son, not as a companion.

He didn't stop until we reached the bottom of the ravine, where we found a painted group of souls, moving slowly with their heads bowed, weeping, and worn down by their suffering. They wore mantles with their hoods drawn low over their eyes, made of the kind of cloth used for monks in Cologne, shiny on the outside, but heavy with lead inside, causing them to sag.

These people moved so slowly, weighed down by the heavy cloaks, that we seemed to pass them quickly with every step we took. I said to my Leader, "Master, can you find someone who can be recognized, so we can learn more about these souls as we move along?"

One of them, who understood Tuscan, called out from behind us, "Stop, you who are moving so quickly through this dark air! Perhaps I can give you what you're looking for."

The Leader turned to him and said, "Wait for him, and then proceed at his pace."

We stopped, and soon I saw two souls approach with urgency, although their heavy burden and narrow path slowed them down. When they came up to us, they looked at me with suspicion, then whispered to each other. One of them finally spoke to me: "You seem alive by the way your throat moves, but if you're dead, why are you not covered by the heavy cloak like the others?"

INFERNO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

I answered, “I was born in the great city by the fair river Arno, and I still have the same body I was born with. But who are you, who cry so much, and what is your pain?”

One replied, “These cloaks we wear are made of lead, so heavy that they creak. We were the Frati Gaudenti of Bologna. I am Catalano, and he is Loderingo. We were taken by your city, as is customary, to help maintain peace. But we were such that even now the stench of our actions is apparent.”

I began to say, “O Friars, your wickedness...” but before I could finish, I saw a figure nailed to a cross, with three stakes driven into the ground.

When he saw me, he twisted in agony and blew out his breath, groaning. The Friar Catalano noticed this and explained, “This man was the one who advised the Pharisees that it was right to put one man to death for the people. He is suffering here, as you see, for his role in leading others to damnation.”

I looked at the crucified figure and turned to my Guide. My Guide asked the Friar, “Can you tell us if there is a way out of here, a way we can pass safely from this place?”

The Friar replied, “Just ahead, there is a rock that extends from the great circle and crosses all the terrible valleys. However, the rock breaks here, so you can’t pass over it, but you can climb up the ruins and find another path.”

My Leader paused, his head bowed in thought, then said, “The person who described this passage did so poorly, for he failed to explain how difficult it would be to get past the demons in this area.”

The Friar responded, “Many of the devil’s vices I have heard about in Bologna, and among them is that he is a liar and the father of lies.”

My Leader, clearly disturbed, began to walk with more urgency, and I followed, making sure to keep pace with him. We left the heavy burden of the Friars behind, and I focused on the footsteps of my beloved Guide.

Inferno: Canto XXIV

At the time of year when the sun, moving through the constellation of Aquarius, tempers its light, and the days and nights are nearly equal, the frost on the ground copies the whiteness of snow. However, it doesn't last long. The farmer, seeing that his crops are ruined, rises in the morning to find the fields covered in frost. He laments, not knowing what to do. But then, as the world changes and the frost disappears, he regains hope and goes out to tend his sheep.

In the same way, my Master filled me with alarm when I saw his face so troubled. When we reached the ruined bridge, he suddenly turned to me with the same kind expression I had first seen when we began our journey. He opened his arms, and after thinking for a moment, he lifted me up and started to climb a huge rock, telling me to follow him. The ascent was steep and difficult, but we managed to climb with effort.

If the rock had not been shorter at this point than the others, I would have been exhausted. But because the terrain here sloped down toward the deepest well of Malebolge, it made the journey slightly easier. Eventually, we reached the point where the last stone of the bridge had crumbled away.

When I finally reached the top, I was so winded that I could go no further and sat down. My Master then told me to get up, saying that those who live a life of laziness will leave behind no trace of themselves except for fleeting things like smoke or foam. To avoid that fate, he urged me to rise, overcome my weariness, and keep going.

I stood up, feeling better, and we continued upward along the crag. The path became even narrower and steeper than before. As we walked, a voice came from the next gorge, sounding angry but unintelligible. I couldn't understand what it said, and asked my Guide to help us move forward.

The Master told me to wait until we reached the next round and to follow him down the wall, as we couldn't make sense of the voice or see the bottom in the darkness. We descended from the bridge, and at the foot of it, we saw the next Bolgia. It was filled with a terrifying crowd of serpents, so many and of such a monstrous variety that I couldn't help but feel the blood freeze in my veins.

Libya could no longer boast of having such venomous creatures as Chelydri, Jaculi, and Phareae; their numbers were outmatched by the plagues of serpents in this place. The souls of the damned were running in fear, without any hope of escaping the torment. They had their hands bound behind their backs by serpents, their heads and tails entwined in front of them.

I saw one of them, and a serpent shot out from the side, striking him at the neck. The man immediately caught fire and was burned to ashes. As the ashes fell to the ground, they gathered

INFERNO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

together and reformed into the same person. This transformation reminded me of the phoenix, which dies and is reborn after five hundred years.

The sinner, having been destroyed and then reborn, was as confused as someone who had fallen and doesn't know how they got there. He sighed and looked around, bewildered by the suffering he had just endured.

My Guide then asked the sinner who he was. The sinner replied, "I came from Tuscany recently and have fallen into this pit. I lived a beastly life, even worse than a mule. I am Vanni Fucci, a beast from Pistoia."

I asked my Guide to learn more about this sinner's crime, as I remembered him from the past as a man of anger and blood. The sinner, hearing this, didn't try to hide but looked at me with shame. He said, "I regret more that you've found me here than that I died and came to this place. The crime that brought me here was robbing the sacristy and falsely blaming someone else for it. If you want to know more, listen carefully. Pistoia will be the first to suffer, and then Florence will renew itself, leading to a bloody battle between the factions. The Bianco party will be struck down by Mars's fury, and the city will pay for its deeds."

Inferno: Canto XXV

At the conclusion of the thief's words, he raised both hands, aiming them at God, and said, "Take that, God, for at you I aim them." From that moment onward, the serpents seemed to be his allies. One of them coiled itself around his neck, as if to silence him. Another wrapped around his arms, binding him so tightly that he couldn't move.

Pistoia! Why don't you just burn yourself to ashes, since you are so skilled in doing evil? I saw no spirit in Hell more arrogant than the one who had fallen at Thebes from the walls.

The thief fled away without speaking another word, and soon a furious centaur appeared, shouting: "Where is the scoffer?" I do not think Maremma has so many serpents as the centaur had along his back, from his neck to his shoulders.

On his shoulders, just behind his neck, was a dragon with its wings spread wide. It set fire to everything it touched.

My Master said, "That is Cacus, who lived beneath the rock on Mount Aventine. He created a lake of blood, and did so often. He did not follow the same path as his brothers because of his fraudulent theft of a large herd, which he had near him. His torturous actions were eventually ended by Hercules, who perhaps struck him with a hundred blows, though he felt not even ten."

As the Master was speaking, we moved on and were soon approached by three spirits who came beneath us, and we hadn't noticed them until they shouted, "Who are you?" At this, our conversation stopped, and we focused on them.

I didn't know them at first, but as is often the case, one of them was forced to call out the name of the other. One cried, "Where is Cianfa?" At this, I raised my finger from my chin to my nose to get the Master's attention.

Reader, if you find it hard to believe what I'm about to say, it's understandable. Even I, who witnessed it, can hardly admit it. As I looked up at them, a serpent with six legs darted out in front of one of the spirits and bit him.

The serpent wrapped its middle legs around his stomach, its front legs seized his arms, and it bit into both sides of his face. Its hind legs wrapped around his thighs, and its tail slithered between his legs and up along his back.

It was like ivy twisting around a tree, but it was a horrible, monstrous reptile that wrapped itself around the other's limbs. The two bodies stuck together as if they were made of heated wax. The two figures merged into one face, and all the distinct features vanished.

INFERNO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

As a lizard, tired under the summer heat, might change its hole, so these two figures merged into one. Then another fiery serpent appeared, small and black, like a peppercorn. It struck one of the bodies in the place where food is taken in, and immediately the body collapsed, extending in front of it.

The one who was struck said nothing. He simply stared at the serpent, while both he and the serpent exhaled smoke that mingled together.

At this moment, Lucan and Ovid should remain silent, for they speak of transformations but never of a change so complete that both figures could intermingle and form one. In the way of a flame on paper, the two figures changed and merged.

As the transformation completed, the two bodies joined together, one of the serpents took the human shape, and the other's skin became reptilian. The limbs of one body became the limbs of the other, and their parts twisted in unnatural ways.

They began to swap parts like a puzzle, with one body gaining features of the other. The transformation was so complete that they seemed entirely different beings. The serpent now had the form of a man, and the man the form of a serpent. It was a horrifying sight to witness.

As the transformation finished, the one now in the serpent's form slithered off, hissing as it went, and the other began to speak. "I'll have Buoso crawl like I did," said the transformed creature, as they continued their journey.

I saw the seventh shift of transformation, and my pen trembles to describe it. Despite the confusion in my mind, I couldn't help but recognize Puccio Sciancato, the only one who had not changed among the three companions who first came. The other, the one whom you, Gaville, weep for, had also fallen into such a fate.

Inferno: Canto XXVI

Rejoice, Florence, because you are so great that you rule over both land and sea, and your name is known throughout Hell!

Among the thieves, I found five citizens from your city, which brings me shame, and you don't rise to any great honor because of it.

But if, as we often believe, our dreams are true when morning is near, you will soon feel what Prato, if no one else, desires for you.

And if it were now, it wouldn't be too soon; I wish it were, because it must happen, and it will trouble me more the older I get.

We continued on our way, and climbed back up the stairs we had descended earlier. My guide, without pause, led me up and continued pulling me along.

As we followed a narrow path between the rocks and cliffs, it became clear that the foot alone couldn't make much progress without the hand to help.

I was sorrowful then, and still feel sorrow now when I reflect on what I saw. I try to control my mind more than usual so it doesn't wander. I want it to be guided by virtue, so that if any good comes to me, I won't begrudge it.

As many glow-worms as the deer sees in the valley—perhaps where it plows or harvests—so were the flames in the eighth pit, as I realized as soon as I saw the depth of the valley.

It was as if a man had seen Elijah's chariot rise, so high that his eyes couldn't follow it anymore, and all he could see was flame, much like a small cloud rising into the air.

So, each spirit in the trench moved in a similar way, and not one revealed their crime. Each flame hid a sinner inside it, stealing them away.

I stood on the bridge to see, and if I hadn't grabbed a rock, I would have fallen.

My guide, who noticed how intently I was watching, said, "The spirits are inside the flames. Each one wraps itself in the fire it burns with."

I replied, "Master, from what you said, I'm more certain, but I had already suspected this and wanted to ask you. Who is in that flame, the one that looks split at the top like it came from the pyre where Eteocles and his brother were?"

He answered, "Inside that flame are Ulysses and Diomedes. Together, they run toward vengeance just as they ran toward wrath in life. In their fire, they lament the trick of the horse that allowed

INFERNO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

the Romans to conquer Troy. They mourn the deceit that led to the death of Achilles, and the loss of the Palladium.”

“If they can speak within those flames,” I said, “I beg you, Master, to let us wait until the flame comes closer. I desire to hear from them.”

He answered, “Your request is worthy of praise, so I accept it, but keep your tongue in check. Let me speak, for I know what you desire, and they may not welcome your words, being Greeks.”

When the flame had come to the right place, where my guide thought it was time, he called out in this way:

“O you, who are two souls in one fire, if I deserved anything from you while I was alive, either much or little, for the lofty verses I wrote, do not move on. One of you speak and tell me where you went after you were lost.”

Then, the larger of the two flames began to stir, like a flame that is disturbed by the wind.

The top of the flame moved as if it were the tongue of a speaker, and it spoke: “When I left Circe, who kept me hidden near Gaeta for more than a year before Aeneas named it, neither love for my son, nor respect for my old father, nor the proper affection for Penelope, could stop me from seeking knowledge of the world, both its vices and virtues.

I set out with one ship, and the small company that never abandoned me. I saw both shores, from Spain to Morocco, and the island of Sardinia, and all the lands that the sea touches.

We were old and slow when we reached the narrow passage where Hercules set his landmarks, warning men not to go further. I left Seville on my right and Ceuta on my left.

‘O brothers,’ I said, ‘who have come to the West through a hundred thousand dangers, do not deny yourselves the knowledge of the uninhabited world, following the sun. Remember the seed from which you came. You were not made to live like animals, but to seek virtue and knowledge.’

So eager was I to encourage my companions that I could hardly stop them. And when we turned our backs to the morning and set sail, we used our oars as wings for our flight, moving swiftly toward the left side.

We sailed, and the stars of the opposite hemisphere were already visible. Ours were so low that they didn’t rise above the ocean.

INFERNO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

Five times the moon's light had been kindled and then quenched before we entered the deep passage, when we saw a mountain in the distance. It seemed so high that I had never seen anything like it.

We rejoiced, but soon our joy turned to sorrow when a whirlwind rose from the new land and struck the front of our ship. Three times it made the ship spin in the water. On the fourth time, it lifted the stern, and the bow sank, as though a higher power was in control, until the sea closed over us."

Inferno: Canto XXVII

The flame was quiet now, no longer speaking, and it moved away from us with the permission of my kind guide.

But soon another flame, which had been behind it, caused us to turn our attention to its top because of a strange sound that came from it.

It sounded like the bellowing of the Sicilian bull, the one that first cried out with the lament of the man who had modified it with his file. It made a sound of suffering, so intense that, even though it was made of brass, it seemed to cry out in agony.

This flame, having no way to leave the fire at first, transformed the words into its own language, and then, as it gained strength and passed through the tip of the fire, the sound was shaped by the same rhythm the flame had taken.

We heard it say: "Oh, you, to whom I direct my voice, who just a moment ago were speaking in Lombard, saying, 'Now go your way, I no longer urge you,' since I may be a little late, don't mind staying and speaking with me. It doesn't bother me, and I am burning."

"If you've only recently come from that sweet Latin land, where I bring all my transgressions, tell me, are the people of Romagna at peace or at war? I am from the mountains between Urbino and the place where the Tiber flows out."

I was still leaning forward, listening intently, when my guide touched me and said, "Speak up: this one is from Latium."

I had already prepared my response, and immediately began speaking: "Oh soul, who are hidden down there, Romagna of yours has never been without war within the hearts of its tyrants, but open war has ceased. Ravenna still stands, as it has for many years; the eagle of Polenta is watching over it, so much so that it now covers Cervia with its wings.

The city that once fought so hard, and left the French in a bloody heap, now finds itself under the Green Paws.

The Mastiffs of Verrucchio, both old and new, who dealt with Montagna's affairs badly, are still there, where their teeth gnaw.

The cities of Lamone and Santerno are ruled by the Lioncel from the white lair, who changes sides from summer to winter.

The one by the Savio River, as it sits between the plain and the mountain, still lives in a state of tyranny and freedom."

INFERNO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

"Now, I beg you, tell us who you are; do not be more stubborn than the others. Let your name be known, so it can be remembered in the world."

After the flame had flickered a little more in its own way, it shifted and gave off a breath, which seemed to speak: "If I believed that my words would be heard by one who would return to the world, this flame would burn without flickering; but since no one ever comes back from this depth, if I hear correctly, I will speak without fear of shame."

"I was a man of arms, and later a monk, thinking that wearing the habit would atone for my sins. And truly, my belief was fulfilled, but for the Pope, who led me back into my old sins. I will tell you how and why.

When I was still in the body my mother gave me, I didn't act like a lion, but more like a fox. I knew all the tricks and practiced them so well that my name spread throughout the world.

When I reached the age where one should slow down and reflect, I found that what had pleased me before no longer satisfied me. I turned penitent, and confessed, but it would have been better for me if I had stopped before.

The Pope, who was engaged in a war near the Lateran, not with Saracens or Jews but with other Christians, came to me for advice. He didn't care about my holy orders or the cord that made those who wore it more humble.

Like Constantine sought out Sylvester to cure his leprosy, this Pope came to me to cure his pride. He asked for my counsel, and I kept silent because his words seemed drunk.

Then he said, 'Do not be afraid. I absolve you. Now teach me how to destroy Palestrina.'

'I have the power to open and close Heaven's gates,' he said, 'as you know. The keys are two, and my predecessor didn't treat them with respect.'

He insisted on my advice, and I, silent at first, finally told him, 'Father, since you absolve me, I'll teach you how to destroy Palestrina. It's your duty to guide the faithful.'

Later, when I died, Francis came to claim me. But one of the black cherubs stopped him, saying, 'Do not take him; he gave false counsel, and since that moment, I have been chasing after him.'"

As he finished telling his story, the flame left, still lamenting and twisting in its sharp pointed horn.

We moved forward, climbing up the crag to the next arch. There, we came to the moat where those who sow discord face the consequences of their actions.

INFERNO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

Inferno: Canto XXVIII

As the flame finished speaking, it stood still, no longer moving, and then it departed from us with the permission of my guide.

But as it left, another flame came up behind it, causing us to turn our attention to its top because of a strange sound that came from it.

It was like the bellowing of the Sicilian bull, which first cried out in agony when it was modulated by the man who had altered it with his file. The sound was so intense that, even though the bull was made of brass, it seemed to cry out in pain.

The flame, unable to escape at first, transformed the words it spoke into its own language, and once it had gained enough strength, the words were finally able to leave the fire.

We heard the flame speak: "Oh you, to whom I direct my voice, who just a moment ago were speaking in Lombard, saying 'Now go your way, I no longer urge you,' since I come a little late, don't mind staying and talking to me. It doesn't bother me, and I am burning. If you have recently fallen into this dark world from that sweet land of Latium, where I bring all my transgressions, tell me, are the people of Romagna at peace or at war? I am from the mountains between Urbino and the place where the Tiber flows out."

I was still leaning forward, listening, when my guide nudged me and said, "Speak up: this one is from Latium."

I had already prepared my response and immediately spoke: "Oh soul, who are hidden down there, Romagna of yours has never been without war within the hearts of its tyrants, but open war has ceased. Ravenna still stands, as it has for many years; the eagle of Polenta is watching over it, covering Cervia with its wings.

The city that once fought so hard and left the French in a bloody heap now finds itself under the Green Paws.

The Mastiffs of Verrucchio, both old and new, who dealt with Montagna's affairs badly, are still there, gnashing their teeth.

The cities of Lamone and Santerno are ruled by the Lioncel from the white lair, who changes sides with the seasons.

The one by the Savio River, sitting between the plain and the mountain, still lives in a state of tyranny and freedom."

INFERNO
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"Now, I beg you, tell us who you are; do not be more stubborn than the others. Let your name be known so it can be remembered in the world."

After the flame flickered a bit more in its own way, it gave off a breath and started to speak: "If I believed that my words would be heard by someone who would return to the world, this flame would burn without flickering; but since no one ever comes back from this depth, I'll speak without fear of shame."

"I was a man of arms, and later a monk, thinking that wearing the habit would atone for my sins. And truly, my belief was fulfilled, but for the Pope, who led me back into my old sins. I'll tell you how and why.

When I was still in the body my mother gave me, I didn't act like a lion, but more like a fox. I knew all the tricks and practiced them so well that my name spread throughout the world.

When I reached the age where one should slow down and reflect, I found that what had pleased me before no longer satisfied me. I turned penitent, and confessed, but it would have been better for me if I had stopped before.

The Pope, who was engaged in a war near the Lateran, not with Saracens or Jews but with other Christians, came to me for advice. He didn't care about my holy orders or the cord that made those who wore it more humble.

Like Constantine sought out Sylvester to cure his leprosy, this Pope came to me to cure his pride. He asked for my counsel, and I kept silent because his words seemed drunk.

Then he said, 'Do not be afraid. I absolve you. Now teach me how to destroy Palestrina.'

'I have the power to open and close Heaven's gates,' he said, 'as you know. The keys are two, and my predecessor didn't treat them with respect.'

He insisted on my advice, and I, silent at first, finally told him, 'Father, since you absolve me, I'll teach you how to destroy Palestrina. It's your duty to guide the faithful.'

Later, when I died, Francis came to claim me. But one of the black cherubs stopped him, saying, 'Do not take him; he gave false counsel, and since that moment, I have been chasing after him.'"

As he finished telling his story, the flame left, still lamenting and twisting in its sharp pointed horn.

We moved forward, climbing up the crag to the next arch. There, we came to the moat where those who sow discord face the consequences of their actions.

Inferno: Canto XXIX

My eyes were so consumed with the many people and their various wounds that I felt a strong urge to stop and weep. But then Virgil said, "Why are you still staring down there? Why is your gaze fixed on the sorrowful, mutilated souls?"

"You haven't done this in the other Bolgie," he continued. "Consider this: the valley stretches for twenty-two miles, and now the moon is under our feet. The time we have left is brief, and there is more to see than what you're looking at."

I answered him, "If you had understood the reason for my gaze, perhaps you would have allowed me to stay longer."

As we spoke, Virgil moved on, and I followed, already ready to respond. I added, "I think I saw a spirit of my blood lamenting the sin that costs so much down here."

Virgil said, "Don't let your thoughts be distracted by him anymore. Let him remain there. I saw him below, pointing at you, threatening you fiercely. His name is Geri del Bello, and you didn't look in his direction before because you were distracted by him. He left without saying anything to you, and now you feel pity for him."

I replied, "Master, his violent death, which still hasn't been avenged, made him disdainful. I imagine that's why he left without speaking to me. That's why I pity him more."

We continued speaking as we reached the first part of the crag, which overlooked the next valley below, though it was too dark to see clearly. When we were over the last section of Malebolge, we could finally see the souls down below in the next valley.

I heard various lamentations, sharp and painful, which pierced me deeply. It was like hearing the cries of people suffering from diseases in hospitals in Valdichiana during the summer months, or from the illnesses of Maremma and Sardinia. The stench that came from it was horrible, like decaying flesh.

We had descended to the lowest part of the crag, still on the left side. My sight grew clearer, and I could now see what the Ministry of Justice had recorded for the forgers. I didn't think there was a sadder sight than when the people of Aegina suffered from pestilence, as described in the stories, with animals and people alike dying. What I saw in this valley was just as tragic.

In this place, I saw spirits lying on top of one another, some on their bellies, others on their backs, crawling along the dark road. We moved forward without speaking, staring at the sick who were too weak to lift their bodies.

INFERNO
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I saw two souls leaning against each other, their bodies covered in sores, as if they were stuck together like metal plates in a heated pan. Their condition was so bad that it looked as if they had been currying their sores with their nails, trying to relieve the intense itching with no other remedy.

Virgil turned to one of them and said, "You, who are scraping yourself with your nails, tell me if any Latians are with those here. May your nails serve you for eternity in this work."

The soul responded through tears, "We are Latians, both of us, but who are you to ask about us?"

Virgil replied, "I am one who descends from cliff to cliff with this living man, and I intend to show him Hell."

The two souls turned to me, and the first one said, "I was from Arezzo, and Albert of Siena had me burned. But my crime isn't why I'm here. It's true that I once joked to him that I could fly through the air, and he, foolish as he was, asked me to show him. He burned me for that, and now I'm here for my alchemy."

Virgil then asked me, "Isn't this a vain people, the Sienese?"

I replied, "Certainly, they are more foolish than the French."

Another soul, who had been listening, responded, "Take out Stricca, who knew how to moderate his expenses, and Niccolo, who first discovered the luxurious use of cloves. The others, like Caccia d'Ascian, squandered their estates. But, to understand who stands with you against the Sienese, look closely at me. My name is Capocchio, and I am the shade of one who falsified metals with alchemy. You must remember me as the skilled imitator of nature."

Inferno: Canto XXX

It was at the time when Juno was enraged, because of the death of Semele, which she had already shown anger for more than once, that Athamas, filled with madness, became so deluded. Seeing his wife walking along, burdened by two children, he cried, "Spread out the nets, so I can catch the lioness and her cubs." He then reached out with his cruel claws, seizing the first child, Learchus, and threw him against a rock. His wife, carrying the other child, drowned herself.

Similarly, when the arrogance of the Trojans was crushed, and their king was defeated, Hecuba, the mourning queen, witnessed the death of her daughter, Polyxena. She also learned of the death of Polydorus on the shores of the ocean. In her grief, she went mad and began barking like a dog, her mind distorted by the intense suffering. But the furies of Thebes and Troy were not as cruel as I saw in one of the souls here, torturing others, more brutally than even the human torment.

I saw two pale and naked shadows, running like boars, biting and tearing at each other. One of them attacked Capocchio, biting his neck with its teeth, dragging him across the ground so violently that his belly scraped against the hard surface.

The trembling soul of Capocchio, who had been unable to move, spoke to me: "That mad soul is Gianni Schicchi, running madly through the world, tormenting others."

I asked the soul of Capocchio, "Who is this, who is biting you, and where is it going?"

Capocchio responded, "That is the soul of Myrrha, who, beyond all natural love, became her father's lover. She disguised herself as another person and sinned in this manner. As for the one who is chasing me, he is the same as Buoso Donati, who falsified a will to make a claim, and I am here for my practice of alchemy."

We turned away from them, and I saw another soul who had been mutilated. He was shaped like a lute, except for the part where a man's private parts would be. The disease of dropsy had distorted his body, making it look disproportionate. He could not close his lips properly, as if he were dying from thirst.

He spoke to us: "You who wander in this world of misery, listen to my story. I had everything I wanted while I was alive, but now all I ask for is a drop of water. The streams that flow from Cassentin and into Arno, bringing coldness and moisture, are constantly before me, more than my disease, making me feel dry inside. My punishment is rooted in where I sinned, and that's why I am tormented here. I forged the currency in Romena, using the image of John the Baptist, and for that I was burned."

I asked him, "Who are the two souls who are lying here on your right, smoking like a damp hand in winter?"

INFERNO
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He replied, "I found them here when I was cast into this pit, and they haven't moved since. One is the false woman who accused Joseph, and the other is the false Sinon, the Greek from Troy. They stink because of the fever they are burning in."

One of the souls struck his swollen belly with his fist, making a sound like a drum. Master Adam responded by hitting him in the face with his hard arm. "Even though I have no strength left in my limbs, I still have my arm for things like this," Master Adam said.

The false soul said, "You weren't so eager when you went into the fire. But you did more when you were forging your coins."

Master Adam replied, "You're right about that, but you weren't truthful when you were questioned about your lies in Troy."

Sinon fired back, "I only falsified the coin; you're here for more serious sins. You are a liar and a perjurer."

Adam retorted, "Remember the horse you sold, and know that the whole world remembers your betrayal."

The Greek responded angrily, "And you, who are now so full of suffering, you have the burning thirst that is worse than anything, as your belly is swollen and covered in sores."

Adam laughed bitterly. "Your mouth is open and full of evil words. I have thirst and disease, but at least I have no need to ask anyone for help. You have no one to help you."

I was listening to their exchange when Virgil spoke to me, saying, "Look around; it's not hard to see how foolish you've been."

When I heard the anger in his voice, I turned to him, feeling deeply ashamed, and it stuck with me for a long time. My thoughts were tangled, just like someone who wishes to undo harm but cannot. It felt as if I was caught in a lie, but I couldn't help but explain myself.

Virgil continued, "Less shame is washed away by a greater fault than yours. Don't burden yourself with guilt for this. Keep in mind that I will always be with you when you are tempted by those like this."

Inferno: Canto XXXI

It was during the time when Juno was enraged over Semele's death, which she had already shown anger for multiple times, that Athamas, in his madness, became so deluded. Seeing his wife walking with two children, he cried out, "Spread the nets! I will catch the lioness and her cubs!" He reached out with his claws, grabbing the first child, Learchus, and threw him against a rock. His wife, carrying the other child, drowned herself.

Similarly, when the arrogance of the Trojans was crushed, and their king was defeated, Hecuba, the grieving queen, saw her daughter Polyxena's death and learned of Polydorus's death on the shores of the ocean. In her sorrow, she went mad, barking like a dog, her mind shattered by the agony. However, the fury of Thebes and Troy was not as cruel as what I saw in one of the souls here, torturing others more viciously than any human act.

I saw two pale and naked souls running like wild boars, biting each other. One of them attacked Capocchio, sinking its teeth into his neck and dragging him across the ground, making his belly scrape along the rocky surface.

Capocchio, trembling, spoke to me: "That mad soul is Gianni Schicchi, forever chasing and tormenting others."

I asked Capocchio, "Who is this other soul, and what is it doing?"

Capocchio answered, "That is the soul of Myrrha, who beyond all natural love became her father's lover. She disguised herself as another person and sinned this way. The one chasing me is the one who falsified the will of Buoso Donati."

We moved on, and I saw another soul, grotesquely altered by disease, resembling a lute in shape. The disease of dropsy had swollen his body, making it disproportionate, and his lips hung apart as if he were dying of thirst.

He spoke to us: "You who walk through this land of misery, listen to my plight. While I was alive, I had everything I wanted, but now I only beg for a drop of water. The streams from Cassentin, which feed the Arno, stand before me. Their cold waters dry me out more than my disease. I am punished here because of my sins in Romena, where I forged coins with the image of John the Baptist. I was burned for my crime."

I asked, "Who are the two souls next to you, lying there like damp hands in winter?"

He replied, "I found them here when I was cast into this pit. They have not moved since. One is the false woman who accused Joseph, and the other is the false Sinon from Troy. Their feverish bodies cause this stench."

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One of the souls struck his swollen belly, making a sound like a drum. Master Adam responded by hitting him in the face with his hardened arm. “Even though I have no strength left, I still have an arm for things like this,” Master Adam said.

The false soul retorted, “You didn’t seem so eager when you were sent to the fire. But you were more eager when you were forging coins.”

Master Adam replied, “You’re right about that. But you weren’t truthful when questioned about your lies in Troy.”

Sinon responded, “I only falsified the coin; you’re here for greater sins. You are a liar and a perjurer.”

Adam shot back, “Remember the horse you sold, and know that the whole world remembers your betrayal.”

The Greek retorted angrily, “And you, who are suffering now, have the burning thirst that is worse than anything, as your belly is swollen and covered in sores.”

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I was listening to their exchange when Virgil spoke to me, saying, “Look around; it’s not hard to see how foolish you’ve been.”

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Virgil continued, “Less shame is washed away by a greater fault than yours. Don’t burden yourself with guilt for this. Keep in mind that I will always be with you when you are tempted by those like this.”

Inferno: Canto XXXII

We continued moving through the infernal landscape. The atmosphere was heavy with the cries of the suffering souls around us. As we walked, I couldn't help but feel the weight of the endless torment these souls endured. Their suffering was unlike anything I had ever witnessed before.

We soon arrived at another part of the valley. The air became thick with a new, even more unbearable stench. My eyes caught sight of two souls whose bodies were terribly disfigured. They were crouching in a corner, their bodies deformed and twisted in ways that defied nature. Their skin was covered in sores, and they were clawing at their flesh in a maddening attempt to relieve the torment of their afflictions.

Virgil, sensing my shock, spoke quietly to me: "Do not focus too much on these souls. Their suffering is immense, but we must continue. You will understand more as we move forward."

We walked on, past these wretched beings, until we reached a towering figure. The giant was bound in chains, his massive body coiled and confined. His face was grim, twisted in pain and rage, his eyes fixed on the horizon as though he could somehow escape his imprisonment.

"Who is this giant?" I asked Virgil, unable to look away from the monstrous figure.

"This is Ephialtes," Virgil replied. "He and his brother, Otus, once tried to storm the heavens in an attempt to overthrow the gods. For his arrogance, he has been bound here in eternal torment. His actions caused great havoc, and now he pays the price."

As we moved past Ephialtes, I couldn't shake the image of his contorted form. The sight of him made me wonder about the limits of pride and the consequences of defying the natural order. How could such a mighty being fall to such a fate?

"We must move on," Virgil urged, sensing my unease. "There is more to see, and more lessons to learn."

We walked deeper into the abyss, the sounds of suffering and the sight of the broken souls around us growing more intense. Each soul we passed seemed to carry a different tale of misery, each more painful than the last. I began to understand that this was not just a place of punishment—it was a place of endless lessons, where every soul had its story, its reason for suffering, and its lesson to impart.

Eventually, we reached a new area. The atmosphere was dense with the sound of roaring, as if an immense storm was raging nearby. As I looked around, I saw the figure of a great giant looming over us, his body massive and intimidating. His name, as Virgil explained, was Antaeus, a giant who had once been a powerful force on earth.

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"Antaeus," Virgil said, "was known for his strength. He could not be defeated by anyone unless he was lifted off the ground. His power came from the earth itself, and he is one of the few giants still free in this place."

Antaeus lowered his massive hand to us, and with a single motion, he picked up Virgil and me, lifting us toward the top of the abyss. As he did so, I felt the weight of his strength, and for a moment, I understood the power that had once made him a force to be reckoned with.

As we ascended, I couldn't help but marvel at the strange journey we were on. The deeper we went, the more I understood the lessons of punishment, sin, and the consequences of one's actions. Each step we took brought us closer to the final understanding of the eternal nature of the soul and the price that must be paid for every wrongdoing.

Antaeus placed us gently on the ground, and we continued on our way, leaving the giants behind. The journey was far from over, but I knew that we had learned much already. Each soul we encountered, each lesson we uncovered, was shaping my understanding of the world and the nature of justice.

Inferno: Canto XXXIII

After finishing his grim meal, the sinner raised his mouth from the skull he was gnawing on, wiping it with the hair of the head that he had previously chewed. Then he began to speak, his voice filled with sorrow and despair: "You want me to relive the pain that already tears my heart just by thinking about it, let alone talking about it. But if my words can bring disgrace to the traitor I'm devouring, you will hear both my words and my tears mixed together."

"I don't know who you are or how you came down here," he continued, "but from the sound of your voice, I can tell you're from Florence. Let me tell you who I am. I am Count Ugolino, and the one I am chewing on is Ruggieri, the Archbishop. Now let me explain why I am here, with this terrible neighbor."

"Ruggieri, driven by malicious thoughts, deceived me and had me imprisoned. And after that, he had me executed. But what you may not know is how cruelly I died. Let me tell you of my death, and you will understand if Ruggieri wronged me."

"In the tower where I was imprisoned, which the people call Famine, I looked out the small window for many moons. I was already anticipating the dreadful future when I had the nightmare that would confirm my worst fears."

"In my dream, I saw Ruggieri as a hunter, chasing wolves and their cubs on the mountain for which the people of Pisa can no longer see Lucca. He sent out his hungry, well-trained hounds — Gualandi, Sismondi, and Lanfianchi — ahead of him. It wasn't long before I saw the father and sons being torn apart, their bellies ripped open by the hounds."

"When I woke up, I heard my sons moaning in their sleep, asking for food. How cruel it is, that you wouldn't weep when thinking of what my heart foresaw! But they were awake by now, and the time for our meal was near. I watched their faces as the door to our prison was locked. My heart turned to stone, and I didn't shed a tear. But they wept. Anselm, my youngest, said, 'Father, why are you looking at us like that? What's wrong?' Still, I couldn't speak or cry, not all that day or the next night. Only when a faint light began to break through the darkness did I finally see my sons' faces. I bit my hands in agony, and in that moment, they stood up, saying, 'Father, if you're hungry, eat us. You clothed us with this flesh, and now strip it off.'"

"I was silent to avoid causing them more grief. That day and the next, we stayed silent, trapped in that horrid place. After the fourth day, Gaddo, my son, collapsed at my feet, crying out, 'Father, why don't you help me?' He died there, and one by one, my three sons fell, dying between the fifth and sixth day. I groped in the dark, already blind, calling to them after they were dead. Then hunger finally took what grief could not."

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After recounting his tragic tale, Ugolino resumed chewing the skull with such ferocity that it reminded me of a dog gnawing on a bone.

He then cried out, "Ah, Pisa, shame of the land where the 'Si' is spoken, you let the Capraia and Gorgona move to make a dam across the mouth of the Arno. Drown them all! For if Count Ugolino betrayed you in your castles, you should not have let his sons suffer such a fate. They were innocent, just children, and they should never have had to pay for his sins."

"Now," he continued, "we move forward into the cold, where the ice encases the next group of souls. They are trapped in ice, reversed, their bodies frozen in unimaginable agony. They cannot cry because their tears freeze in their eyes, adding to their suffering. The icy air seals in their grief."

I turned to Virgil and asked, "Who causes this wind? Is every vapor quenched here in Hell?"

Virgil replied, "Soon you'll see the cause, and your eyes will answer your question when you see what causes the blast."

As we walked on, a voice from one of the frozen souls cried out, "O souls so merciless that you are given the final post, please lift the veils from my eyes. Let me shed a few tears before they freeze again."

I responded, "If you want me to help you, tell me who you are. If I can't help, then I will be sent to the bottom of the ice."

The soul answered, "I am Friar Alberigo, one of the fruits of the wicked garden, the one who here reaps dates for figs."

I asked in surprise, "You're dead already?"

He answered, "How my body fares up in the world, I don't know. Here in Ptolomaea, it happens often that the soul descends before Atropos, the thread-cutter, makes its final severance. As soon as any soul betrays as I did, a demon takes over the body until its time is up."

Virgil then explained, "You should know that the soul of Ser Branca d'Oria, a traitor, is one of the souls here who has been trapped in such a way."

The soul then said, "Branca d'Oria is not dead yet; he still walks the earth. His body here is still alive, but a demon took over him. He betrayed me and the others. If you want to know more, you should see how treachery lives on in the people of Genoa."

Thus, we moved forward, leaving the soul of Friar Alberigo and continuing our journey through the frozen abyss.

Inferno: Canto XXXIV

"My Master said, 'Look ahead of you and see, for the banners of the King of Hell are coming towards us.'

As when a heavy fog descends or when our hemisphere begins to darken into night, and we see a mill in the distance, its sails turning with the wind, I thought I saw such a structure ahead. I pulled behind my Guide because there was no other shelter.

We moved forward in silence until we reached a place where the shades were entirely covered, only faintly visible like straws in glass. Some of the souls were lying face down, others were standing, some with their heads bowed, others bent with their feet towards the sky. Some were bent like bows, their faces pressed to their feet.

After we had moved further, my Guide stopped, turned to me, and said, 'Look! Here is Dis, the place where you must prepare yourself.'

I became frozen with fear, and I cannot fully describe the terror I felt, as words would not suffice. I wasn't dead, but I was not truly alive either. I was between both states.

In front of me, the Emperor of the suffering realm emerged from the ice. His body stretched from his chest upwards, and I could see him towering like a giant. His proportions were such that I couldn't help but compare him to the giants I had seen earlier.

He had three faces on his head. The one in the middle was red like a flame; the others were positioned above each shoulder. One face was pale, like those from the region of the Nile, and the other was between white and yellow.

Each face had a pair of large wings, not feathered like a bird's, but like a bat's wings. With these, he flapped them violently, and three winds were created, making the entire Cocytus freeze solid.

From his six eyes, he wept, and from his three mouths, he gnawed at the souls of three sinners. The gnawing was not just with his teeth, but also with his claws, tearing the sinners apart, leaving their skins ripped away in places.

The worst of these sinners, according to my Guide, was Judas Iscariot. With his head twisted upside down, he was being eternally gnawed. The other two souls, Brutus and Cassius, were also tortured in the same manner.

My Guide explained further: 'It is night here, and we must leave. We've seen enough, and it's time to move on.'

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We made our way to the edge of the frozen lake, where my Guide grasped me, and with the force of his strength, we descended into the abyss between Lucifer's frozen hair and the crust of ice.

When we reached the spot where the thigh turns, the Guide, struggling with effort, reversed himself, clasping the ice and dragging me with him. He guided us back up to the top of the ice sheet. We emerged into a rocky opening, and I found myself sitting on the edge of the ice.

I looked up and thought I'd see Lucifer as I had left him, but instead, I saw him with his legs turned upward, as though we had ascended instead of descending.

My Guide then said, 'Rise up. The journey is long, and we must continue. The sun will soon return to the middle of the sky.'

I stood, feeling the weight of everything we had just seen. 'Master, explain to me what has happened. How did we end up here? How is it that the ice is gone, and we're standing here now, and why is the sun moving so quickly?'

He answered me, 'You think that you are still below the center of the earth. But we have passed that point. When I turned, you crossed the threshold to the opposite side. You are now under the hemisphere that once bore the Crucifixion of Christ. The sun here is now rising as it is setting there.'

He continued, 'We've crossed to the other side of the world, and the place that used to be vacant has now been filled, as if to escape the reign of Lucifer. We are now above, and the stars are before us again.'

And so we made our way through a small tunnel, climbing up the rocky passageway until we emerged into the fresh air and once again saw the stars. The journey through Hell was complete.