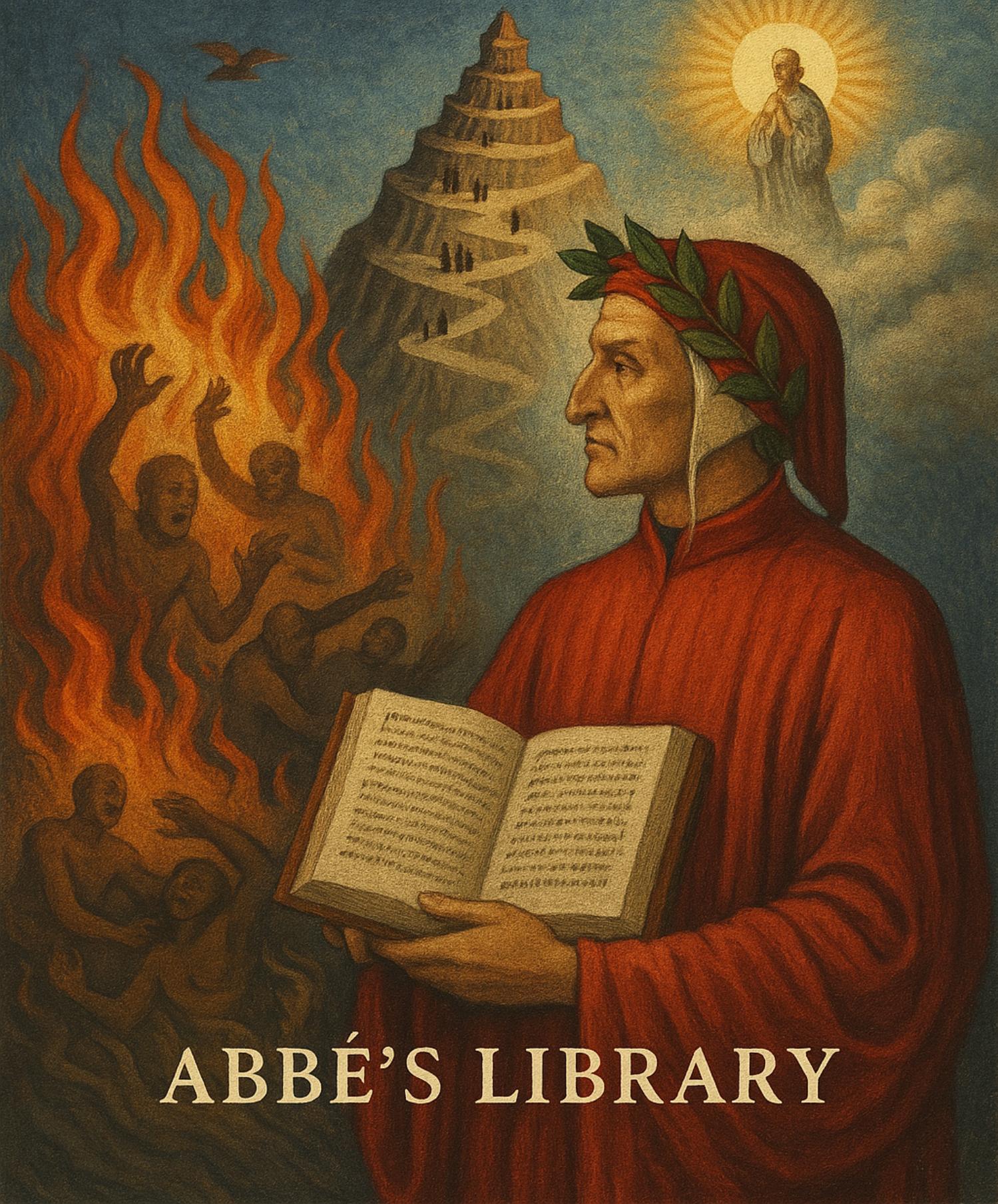


# DANTE

## THE DIVINE COMEDY



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The Divine Comedy  
Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso  
By Dante Alighieri  
(Abbé's Library)

THE DIVINE COMEDY  
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The Divine Comedy  
Inferno  
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**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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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?"

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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.

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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."

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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.

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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.

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**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."

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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.

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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.

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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?"

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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.”

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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."

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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."

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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."

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"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."

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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."

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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."

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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?”

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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!”

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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?"

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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

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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.

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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

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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.

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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."

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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 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.

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**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.

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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.

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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 Romagna, 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?"

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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.”

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 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.”

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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.

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The Divine Comedy  
Purgatorio  
By Dante Alighieri  
(Abbé's Library)

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**Purgatorio: Canto I**

The light ship of my mind sets sail on better waves, eager to leave behind the dark and cruel sea. Now, I will sing about that second realm, where the human soul is cleansed from sin and prepared for its ascent to Heaven.

O holy Muses, I follow your lead! Let Calliope, the Muse of epic poetry, rise and help me tell a grander story, one that echoes loudly, like the sound of chattering birds, causing the damned souls to lose all hope of forgiveness.

The sky was a bright sapphire blue, a color that filled the air, and above, the first circle of Heaven seemed to shine. This sight filled my heart with joy as I emerged from the heavy darkness of Hell. The planet Venus, known for inspiring love, made the East glow with light, and beneath it, I saw the constellation Pisces.

I turned to the right and focused on the opposite pole, where I saw four stars that had never been seen by anyone except the first humans. Their light filled the sky with happiness, and I marveled at their beauty. O Northern Hemisphere, you are lost and empty now, without those stars!

As I looked in that direction, I turned slightly toward the other pole. From where the Big Dipper had disappeared, I saw a figure standing beside me. He was an old man, so dignified in appearance that he looked like a father to his son. His long white beard and hair flowed down to his chest, and the light from the four stars shone so brightly on his face that it appeared to glow like the sun.

“Who are you?” he asked. “How did you escape from the eternal prison? Who has led you out of the darkness of Hell? Are the laws of this abyss now broken, or has Heaven made new laws that allow you to approach this place?”

My guide quickly motioned for me to kneel and then spoke to the old man. “I didn’t come here by my own choice. A Lady from Heaven asked me to bring this soul. Since you want to know more, I will explain. This man has never seen the deepest darkness of Hell, but his mistakes brought him very close. I was sent to rescue him, and now we have come here to show him the souls who are being cleansed from their sins. The story of how I brought him here is long, but divine guidance has led me to bring him to you. May our arrival please you.”

The old man replied, “I once helped the soul of Marcia, but now she lives beyond the cursed stream, and I cannot help her anymore. However, if a Lady from Heaven has guided you, I need no further flattery. Go now, and with a reed, wash his face, for only then will it be fit to stand before the minister of Heaven.”

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The old man then disappeared, and my guide led me to a place where I could wash my face in the water. Afterward, my guide told me to keep my focus on the way ahead. We continued on our journey as the dawn of a new day began to break.

### Purgatorio: Canto II

When the sun reached the point in the sky that marks the highest point above Jerusalem's walls, and night, which is opposite to it, had fully risen from the Ganges, bringing with her the scales she carries when she rules, the sky began to shift. Aurora's pale, rosy face turned to orange as the sun rose higher.

We stood by the water's edge, like travelers lost in thought, moving along in our minds while our bodies stayed still. Suddenly, at the break of dawn, a bright light shot across the sea, faster than any bird could fly. I turned to my guide to ask about it, but when I looked back, the light had grown larger and brighter. There were strange bright shapes moving, but I couldn't tell what they were. Then, the light grew into the shape of wings. My guide, recognizing it, cried out, "Bow down, bow down; it's God's angel. Fold your hands and look. You're about to see true angels."

I was struck by the sight. He was so fast, he didn't need oars or a sail—just his wings. He flew up, holding them high, cutting through the air with plumes that didn't fall out or change like a mortal's hair. As he came closer, his brilliance became unbearable, so I lowered my gaze.

The angel came ashore in a small boat that barely touched the water. At the prow was the steersman, glowing with a holy light. He was the first one to step out, and a hundred spirits, more or less, followed him, singing praises to God. They sang a hymn that had a line about Israel's departure from Egypt, but it was not finished. After the angel blessed them with the sign of the cross, they leaped out of the boat, swift as the angel had come. The boat then returned, leaving the spirits standing there, astonished by the new land.

The sun, now climbing higher in the sky, began to chase away the winter cold. Just as the sun's warmth spread over us, a group of spirits looked up at us and asked, "Do you know the way to the mountain?"

Virgil answered, "You think we're familiar with this place, but we're strangers here too. We only arrived recently from another, even harsher path, and now the way up seems easy to us in comparison."

The spirits, sensing I was still alive, turned toward me, filled with wonder. They gathered around me as though I were a herald, eager for news, stepping on each other in their excitement to get close. One spirit broke away from the crowd, rushing toward me with such eagerness that I moved to embrace him too. But just as I reached out, my hands went through him, and he smiled at me before pulling away.

I followed him, but he stopped me with a sweet voice. "Don't move. Pause for a moment. I loved you in my previous life, and I love you now, so I'll talk with you for a while."

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I asked him who he was, and he replied, “I am Casella. I was one of those who died too soon, but now I’m allowed to rest here, near the mountain. How much time has passed since I left the world?”

I asked him why so much time had been lost, and he said, “No injustice was done to me. I have been here for a while, waiting to be admitted. The laws of Heaven are beyond my control, and I’ve waited as long as I needed to.”

I replied, “Please, sing to me again, as you used to, to ease my heart. Let your sweet song soothe the pain of my journey.”

Casella smiled and began to sing, and his voice was so beautiful that even Virgil and the other spirits around him were entranced. We stood, listening to the music, when suddenly an old man appeared, exclaiming, “Why are you lingering here, spirits? Don’t waste time! Hurry, go to the mountain and rid yourselves of the weight that keeps you from seeing God!”

At that, all the spirits immediately stopped listening and ran to the mountain, leaving behind their song as they hurried to shed the sins that weighed them down.

We, too, left the scene in haste, following the path toward the mountain.

### Purgatorio: Canto III

The spirits scattered across the plain, turning toward the mountain as reason guides us. I stayed close to my faithful companion, not leaving him, for without him, I wouldn't have made it far. How could I have managed, or who else would guide me through the difficult terrain? He seemed to be overwhelmed by self-remorse. Oh, how deeply even a small wrong can hurt a clear conscience!

As soon as his feet slowed, my mind, which had been preoccupied, cleared up, and I felt a renewed sense of joy. I focused on the steep path ahead of me, where the mountain rose higher and higher toward Heaven.

The sun was behind us, casting a red light in front of me, but its rays were blocked by my form. I became afraid, thinking I might be left behind, and when I looked ahead, I saw only the ground darkened by the shadow of the mountain. My guide, sensing my anxiety, turned to me and reassured me: "Why do you doubt? Don't you believe I'm with you, your guide? It's evening where the body of the one who cast a shadow for me now lies, between Naples and Brindisi. Don't wonder that no shadow falls before me, just as the rays in the sky never obstruct each other. To endure both heat and cold, like the bodies we possess, is a mystery not to be understood by us. Don't waste time trying to grasp why things work the way they do. Humans can't comprehend it. Had you understood this, there would have been no need for Mary to give birth. You've seen many who desire, and yet remain unfulfilled, like Plato and Aristotle and others who strived in vain."

He bowed his head, deep in thought, and we arrived at the foot of the mountain. The rock was so steep that even the most nimble could not climb it. The roughest paths between Lerici and Turbia would have been easier than this.

"Who knows which way we should go now?" my guide asked. "Who can climb without help?" He looked down at the path, trying to figure it out, while I gazed upward at the spirits slowly making their way toward us. They moved so slowly, they seemed almost frozen in place.

I turned to my guide. "Look, there are some ahead, maybe they can help us," I said.

He looked up, then answered, "Let's go there, but take heart. They come slowly, so be patient."

As we moved closer, the group of spirits was far away at first, but we eventually came within a thousand paces. They stood together, unmoving, like a herd of sheep, hesitant but watching the leader of the group.

"Perfect souls! Chosen ones!" Virgil began, "By the blessed peace you enjoy, I ask you to help us. Tell us where the mountain slopes so that we may climb it easily. For the one who knows best is most troubled by wasting time."

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Like a flock of sheep emerging from their fold, some ahead, others following, the group began to move toward us. The first one was dignified and graceful, and when they saw the light fall on the ground, they stopped and hesitated, as if unsure what to do.

Virgil spoke, “Don’t worry, this is a human body you see. Don’t be surprised that the light breaks on the ground; know that we aim to climb with virtue given from Heaven.” The group then moved aside, and one of them approached us.

He said, “Whoever you are, if you’ve seen me before, tell me.”

I looked at him and recognized him immediately, though I hadn’t seen him before. He was gentle and handsome in appearance, but there was a scar on his forehead.

“I don’t remember having seen you before,” I said. He smiled and showed me a wound on his chest.

“I am Manfredi, grandson of Queen Costanza,” he said. “When you return to the living world, tell my daughter about me. When I was killed, I went to him who forgives freely. My sins were great, but God’s arms are wide, and they welcome all who turn to Him. If only the bishop of Cosenza had better understood this truth, my bones would have remained near Benevento. But now they are scattered and the rain drenches them. Yet, our curse is not enough to destroy us, for God’s love will bring us back, even though we must suffer. Those who die in rebellion against the Church must wait thirty times the length of their sin in purification. Let your prayers help shorten the time of my suffering.”

**Purgatorio: Canto IV**

Suddenly, the spirits scattered and moved toward the mountain, just as reason guides us. I stayed close to my faithful guide, not leaving him behind. Without him, I wouldn't have been able to make it. How could I have done it, or who else could have led me through this treacherous terrain? He seemed to be overwhelmed by regret. Oh, how even the smallest mistake can hurt a clear conscience!

As soon as he slowed down, my mind, which had been clouded before, cleared up, and I felt renewed. I set my eyes on the steep path ahead, where the mountain reached toward the heavens.

The sun was behind us, casting a reddish glow in front of me, but the rays were blocked by my form. I became afraid, thinking I might be left behind. When I looked ahead, I saw only the ground covered by the shadow of the mountain. My guide, noticing my fear, turned to me and reassured me: "Why do you doubt? Don't you believe I'm with you, guiding you? It's evening where the body of the one who cast a shadow for me now lies, between Naples and Brindisi. Don't be surprised that no shadow falls before me, just like the rays in the sky never block each other. To endure both heat and cold, like our bodies are made to, is a mystery that we can't understand. Don't try to grasp why things happen the way they do. If you had understood this, there would have been no need for Mary to give birth. You've seen many who desire and yet remain unfulfilled, like Plato and Aristotle and others who strived in vain."

He lowered his head, deep in thought, and we arrived at the foot of the mountain. The rock was so steep that even the nimblest could not climb it. The roughest paths between Lerici and Turbia would have been easier than this.

"Who knows which way we should go now?" my guide asked. "Who can climb without help?" He looked down at the path, trying to figure it out, while I gazed upward at the spirits slowly making their way toward us. They moved so slowly, they seemed almost frozen in place.

I turned to my guide. "Look, there are some ahead. Maybe they can help us," I said.

He looked up, then answered, "Let's go there. They come slowly, so be patient."

As we moved closer, the group of spirits was far away at first, but we eventually came within a thousand paces. They stood together, unmoving, like a herd of sheep, hesitant but watching the leader of the group.

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"I am Manfredi, grandson of Queen Costanza," he said. "When you return to the living world, tell my daughter about me. When I was killed, I went to him who forgives freely. My sins were great, but God's arms are wide, and they welcome all who turn to Him. If only the bishop of Cosenza had better understood this truth, my bones would have remained near Benevento. But now they are scattered and the rain drenches them. Yet, our curse is not enough to destroy us, for God's love will bring us back, even though we must suffer. Those who die in rebellion against the Church must wait thirty times the length of their sin in purification. Let your prayers help shorten the time of my suffering."

### Purgatorio: Canto V

I had just left those spirits and was following my guide when I heard someone point and exclaim, "Look! It seems as if the light isn't shining from the left side of the man below, and he appears to be led, just like a living person." I turned my eyes toward the sound and saw the spirits gaze at me, full of wonder. Their attention shifted back and forth between me and the broken light beneath.

"Why are you so focused on this?" my guide asked. "Why are you slowing down? What does it matter what they whisper here? Come on, follow me, and leave behind the crowd and their chatter. Be like a tower, firmly standing, unmoved by any gust of wind. The more a person's mind is scattered, the farther off the goal becomes because the mind weakens itself with each distraction."

What else could I answer except, "I come"? I said it, a little embarrassed, as often happens when one's actions are driven by genuine remorse.

Meanwhile, we continued along the hill, and I heard someone singing the "Miserere" in response to the other spirits. When they realized I wasn't letting the light pass through me, their song turned into a hoarse cry. Two spirits, dressed like messengers, rushed to meet us, asking, "We'd like to know who you are."

My guide replied, "You can return and tell those who sent you that he is truly flesh and blood. If they were hesitant to see his shade, now they have their answer. Honor him well."

I've never seen winds rush through the air so quickly, nor the clouds of August move so fast across the sky, as these spirits did when they turned and approached us. The whole group came together, and with the same rapid motion, they circled us like a loose-knit troop.

"My son, there are many who wish to ask something of you," the poet said. "Go on and listen as you walk."

"O spirit, who walks toward blessedness with the same body you had in life," they began to call out, "take a moment to rest. Have you seen anyone from our group? Tell us if you've met someone who can bring us news."

I scanned their faces but didn't recognize anyone. "If I can help you in any way, please ask. I'll do what I can, by that peace which I seek in my journey through the world," I answered.

One of the spirits replied, "No one doubts your goodwill, even if you haven't promised an oath. As long as your will is true, we ask you to help us. I'm from the land between Romagna and the realm of Charles. If you pass through Fano, I ask you to pray for me, so my sins can be pardoned. I came from there. The one who wronged me was the prince of Este, who pursued me

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in his wrath. Had I gone to Mira or tried to flee elsewhere, I might have lived. But instead, I ended up dying in the marshes, my blood spilling out in the mire.”

Another spirit added, “I’m Buonconte from Montefeltro. I went to my death with no one to care for me, except for Giovanna and others. My life ended in the field of Campaldino. I was struck by a blow to the heart, and as I fled, I bled out. When I died, my body was taken by an angel, and I was carried away by Heaven.”

“Tell me,” I asked, “why didn’t anyone know where your body was buried?”

He replied, “I was struck at the foot of Casentino, where the Archiano river flows. I was wounded, and I fell to the ground, calling on Mary as I died. My body was later carried away by the Archiano river and thrown into the Arno. It was left to be carried away in the currents, and now the rain and wind have scattered my remains.”

Then a third spirit spoke, saying, “When you return to the world, please remember me. I was Pia from Sienna. Maremma took my life, and the one who gave me the ring of marriage knows the full truth.”

**Purgatorio: Canto VI**

After I left those spirits and followed my guide, I heard someone pointing at me and exclaiming, "Look at him! It seems as though the light doesn't shine from his left side, and he looks like he's being led, just like a living person." I turned to see what was happening, and I noticed that the spirits were staring at me, filled with wonder. They looked at me and the broken light beneath, exchanging confused glances.

"Why are you so distracted?" my guide asked. "Why are you slowing down? What does it matter to you what they whisper? Follow me and leave behind their chatter. Be like a tower, standing firm and unmoved by any gust of wind. The more a person's thoughts are scattered, the farther they drift from their goal, because one thought weakens another."

I could only respond with, "I come," a little embarrassed by the situation.

We continued up the hill, and soon I heard a choir singing the "Miserere." When they realized I wasn't letting the light pass through me, their song shifted to a hoarse cry. Two spirits, looking like messengers, rushed to meet us, asking, "We want to know who you are."

My guide answered, "You can return and tell those who sent you that he is truly flesh and blood. If they were unsure whether they were seeing his shade, now they have their answer. Honor him well."

I had never seen the wind move so quickly or the clouds shift so fast as these spirits did when they turned to follow us. They moved with such speed and grace, circling us like a troop set loose from its restraints.

"My son, there are many who wish to ask something of you," the poet said. "Go ahead, and listen as you walk."

"O spirit, who walks toward blessedness with the same body you had in life," they called out, "please pause for a moment. Have you seen anyone from our group? If you have, tell us what you know about them."

I looked at their faces but didn't recognize anyone. "If I can help you in any way, please ask. I will do what I can, in the name of that peace which I seek in my journey," I said.

One of the spirits replied, "No one doubts your kindness, even if you haven't sworn an oath. As long as your will is strong, we ask you to help us. I am from the land between Romagna and Charles's realm. If you pass through Fano, I ask you to pray for me, so that my sins may be forgiven. I came from there. The one who wronged me was the prince of Este, who pursued me in his wrath. Had I gone to Mira, or fled somewhere else, I might have lived. But instead, I ended up in the marshes, dying as my blood spilled into the mire."

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Another spirit added, "I'm Buonconte from Montefeltro. I died without anyone to care for me, except Giovanna and a few others. My life ended on the field of Campaldino. I was struck in the heart, and as I fled, I bled out. When I died, my body was taken by an angel and carried by Heaven."

"Why was your body not buried?" I asked.

He replied, "I was struck near the foot of Casentino, where the Archiano river flows. I fell, bleeding and calling on Mary as I died. My body was swept away by the river and carried into the Arno. There, my remains were left to be carried down the stream, scattered by the rain and wind."

Then a third spirit spoke: "When you return to the world, please remember me. I was Pia from Sienna. Maremma took my life, and the one who gave me the marriage ring knows the truth of my story."

**Purgatorio: Canto VII**

After exchanging seven joyful greetings, Sordello stepped back and asked, "Who are you?"

"My bones were buried by Octavius' care, before this mountain was ever sought by spirits worthy of ascension to God. I am Virgil, not deprived of heaven for any sin, except for lack of faith," my guide replied briefly.

Sordello looked at Virgil in awe, and with reverence, he moved closer, saying, "Glory of Latium! The pride of my birthplace! What have I done to deserve this? If I am worthy to hear your voice, please tell me: do you come from below, and from what realm?"

Virgil answered, "I've journeyed through every circle of that sad region. There's a place beneath, not filled with torments, but only with shadow, where the voices are not of sharp anguish but are heard in sighs."

"I dwell with those who, before they could be freed from the taint of human sin, died—those who understood virtues but did not live them fully. They followed the rest without blame. If you know the way, please tell us how to reach the true beginning of Purgatory."

Virgil answered, "We are not yet certain of our destination. I'll accompany you as far as I can. But look, the day is declining, and it's easier to ascend during the night. The spirits to the right are separated, waiting. If you agree, I will lead you to them. You will find it a pleasant place."

I asked, "Why is it that some wish to ascend at night? Can they not? Are there any obstacles?"

Sordello answered, "This line marks the point where you can't ascend after sunset. The night's shadows confuse the will and make it hard to move forward. However, you may return or wander, but the day will give you clarity."

My guide, surprised by Sordello's explanation, said, "Lead us there quickly, so that we may enjoy the rest."

We moved a little further, and I noticed the mountain had a hollow, like a large valley. "Let's go this way," Sordello said. "It's a gentle descent, where you can rest and wait for the day's renewal."

We continued on a crooked path, following the ridge's side. It was a difficult slope, but we pressed on. The area around us was filled with vibrant colors and the scents of flowers, more beautiful than any earthly flowers.

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In a peaceful spot, we heard the spirits singing the “*Salve Regina*.” “Before the sun sets,” Sordello warned, “we’ll have a clearer view of all the spirits. This higher vantage point will give us a better perspective.”

As the spirits near us rose, Sordello recognized one and called out. He asked, “Who’s sitting at the highest point?” The first spirit stood and started to speak, describing a king who had the power to heal Italy’s wounds, but failed. “Look at those who neglected their duty, causing Italy’s suffering,” he continued, naming various historical figures who failed to protect their land from tyranny and war.

Sordello then identified other spirits, including William, the brave Marquis, whose wars left their mark on history. Each spirit, though, was marked by their failures—whether as rulers or warriors—failing to preserve the peace that could have prevented further suffering.

### Purgatorio: Canto VIII

It was now the hour when desire awakens in those at sea, and melts their hearts—the hour when those who bid farewell to their sweet friends in the morning, or pilgrims starting their journey, feel a deep thrill if they hear the vesper bell, which seems to mourn the fading of the day. It was at that moment that I, no longer paying attention to the sounds around me, began to notice a spirit rise from its seat. With both palms raised, it implored for an audience, its eyes fixed on the east, seemingly telling God, “I care for nothing else.”

Then it began singing “Te Lucis Ante” in a soft, devout tone that completely captivated me. The rest of the spirits, softly and devoutly, followed the hymn, their gazes directed toward the heavenly spheres above.

Here, reader, if you can, pay close attention! For this is a veil so fine that you might pass through it without noticing it. I saw the gentle group look up, awaiting something with hope, pale and humble in their demeanor. From above, two angels descended with swords, their blades glowing and broken at the tips. Their robes were green, the color of fresh leaves, and their wings matched, fluttering in the air.

One angel stood above us, the other on the opposite hill, creating a barrier of light in the middle. I saw their heads shining brightly, but their faces were so radiant that I couldn’t look at them directly. “These two angels have come from Mary’s bosom,” Sordello explained, “to guard the valley from the serpent.”

Unsure of which path to take, I turned to Virgil, and pressed closely to his side, frozen with fear. “Do not be afraid,” Sordello said. “Come now, let us descend into the valley and converse with these spirits. Their company may bring you joy.”

After just a few steps, I noticed a figure ahead who seemed to want to speak with me. As the darkness of the evening crept in, I saw this spirit more clearly, and, with joy, I recognized him. “Nino, you courteous judge!” I exclaimed. “What joy it is to see that you are not among the damned!”

He asked, “How long since you arrived at the mountain’s foot, traveling from the distant seas?” I replied, “I came through the sorrowful seats of Hell this morning, still journeying in my mortal body. The others strive to ascend, but here I come seeking to gain.”

Upon hearing my words, he and Sordello stepped back, astonished. Then Nino turned to another spirit nearby and called for Conrad to come quickly, saying, “See what grace God has shown this man.”

Nino then turned back to me, his face filled with sorrow, and said, “Tell my Giovanna that I love her still, and that she should pray for me, for I left this world before I could make things right

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with her. Her mother, I fear, has stopped loving me since I've been gone, and this I believe is why she abandoned me. Tell her that if she ever doubts the depth of my love, I wish she would remember the flame that once burned brightly in me."

Before I could respond, Nino's face grew serious again. "Remember me when you return to the world," he said. "Tell her that for me."

As I gazed up, Virgil, noticing my silence, asked, "What catches your attention, my son?"

I replied, "The three lights above us, they are like torches set alight, burning brightly."

Virgil then explained, "Those are the stars that set the course for the heavens, and they are now in the place of the four stars you saw earlier. Look up, and know that the journey is still far."

As we continued, Sordello motioned for us to look. "There," he said, "our enemy!" And with his hand, he pointed out a serpent coiled among the flowers and grasses below us. The angelic guards, their wings cutting through the air, swiftly moved to chase the serpent away.

The spirit who had been speaking to Nino, who had not taken his eyes off me, finally spoke. "As the light from your guide brings you upward, may it be sufficient to reach the highest heights. And now, tell me, do you know anything of Valdimagra or the lands nearby?"

I replied, "I have not traveled to those lands, but I know their fame. Your family's glory is well known, and its reputation extends across all of Europe. It is a shining example of honor."

The spirit then said, "Now continue, for in seven days the sun will rise again, and you must not let your purpose be clouded by doubt. Let your understanding be guided by those who are wise."

### Purgatorio: Canto IX

It was the hour that awakens desire in sailors, and softens their hearts—the hour when those at sea, bidding their dear ones farewell in the morning, or pilgrims starting their journey, feel the pull of longing as they hear the evening bell, which seems to mourn the end of the day. At that moment, I, no longer paying attention to the sounds around me, noticed one of the spirits rise from its seat, asking for an audience. It raised both palms to the sky, its eyes fixed on the east, as if telling God, “I care for nothing else.”

Then, it began to sing “Te Lucis Ante” in a soft, devout tone, so beautiful that it completely captivated me. The rest of the spirits followed along with the hymn, their eyes lifted toward the heavenly spheres.

Reader, if you can, understand this subtle moment. It is as delicate as a veil, and you might pass through it without noticing. I saw the spirits look up in anticipation, pale and humble. From above, two angels descended with glowing swords in their hands, their wings green like fresh leaves. They came down so gracefully, their presence shining with light.

One angel stood above us, the other on the opposite hill, positioning themselves to form a barrier of light. I could see their faces, but they were so bright that I could not look at them directly. “These two angels have come from Mary’s bosom,” Sordello explained, “to guard this valley from the serpent.”

Uncertain of which way to go, I turned to Virgil and pressed closely to his side, overcome with fear. “Do not be afraid,” Sordello said. “Come now, let us descend into the valley and speak with these spirits. Their company will bring you joy.”

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why she abandoned me. Tell her that if she ever doubts the depth of my love, I wish she would remember the flame that once burned brightly in me."

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The spirit then said, "Now continue, for in seven days the sun will rise again, and you must not let your purpose be clouded by doubt. Let your understanding be guided by those who are wise."

### Purgatorio: Canto X

When we had passed through the gate—where the soul's negative tendencies twist the path, making it seem like the more difficult way is the straight one—I heard the gate close behind us. Had I looked back, what excuse could I offer for my action? We began to climb the cracked rock, which alternated between winding up on either side, much like the waves of the sea—rising and falling. “Here we must be careful,” my guide said, “so our steps follow the curves of the path.”

We proceeded so slowly that by the time the moon, rising from the horizon, had passed her second quarter, we still hadn't completed the climb. When we finally reached the summit, where the mountain opened up, I was exhausted, and we stood uncertain of where to go next, surrounded by a desolate plain more lonely than any desert. The space between the edge and the base of the steep cliff was three times the height of a man, and as far as my eye could see, I noticed that the ledge stretched evenly on both sides.

We hadn't yet moved from that spot when I noticed that the surrounding cliff—too steep to climb—was made of perfectly white marble, so finely carved that even Polyclitus or nature herself would be ashamed of it. Among the sculptures, I saw an angel descending with such grace that it seemed almost real—so lifelike it felt as if it could speak the words, “Hail!” as though it had been sealed onto the surface of the rock. The image was so striking, it seemed to embody the words of the angel who opened Heaven's gates to the world.

“Do not focus on this one figure,” my guide said gently, “but look around and see the entire scene.” At that, I shifted my gaze and saw another scene carved on the rock behind the angel. I approached it to get a better view. There, on the same marble, was the image of the sacred ark being carried by oxen, with a procession of people before it—some singing, some silent, as incense curled upwards from their offerings. The whole scene captured a moment of reverence and devotion, where even the musical instruments seemed to join in.

Moving on, I saw another tableau—this one showing the glory of the Roman emperor, Trajan, who was celebrated for his justice. A widow stood at his side, grieving the murder of her son, while knights gathered around them. Overhead, golden eagles soared, caught in the wind, and the scene conveyed both nobility and sorrow.

I watched as a figure in the scene spoke: “Grant me vengeance, emperor, for my son has been murdered.” The emperor replied, “Wait until I return.” The widow, frantic with grief, asked, “What if you do not return?” The emperor, calm but firm, answered, “Where I am, justice is done, and I will make sure that your son is avenged.”

At this point, Sordello motioned for us to follow him, and as we did, I saw more spirits moving ahead. These spirits seemed to have no resemblance to humans, but their suffering was clearly visible. “What is this?” I asked my guide, puzzled by the strange figures approaching.

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“They are burdened by torment,” Virgil replied. “Look carefully and you will understand their pain. These souls, weighed down by their suffering, crawl forward, unable to stand tall, as if pressed by the weight of their actions.”

It was clear that these souls were bearing heavy burdens, symbolizing their sins. They twisted their bodies in unnatural positions, and each one seemed to express the agony they carried with them. One of them cried out, “I can bear no more,” a cry that resonated through the air. The image was powerful, making it clear that sin has a way of contorting not just the body, but the soul as well.

**Purgatorio: Canto XI**

"O Almighty Father, who make Your home in the heavens, not limited to boundaries, but filled with love, where You see the essence of all things—may Your name be honored. May all creatures join in praising Your might, for Your blessed Spirit is worthy of all thanks and praise. May Your kingdom's peace come to us, for without it, our efforts to reach it will be in vain. Just as the angels offer You sacrifices, circling Your throne with loud hosannas, so may the saints on earth do the same. Grant us this day our daily bread, for without it, he who strives to advance in this world will only move backward. Just as we forgive others, forgive us, and take no account of our merits. Do not allow the old adversary to defeat us easily, but free us from his temptations and defeat his wiles. This last petition, Lord, is not for us, but for those who come after us."

Thus, for themselves and us, the spirits prayed, burdened as they were, moving with difficulty like those weighed down by dreams, but with unequal suffering. They traveled around the first circle, purging themselves of the darkness they had carried from the world. And if any vows are still offered on their behalf, what can be done by those with goodness in their hearts? It is right that we help them cleanse the stains they brought with them, so that, made pure, they may ascend to the stars.

"May mercy-tempered justice relieve your burdens, so that you can stretch your wings and rise, just as you show us the quickest way up the ladder. And if there are several paths, tell us which one is the easiest, for this man, who walks with me and still carries the weight of his earthly flesh, climbs slowly despite his best intentions."

The answer came, though not spoken directly, but was communicated: "Come with us to the right side of the path, and you will find a passage that does not tire the body of the living man. And were it not for the rock that hinders my proud neck, I would lower my head to the ground to see him you speak of, to see if I knew him and ask for his pity for the burden I carry. I am Omberto, of the proud Aldobrandeschi family. My noble blood made me so arrogant that I forgot the common mother and became so scornful that I fell. My family too shares in the shame, as Sienna's people can tell. I am here, suffering the consequences of my pride, as I could not remedy it in life, now I endure it among the dead."

I looked down, and another spirit, not the one who spoke, bent under his own burden. He recognized me and called out, straining to look at me. "Oh!" I exclaimed. "Are you not Oderigi, the glory of Agobbio, renowned for your art, which the people of Paris call the limner's skill?"

"Brother," he replied, "It is now Franco's pencil that paints the brighter pictures, and all the honor goes to him. I admit, I wasn't always kind to him when I lived, for I was so eager to be the best. Here I am paying for that pride. I wouldn't even be here if, still able to sin, I hadn't turned to God. Oh, how vain is human glory, so easily faded when a new age succeeds it. Cimabue thought he was the master of painting, but now Giotto's name eclipses his. And so it goes with Guido,

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whose fame is now outshone by another. The noise of worldly fame is like a wind that blows from many directions, shifting its name with the wind. Will you live on in people's mouths once your body is gone? How long will your fame last? In the end, it's like the briefest flash compared to eternity."

I then asked, "Who is the one you spoke of?"

"This is Provenzano," he replied. "He sought to control all of Sienna, and now he suffers the consequences of his arrogance. He goes on in this place, never resting, just as he did in life."

"But," I asked, "if someone delays repentance to the very end of their life, how did Provenzano make it here?"

"When he was at the peak of his power," the spirit answered, "he sought to redeem a friend imprisoned by Charles. He trembled in every vein, yet did not refuse, for justice demanded it. It is this act that freed him from the weight of his pride."

### Purgatorio: Canto XII

With the same pace as oxen in a yoke, I journeyed on with that burdened spirit for as long as my kind guide allowed me. But when he told me to continue on my own, saying, "Here, everyone must use their own strength to push forward, each person as best as they can," I straightened up, ready for speed, but still mentally submissive.

I followed my guide's path without hesitation, and we had moved so quickly when he warned me, "Look down and observe the ground beneath your feet, for it will make the journey easier."

Just as tombstones often have a sculpted image of the deceased, evoking tears from those who mourn, I saw something similar on the side of the mountain. It was even more skillfully done, with scenes carved into the rock showing various figures. On one side, I saw the noblest of all creatures, once the most honored, struck by lightning from the heavens. On the other side, Briareus was pierced by a celestial bolt, lying crushed by the weight of the mortal blow. I saw the Thymbraean god with Mars and Pallas, still armed and staring at the giant's scattered limbs across the heavens. I saw Nimrod, standing at the foot of his great tower, bewildered, looking at the crowd involved in his failed attempt to build the Tower of Babel in the land of Sennaar.

Then I saw Niobe in a state of great sorrow, dragged along a road with seven sons slain on either side of her. I saw Saul looking dreadful, dying by his own sword on Mount Gilboa, a place that would never receive rain or dew again. I saw Arachne, now half-spider, crawling up the unfinished web she wove, leading to her doom. I saw Rehoboam, no longer defiant, now filled with fear, his chariot whirling aimlessly.

On the ground, I saw scenes of suffering, like how Alcmaeon forced his mother to accept the cursed ornament that led to his misery. I saw how Sennacherib's sons fell in the temple, and how a corpse was left behind in his wake. I saw the cruel fate of Cyrus, who was killed by Tomyris, who mocked him by saying, "You thirsted for blood, now take your fill of it!" I also saw the Assyrians routed in battle, with Holofernes slain and the remains of the carnage left behind. I saw the ruins of Troy, in ashes and caves, its downfall complete.

What master could have drawn such detailed and intricate images? The dead seemed alive, and even the living seemed more real than the truth itself, more vivid than the reality I walked through. As we continued, my neck grew stiff, and I passed on with my head held high, not hiding my eyes, lest I see the evil in my own path.

I didn't realize how much of the mountain we had climbed until the sun was higher in the sky. My guide, with his usual care, told me, "Raise your head. Don't wait any longer. Look ahead: an angel is coming toward us! The sixth handmaid is returning from her service." With his words, I realized it was time to move forward, so I looked with reverence, hoping the angel would lead us upward.

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When the angel approached, he was dressed in white, shining like the morning star, casting a brilliant light. He opened his arms and wings and said, "Come, the steps are near. The ascent is now easy to complete."

Few are the people who hasten when they hear such words, but why should men, born to fly, let such a slight breeze hinder them? The angel led us to a place where the rock split, and with his wings against my face, he promised us a safe journey. As we climbed, we could see the chapel above, which overlooked the city. The steep climb was broken by the old steps, carved long ago when things were simpler.

As we entered, I heard voices singing, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." How different from the shrieks of hell! Here, songs welcomed us. As we climbed the stairs, I felt lighter, and I asked, "Master, what heavy burden have I been relieved of, that I no longer feel the weight of the journey?"

He answered briefly, "When the sins that still mark your soul are entirely erased, then your will to ascend will be so strong that you won't feel the labor anymore. Instead, you'll find delight as you climb."

Then, like someone who doesn't know what's on their head but is guided by others, I stretched out my right hand and found six letters still etched on my brow, the mark from the sword of the angel who holds the keys to heaven. My guide smiled as he watched me.

### Purgatorio: Canto XIII

We reached the top of the scale and stood on the second ledge of the mountain, which heals the one who climbs it. There was a cornice, like the one before, circling the hill, but its arch was not as wide.

There were no shadows or images there; the rampart and path were all smooth, reflecting only the dull color of the rock. "If we wait here for someone to question us," said the poet, "I fear we might end up waiting too long."

Then he fixed his eyes on the sun, made his right side the center of his direction, and turned left. "O pleasant light, my hope and confidence, guide us," he said. "You give warmth and brightness to the world. If there is no other obstacle, your beams should always guide us."

We traveled quickly, covering about a mile on earth in a short time, as if driven by a strong will. Soon, we heard invisible spirits flying toward us, who kindly invited us to love's table. The first voice that flew by cried aloud, "They have no wine," and the sounds echoed behind us, not fading away. Then another spirit cried, "I am Orestes," and swiftly flew past. "Oh father!" I exclaimed, "What are these voices?" And as I asked, a third voice came, saying, "Love those who have wronged you."

"This circle," said my guide, "is for the punishment of envy, and the cords here are drawn by the hand of charity. The sound here is harsher, as you'll hear when you reach the place where forgiveness frees them. But focus your eyes through the air, and you'll see a multitude seated ahead, each along the rocky ledge."

Then I opened my eyes wider and saw, as we moved forward, shadows dressed in dark garments, blending with the rock. When we got closer, I heard them crying, "Blessed Mary! Pray for us, Michael and Peter! All you holy hosts!"

I don't think there's a person on earth today who wouldn't feel pity at the sight I saw. My eyes filled with sorrow as I got closer and saw their forms more clearly. Their clothing seemed like rough sackcloth. One leaned on another for support, and all leaned against the cliff. They stood like the blind and poor near the confessionals, begging for alms, not only through words but through their misery. And just as no noonday sun visits the blind man, heaven showed no light to these souls. They were bound by a thread, pulling them together like a wild hawk being tamed.

I thought it wrong to pass by without acknowledging them. I turned to my guide, who understood the silent appeal. He spoke without waiting for my question: "Speak, but be brief and thoughtful."

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On that part of the cornice, where no edge guarded the steep descent, Virgil approached. On the other side were the spirits, their faces wet with penitential tears, as they made their way through the painful path.

I turned to them and said, "O shades, certain that the high light, the object of your desires, will shine upon you, may heaven's grace clear whatever stains remain on your consciences. Please tell me, is there anyone from Latium among you? If so, perhaps my knowledge will be of help."

A voice answered from the distance, "My brother, we are all citizens of one true city. The one you seek is a stranger to the land of Italy."

I noticed a spirit with an expectant look. How did I know? His chin was raised, as if he were blind. "Spirit," I said, "who are you, tutoring yourself to rise? Tell me who you are, by place or name, so that I may know you."

"I was from Sienna," the spirit answered. "Here, I cleanse my life with these souls, seeking with tears the grace of the one who is. Although I was not known for wisdom, I was much happier when others suffered. Let me tell you my story. As my years declined, my fellow citizens, near Colle, met their enemies in battle. I prayed to God to give them victory. They were defeated and fled, and I, overjoyed, proudly raised my head, saying, 'It's over! Heaven, I fear you not.' But by the end of my life, I wished for peace with God, though I hadn't repented. It was only because the hermit Piero, touched by charity, remembered me in his prayers. But who are you who question us, breathing and asking?"

I replied, "My eyes may soon fail me, but they haven't yet caused harm with envious glances. I fear the burden of hell more than the weight I carry now."

She responded, "Then who among us here brought you, if you intend to return?"

I answered, "He who stands silent beside me. I live. Ask me, chosen spirit, if you want to know who will move my mortal feet for you."

"Ah," she said, "this is such a strange thing! It is a great sign that God loves you. Therefore, with your prayers, help me. And by that which you most desire, if you ever walk on Tuscan soil, save my reputation among my family. You will see them among the foolish crowd who, seeking their hopes in Telamone's haven, will fail and be confounded when the imagined stream they sought, that of Diana, calls. But the leaders of the navies will mourn more than their lost hopes."

**Purgatorio: Canto XIV**

“Tell me, who is this person wandering around our mountain, who, before death has clipped his wings for flight, opens and closes his eyes at will?”

“I don’t know who he is, but I do know that he’s not alone. Ask him yourself, for you’re closer to him. Be careful, though, approach him gently so that he may speak.”

Thus, two spirits, each bending toward the other, spoke about me. Then both turned to me, leaning backward, and one began: “O soul, still trapped in your body, striving to rise toward the sky! Please, tell us where you come from and who you are, for we are amazed by the favor shown to you, as if you were a new creation.”

I replied immediately, “There is a small stream running through Tuscany, whose source springs from the mountain of Falterona. The stream isn’t satisfied until it has traveled for a hundred miles. I come from its banks. To tell you who I am would be pointless since my name is hardly known even in passing.”

“If I understand your speech correctly,” the first spirit said, “you are speaking of the Arno River.”

The other spirit replied, “Why did he hide the name of the river, as one does with something shameful?” The first spirit responded, “I don’t know, but it seems fitting that the name of that valley should be forgotten. From the point where the Alpine slope feeds the stream, even to the place where the river meets the ocean, all the waters suffer from the influence of evil. It’s like a snake, tainted by malice, twisting the entire river. The people in that valley are so transformed that it’s as though they were fed by Circe herself. Among these people, instead of acorns, they feed on food that’s meant for humans. These are the kind of people who have lost their way and now the stream they follow is filled with more destructive waters. As the river grows, so do the vicious, turning from dogs into wolves, and even foxes with such craftiness that no one can master them. It won’t end well for this man. If he remembers my words, he’ll be saved. I see your grandson will be the one to hunt these wolves. From the shore of the river, he’ll terrorize them. He will sell their flesh, but like an old beast, he will slaughter them. He’ll take many lives, but he will lose his own worth and reputation. His bloody hands will leave a legacy so tainted that it won’t regain its strength for a thousand years.”

Upon hearing this, I was filled with sadness, and the spirit who had been listening turned pale with grief as soon as he heard those words.

His face and the other’s words stirred me to ask about their identities. I approached them humbly and asked their names.

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The spirit who had spoken first replied: “Your wish is to know our names, but in asking for your own sake, you do me a service. Since God’s grace shines so brightly in you, I will answer. I am Guido of Duca. My blood burned with envy. If I had seen someone else happy, my face would turn pale with jealousy. This is the price I pay for the seeds I sowed. Why do people put their hearts where there is no room for others to join in the good? This is the spirit of Rinieri, the pride and honor of the house of Calboli, though nothing remains of his worth now. He’s not the only one who’s been stripped of everything between Po, the mountain, the Reno, and the shore. This entire area has sprouted roots of evil and corruption. Where are Lizio, Manardi, Traversalo, and Carpigna? Where are the children of old Romagna? When the low artisans of Bologna and Bernardin of Faenza sprout, we see noble offspring from humble origins. Don’t be surprised, Tuscan, if you see me weep as I remember these noble names: Guido of Prata, Azzo, Tignoso, and Traversaro. All of these families, once great, are now fallen. Their legacy has been drowned in malice. The same goes for Brettinoro, Bagnacavallo, Castracaro, and Conio—those who bear evil blood and care only to continue their families’ line. Yet, when a demon child is born, it is for the better that their bloodline ends, and it will not remain a true testament to their greatness. O Hugolin! Descendant of Fantolini, your name will remain clear, for there will be no one to tarnish it after you. But, Tuscan, go on your way. I take more comfort in weeping than in words. Such sorrow for your sake has seized my heart.”

We continued on our way, hearing the sound of footsteps following us. Soon, a voice that seemed like lightning splitting the air met us, shouting, “Whoever finds me, will kill me,” then fled, like a lightning bolt coming from a cloud. When the sound faded, another voice came with a crash, just as loud as thunder: “Look at Aglauros turned to stone.” I recoiled at the sound, drawing closer to my guide.

The air was still, and my guide said: “That was the sharpest test. But your old enemy entices you with a hook, drawing you eagerly toward him. Now, neither a curb nor a call to return can save you. Heaven calls and displays its eternal beauty to you, but your eye keeps turning back to the earth. This is why God strikes you who see it all but still turn away.”

### Purgatorio: Canto XV

As much as the time between the closing of the third hour and the dawn, when heaven's sphere spins as restlessly as a child at play, so much time had passed by the sun's journey towards the western horizon.

It was evening there, and here it was the middle of the night; the sun's rays were striking directly on our foreheads. As we had circled around the mountain, our path now led us directly towards the sunset. When I felt a stronger weight of light pressing down on me, more intense than before, I was filled with wonder. I raised my hands to shield my eyes from the overwhelming brightness, but it was in vain. The light seemed to smite the ground before me, and I recoiled. "What is this, beloved master? What is it that I cannot shield myself from?" I cried out, "What seems to be coming toward us?"

"Do not marvel," he replied, "if heaven's family still dazzles you with radiance, for this is a messenger, inviting you to ascend. Soon, these sights, though bright, will delight you, as your senses grow capable of perceiving them."

As soon as we reached the angel, he greeted us joyfully: "Here, enter on a ladder far less steep than any you have yet encountered." We immediately began climbing, and as we did, we heard voices singing, "Blessed are the merciful," and "Happy are you who conquer!"

Each of us alone, my guide and I, continued our ascent, and I hoped to gain more understanding from his words. I then asked, "What did the spirit of Romagna mean when he spoke of bliss shared only with one's self?"

He replied quickly: "No wonder, since he knows the sorrow tied to his own greatest flaw, if he rebukes others to lessen their grief. You desire a certain goal, but by sharing it, your joy is diminished. Envy causes such suffering, but this will not affect you if your desire is raised to higher realms. In that place, the more we call something ours, the more it is shared, and each person's joy increases. Charity burns in a brighter flame, and as it expands, so does the light."

"I still don't fully understand," I said. "How is it possible that distributing good to many makes the many richer than if it were shared by only a few?"

He answered: "Your mind still clings to earthly matters, and it clouds your vision of true light. The highest good, which is infinite and ineffable, spreads love to all. It pours out as a beam of light to a clear body, giving as much energy as it can find. The eternal light expands, spreading where charity reaches. The more people that aspire to that bliss, the more love there is to give, and the more is loved. It is like mirrors that reflect light to each other. If these words don't ease your thirst for understanding, then Beatrice, whom you will see, will help you, and she will rid you of this confusion and all others."

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"Your words comfort me," I said, "when I saw that we had reached the next level. My eyes were filled with wonder, and I fell into an ecstatic vision. I saw myself in a temple, surrounded by a crowd. A woman, with a loving gaze, approached and said, 'Child, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have searched for you in sorrow.' She said no more, and the vision vanished."

"Then another woman appeared before me, with tears flowing down her face, as if deep resentment stung her. She seemed to say, 'If you, Pisistratus, truly rule this city, avenge your daughter, whose arms have held her captive!' Then, another spoke, kindly and calmly, saying, 'How shall we repay those who wish us harm, if we condemn the man who loves us?'"

"Next, I saw a crowd in fury, throwing stones at a young man, shouting, 'Destroy! Destroy!' The youth fell, his body heavy with death, but his eyes were opened, facing heaven, as he prayed for forgiveness for his enemies, with compassion in his gaze."

"When my spirit returned to reality, I observed what I had seen was not from any false vision. My guide, seeing that I was confused, spoke: 'What's the matter? You've wandered more than half a league with your eyes closed, staggering as though you were drunk or asleep.'"

"Beloved father, if you listen," I said, "I will tell you what I saw when my steps failed me."

He answered: "It doesn't matter what you saw, for I knew your thoughts even without you telling me. What you saw was shown to you so that you would open your heart to peace, which flows from the eternal fountain. I didn't ask what ailed you, for like one who looks only with the eye, unable to see when the body is lifeless, I only asked to help you regain your strength. This is the goad that helps the slow and weary, so they won't fail when their hour arrives."

We continued our journey through the evening sky, gazing ahead as our eyes could reach the bright evening rays. Gradually, a thick mist began to gather toward us, darker than the night. There was no way to escape, and the mist took away our sight and the pure air.

**Purgatorio: Canto XVI**

"Who is the one who moves around our mountain, opening and closing his eyes as he pleases, before death has clipped his wings for flight?"

"I don't know who he is, but I know he isn't alone. You should ask him, for you are closer to him. Be careful in how you approach him, so that he will speak."

Then, on the right side, two spirits bent toward each other, speaking about me. They then turned to face me and began, "O soul, who still enclosed in your body, tend towards the sky, for charity's sake, help us understand where you come from and who you are. You make us marvel, as if we were witnessing something we've never seen before."

"I come from a brook in Tuscany," I replied immediately. "It springs up in Falterona and travels, never being satisfied, for it runs for a hundred miles. From its banks, I bring this frame. To tell you who I am would be a waste of words, for my name is hardly known."

"If I understand you correctly," the first spirit said, "you speak of the river Arno."

"Why did he hide the name of that river?" the other spirit asked. The one who had been questioned then replied: "I don't know, but it's fitting that the name should be lost. From the source in the Alps, where Pelorus barely touches, to the point where the ocean receives it, the river flows through a valley where the natural world is so corrupted, it's like the people there share in the transformation of Circe. They start as wild beasts, deserving of acorns, and then gradually become worse. They turn from curs to wolves, then to foxes, all full of deceit. That's where your grandson comes from. He will hunt those wolves along the riverbank, causing harm, selling their flesh while they're still alive, and eventually leading them to slaughter. He will take many lives, and his own life will be ruined by his actions."

Upon hearing these words, I saw the spirit change his expression, overwhelmed with sadness.

Curious about the identities of both spirits, I asked, "Who are you?"

The spirit who had spoken first answered: "I am Guido of Duca. Envy so dried up my blood that when I saw anyone else rejoice, my face would turn pale with jealousy. I reaped the consequences of sowing envy. But do not mistake me. I am not saying that the world is full of evil for no reason. It is filled with evil because the leaders fail to guide the people towards goodness. There were two suns in Rome, one worldly and one spiritual. The worldly one has now extinguished the other, and the sword is now joined with the crook, leading the world towards corruption. This is evident in the land where the Adige and Po rivers flow, which once was full of nobility and courage. Now, it is filled with disgrace. Gherardo of Palazzo, Conrad, and Guido of Castello remain as the only relics of a better age."

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At this point, I asked, "Who is Gherardo, the one you mention as a rebuke to this age?"

The spirit answered, "Your words either deceive or test me, for you, speaking in Tuscan, seem not to have heard of good Gherardo. He is the only true addition to the past, as his daughter Gaia gave him another name. God be with you, I must leave. The dawn is breaking, and the angel approaches."

And with that, the spirit was gone.

### Purgatorio: Canto XVII

Remember, reader, if you have ever been caught in a cloud on top of a mountain, where you couldn't see any better than a mole through opaque skin. Then, when the thick mist began to dissolve into thin air, how weakly the sun's light appeared as it struggled to shine through. This is how my thoughts could barely understand as I first saw the sun again, now hanging low towards its resting place.

So, I continued along with my guide, keeping pace with him. After a while, we came out of the cloud, and the sun's last rays from the lower shores of the mountain faded away.

O quick and forgetful mind! That sometimes robs us of ourselves, making us unable to notice even the loudest sounds, though we are surrounded by them. What moves you, if your senses are not alert? The light from heaven, which shines on its own or swiftly descends by God's will, was what illuminated the next vision I had.

A scene appeared in my mind: the image of someone who had been crucified, whose face showed deep hatred and malice at the moment of death. Around him were Ahasuerus the great king, Esther his wife, and Mordecai the righteous, who was blameless in word and deed. Then, as if it were a fading image, it vanished like a bubble bursting when the water that supported it disappears.

Next, I saw a girl weeping loudly and crying, "O queen! O mother! Why has anger driven you to hate your existence? In despair, you have killed yourself over losing Lavinia. Now you have lost me too, for I am the one who mourns, a mother who dies too early."

Just like a dream is interrupted by sudden light striking closed eyes, the vision before me faded. As soon as the light hit my face, it vanished.

As I looked around, trying to understand where I had arrived, I heard a voice say, "Here you climb." Immediately, I was overcome with curiosity to see who was speaking, so I couldn't help but look. Just as the sun's light weighs down our sight and veils its form, so too did my senses fail to fully grasp the full brilliance of the voice's source.

"This is the spirit from above," my guide said. "He is the one who guides us on our upward path, without our asking, and he shrouds himself in his own light. As a man does for himself, so this spirit does for us. For anyone who waits, seeking aid, but still expects refusal, is ready for disappointment. But here, we shall accept the invitation, hurry to ascend, before the darkening of the day. We must climb now, for we will not be able to again until the morning light."

Then we both began climbing the ladder. As we approached the first step, I felt the rush of a wing against my face, and I heard it whisper, "Blessed are the peacemakers; they know not evil wrath."

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By now, the last rays of the sun had set, and night was upon us. Stars began to shine in the sky. I thought to myself, "Why do I feel so weak, as if I can't continue?" We had reached the summit and were as fixed as a ship that has arrived on land. After a short pause, I turned to my guide and asked, "What guilt is purged on this circle?"

He replied, "The love for good, whatever was lacking in it, is fulfilled here. Here, the oar that had been slack is plied again. But I will tell you more clearly. Listen, and you'll understand more from this delay."

"My son," he began, "no being, either created or created by God, has ever existed without love. Some love is natural, and some comes from the growth of free will. Natural love is always right, but love from free will can be warped if it's bent on the wrong object or in excess. As long as it seeks the ultimate good, no evil is involved. But when it warps to evil, or seeks things in excess or too little, it leads to evil."

"Love is the seed of all virtue, and also of every act that deserves punishment. Love intends the welfare of the thing loved. Thus, all from self-hatred are free from such harm. And because no being can exist independently from the first cause, all love, even in a corrupted form, is constrained by a universal law."

"Now, I will explain the three kinds of love. The first is when someone wishes for greatness by putting another down. The second is when someone fears the loss of power or fame and resents others rising above them. The third is when someone seeks vengeance, yearning for another's downfall. All three types of love bring sorrow, as they're warped by ill intentions."

"The second type of love is mourned here. And those who love the good but with disordered or irregular course also experience torment in this circle. When the soul pursues a blissful state, yet does so lazily or too passively, this circle corrects them. Love for things that cannot bring true happiness or fulfillment is also mourned here."

"The love given too freely or wastefully also brings torment in this circle. The love that desires the wrong thing can corrupt good intentions."

"Remember, this is a world where we're led by free will to choose between good and evil. The cause of evil is not nature, but rather poor guidance, which has caused the world to fall into evil."

**Purgatorio: Canto XVIII**

The teacher finished speaking, and after his high discourse, he looked at me earnestly to see if I seemed content. I, still driven by an insatiable thirst for knowledge, was silent—silent on the outside, but inside I thought, “Perhaps my constant questioning is bothering him.” But he, like a true father, noticed my silent wish and, speaking, gave me the courage to ask: “Master, the light from your words is so clear that I can understand everything. Therefore, I ask you, dearest father, if you would explain to me the nature of love, from which all good deeds and their opposites arise.”

He answered me: “Focus carefully on what I now reveal, and you will clearly see how much those blind guides have strayed. The soul, created to love, moves in whatever direction she is prompted by pleasure, as soon as she is awakened by it. The substance of the thing she sees is formed in her mind, and she is drawn to it. When she inclines toward it, that inclination is love, and it creates a new nature in her, like pleasure in the soul. Just as fire naturally rises, seeking its source and seat, the soul is drawn to the object of her desire. Desire is a spiritual motion, and it never rests until it enjoys the thing it loves.”

He continued, explaining how many have misunderstood the nature of love, claiming it to be good in itself, without considering its direction. “If the wax is good, it does not mean that every impression must be perfect. Love is the root of all virtues and all actions that merit praise or punishment. It is always aimed at the good of the thing loved, and therefore, it is not capable of hating what is truly good.”

I replied, “Your words, O master, have helped me understand what love is, and yet new doubts have arisen. If love is offered from outside, and the spirit does not have any other foundation to guide it, whether it inclines toward good or evil, it is not the spirit’s fault.”

The teacher responded: “What reason reveals, I can explain to you. What lies beyond reason’s reach, you will learn from Beatrice, for that is not for reason to explain. The spirit, joined with matter, has a specific virtue of that union, which can only be understood through its effects, just like the life of a plant is known by the green leaf. This is the source of merit—whether the affections are good or bad, and how they move the soul toward or away from the good.”

He continued, “Thus, love arises from necessity. You have the power to dismiss or nurture it. Remember, Beatrice calls free will the noblest virtue. She will explain this to you in greater detail when you meet her.”

At that moment, the moon, almost at midnight, cast her light in a way that made the stars seem to flicker and fade. She appeared like a rock on fire as she made her way across the sky. This vision cleared my mind and lightened my thoughts, and I understood more clearly what had been revealed to me.

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As we continued our journey, I suddenly felt a rush of spirits approaching, like a tumultuous crowd, moving with great speed, all driven by intense love. They quickly overtook us, and I heard two spirits leading them, crying out, "Blessed Mary hastened to the hilly region. Caesar, to subdue Ilerda, set his sights on Marseilles and then flew to Spain."

Others in the crowd shouted, "Do not delay; do not waste time. Zeal for service quickens celestial grace."

One of the spirits spoke, saying, "O you who once were slow or neglectful, now fervent love moves you to act. This man, who still lives, desires to ascend, so the morning light may guide him. Therefore, show him the way."

My guide then addressed the spirit: "Follow us, and you will find the cleft. We cannot linger, for we are moved by an irresistible will to continue."

The spirit replied, "I am from Verona, where I was abbot of San Zeno when Barbarossa seized imperial power. In the future, the abbot who replaces me will weep for his misused authority."

We continued upward as the crowd moved ahead. The spirit, in his fervor, added more, but soon moved so far ahead that I could not hear him clearly.

Then, my guide cried, "Look! Two spirits are chiding their sin!" I looked, and saw two spirits in pursuit of their redemption. They shouted, "They died before the sea opened for them, or before Jordan saw their heirs. They, like Aeneas, could not endure suffering, and chose life without glory."

As they passed from sight, new thoughts arose in my mind, one after the other, until I became lost in the fleeting train of ideas. Eventually, these thoughts turned into a dream.

**Purgatorio: Canto XIX**

It was the hour when the heat of the day had passed, and the cold light of the moon took over, subdued by the earth or the influence of Saturn. The geomancer saw his Greater Fortune rise in the east, where the dawn first broke the shadows. In my dream, a woman's shape appeared before me. Her lips stammered, her eyes were askew, her feet were distorted, her hands were maimed, and her face was pale.

I looked at her, and just as the sunlight warms limbs stiffened by the cold of the night, my gaze seemed to restore her. Her form straightened, her faded face gained color, and love's own hue lit her up. She immediately began to sing, and though I didn't want to listen, I could hardly pull my attention away from the song. "I am the Siren," she sang. "I am the one whom sailors are bewitched by when they hear my song. I enchant them. I drew Ulysses from his course with my singing. Once someone listens to me, they rarely leave. I charm their hearts, and they know no emptiness."

Before she could finish, a holy-looking woman appeared at her side and asked, "Who is this, O Virgil?" My guide approached, still keeping his eyes on the holy figure. The other woman grabbed the Siren, tearing her robes and revealing her belly, which emitted such a foul stench that it made me turn my eyes away. Then my guide spoke, "I've called you three times now. Get up, and let us find the opening where you can pass."

I immediately rose, and as we walked, the sun's rays struck us, and I followed with my head bowed, like a man overburdened with thought. Then I heard a voice saying, "Come, enter here." It was a gentle and soft voice, unlike anything I'd heard before. A figure with swan-like wings spread wide led us down a path, and as he moved his wings, he fanned us and said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

My guide asked, "Why do you still look to the earth?" The angelic figure, hovering just above us, took his place. I replied, "A new vision has raised doubts within me, and my mind is consumed by them, leaving no room for anything else." The guide responded, "Did you see that old enchantress? The one whose wiles make the spirits above weep? Did you see how man can free himself from her bonds? Enough. Look up and direct your gaze to the lure Heaven's eternal King spins in the rolling heavens."

Just as a falcon first looks downward and then turns eagerly upward to the food that calls him, so I followed the call. I continued on until I reached a plain. At the fifth circle, I saw a group of spirits lying on the ground, weeping bitterly. "My soul has cleaved to the dust," I heard one of them say, with sighs so deep it almost choked the words. "O ye elect of God, whose suffering is softened by hope and justice, guide us towards the steep ascent."

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The poet asked them to move, and they responded, instructing us to stay on the right side of the path. After hearing their response, I looked at my guide. He understood their request, and with a glad gesture, he gave his approval. I then approached the spirit who had spoken and asked, "Spirit, whose repentant tears will bring you closer to God, tell me who you are, and why do you lie prostrate on the ground? If there is anything I can do, let me know."

The spirit responded, "You want to know why Heaven has turned our backs on us, but first, know that I am the successor of Peter, and my lineage comes from the stream that flows between Chiaveri and Siestri. I learned, though late, that the weight of the robe of sovereignty is heavier than all other burdens. I had my conversion when I became the pastor of Rome, and I saw the deceit and emptiness of life. I had been a soul in misery, disconnected from God, and greedy for earthly things. But now, as you see, I am punished for my indulgence in earthly desires."

I bowed my knees and would have spoken, but the spirit, sensing my reverence, asked, "What causes you to bow?" I replied, "Compassion and awe of your dignity." The spirit then commanded me to rise, stating that he was a fellow servant of one sovereign power, and if I had ever heard the gospel truth, I would understand. "Go now," he said, "and linger no more. Your delay hinders my prayers for mercy. I have a kinswoman on earth named Alagia, who remains all that is left of me there."

### Purgatorio: Canto XX

It was the hour when the heat of the day had gone, and the moon's cold light had taken over, subdued by the influence of the earth or Saturn's planetary power. The geomancer saw his Greater Fortune rising in the east, where the dawn first broke the shadowy cone. Then, before me in my dream, a woman's shape appeared. Her lips stammered, her eyes were askew, her feet were distorted, her hands were maimed, and her face was pale.

I looked at her, and just as sunlight cheers limbs numbed by the cold of night, my gaze seemed to restore her. Her form straightened, her faded face gained color, and love's hue lit her up. She immediately began to sing, and although I didn't want to listen, I could hardly pull my attention away from the song. "I am the Siren," she sang. "I am the one whom sailors are bewitched by when they hear my song. I enchant them. I drew Ulysses from his course with my singing. Once someone listens to me, they rarely leave. I charm their hearts, and they know no emptiness."

Before she could finish, a holy-looking woman appeared at her side and asked, "Who is this, O Virgil?" My guide approached, still keeping his eyes on the holy figure. The other woman grabbed the Siren, tearing her robes and revealing her belly, which emitted such a foul stench that it made me turn my eyes away. Then my guide spoke, "I've called you three times now. Get up, and let us find the opening where you can pass."

I immediately rose, and as we walked, the sun's rays struck us, and I followed with my head bowed, like a man overburdened with thought. Then I heard a voice saying, "Come, enter here." It was a gentle and soft voice, unlike anything I'd heard before. A figure with swan-like wings spread wide led us down a path, and as he moved his wings, he fanned us and said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

My guide asked, "Why do you still look to the earth?" The angelic figure, hovering just above us, took his place. I replied, "A new vision has raised doubts within me, and my mind is consumed by them, leaving no room for anything else." The guide responded, "Did you see that old enchantress? The one whose wiles make the spirits above weep? Did you see how man can free himself from her bonds? Enough. Look up and direct your gaze to the lure Heaven's eternal King spins in the rolling heavens."

Just as a falcon first looks downward and then turns eagerly upward to the food that calls him, so I followed the call. I continued on until I reached a plain. At the fifth circle, I saw a group of spirits lying on the ground, weeping bitterly. "My soul has cleaved to the dust," I heard one of them say, with sighs so deep it almost choked the words. "O ye elect of God, whose suffering is softened by hope and justice, guide us towards the steep ascent."

The poet asked them to move, and they responded, instructing us to stay on the right side of the path. After hearing their response, I looked at my guide. He understood their request, and with a

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glad gesture, he gave his approval. I then approached the spirit who had spoken and asked, “Spirit, whose repentant tears will bring you closer to God, tell me who you are, and why do you lie prostrate on the ground? If there is anything I can do, let me know.”

The spirit responded, “You want to know why Heaven has turned our backs on us, but first, know that I am the successor of Peter, and my lineage comes from the stream that flows between Chiaveri and Siestri. I learned, though late, that the weight of the robe of sovereignty is heavier than all other burdens. I had my conversion when I became the pastor of Rome, and I saw the deceit and emptiness of life. I had been a soul in misery, disconnected from God, and greedy for earthly things. But now, as you see, I am punished for my indulgence in earthly desires.”

I bowed my knees and would have spoken, but the spirit, sensing my reverence, asked, “What causes you to bow?” I replied, “Compassion and awe of your dignity.” The spirit then commanded me to rise, stating that he was a fellow servant of one sovereign power, and if I had ever heard the gospel truth, I would understand. “Go now,” he said, “and linger no more. Your delay hinders my prayers for mercy. I have a kinswoman on earth named Alagia, who remains all that is left of me there.”

**Purgatorio: Canto XXI**

It was the hour when the heat of the day has passed, and the moon's cold beams take over, subdued by the earth or the influence of Saturn. The geomancer saw his Greater Fortune rise in the east, where dawn first breaks over the shadowed mountain. Then, before me in my dream, a woman's shape appeared. She had lips that stammered, eyes that were askew, and her feet and hands were distorted, her face pale.

I looked at her, and as the sun cheers limbs numbed by the night's cold, my gaze seemed to restore her. She straightened, her faded face gaining color, and love's hue illuminated her. She then began to sing a song that was so beautiful I could hardly look away, even though I didn't want to listen. "I am the Siren," she sang. "I am the one that sailors hear, and they're entranced by my song. I drew Ulysses off course with my singing. Once someone listens to me, they rarely leave; I charm them, and they feel no emptiness."

Before she finished, a holy-looking woman appeared next to her. She spoke with a stern voice, asking, "Who is this, O Virgil?" My guide approached, eyes still focused on the holy figure, and said, "Peace in the blessed council be your lot, awarded by the righteous court that exiles me to everlasting banishment!"

The spirit before us then spoke, "How is it that you are spirits, whom God does not allow into His realm above, and who, through such heights, have been led this far?" To this, the poet replied, "If you observe the signs this man bears, which the angel has marked on him, it is clear that in the kingdom of the just, he must share. But since she, who spins day and night, has not yet drawn the thread for him, his soul—like mine and yours—could not ascend on its own. Thus, I was taken from the depths of hell to lead him, and I will lead him as far as my knowledge allows. But, if you know, please tell us why the mountain shook, and why it seemed to shout from its wave-washed base."

His question was exactly what I longed to know. I felt my thirst for understanding abate. The spirit answered, "This mountain shows no irregular devotion or rule. It is exempt from every change except for the influence of Heaven itself. No storm, snow, or hail can pass this point. You will not see a cloud move or lightning strike. Vapors do not rise higher than the top of the trinal stairs, where Peter's vicegerent stands. Below, perhaps the soil trembles from various motions, but here—when any spirit feels purified, ready to rise—the mountain trembles, and the spirits rejoice."

This answer, satisfying my thirst for knowledge, filled me with contentment. Virgil, seeing I was pleased, asked the spirit to share his story, inquiring who he was and why he had been prostrated for so long.

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The spirit responded, "In my time, I was known for my high position and renown. I was once a great figure in the kingdom of France, a descendant of Hugh Capet. Through me, the royal line of the Philips and the Louis began. But after a while, I realized that the power of the crown was not what it seemed. After becoming the king's pastor, I saw the falsehood and emptiness of life. I became disconnected from God and devoted to earthly things, but I eventually converted. Now, I am punished for my former indulgence in greed. This mount punishes such sins with no other penalty. As avarice dried up our love for good, we are here, bound by justice, until Heaven's Lord deems it time to release us."

I bowed my knees to him in reverence and would have spoken, but the spirit, perceiving my reverence, asked, "What causes you to bow down?" I replied, "Compassion and awe of your dignity." The spirit then said, "Rise, brother, and do not worship me. I am but a shadow, as are you. We are servants of one Sovereign Power. If you have ever heard the truth of the gospel, you will understand my words. Now, go, and do not linger here. Your delay hinders my prayers. I have a kinswoman named Alagia, and she is the only one left of my line on Earth."

**Purgatorio: Canto XXII**

We had just left the angel who had guided us up to the sixth circle, when Virgil, noticing a mark on my forehead had disappeared, began to speak. As we continued on, I felt more at ease, and the thirst for knowledge I had before was now somewhat alleviated. I followed the quick-moving shades upward without feeling the weight of the journey, when Virgil asked me a question: "Let the pure flame of virtue flow; love never fails to warm another's heart, so let the light shine clearly. From the moment the spirit of Aquinum came down among us and spoke of your affection, my goodwill toward you has been as strong as it ever was for anyone I have not seen. This ascent now seems easy to me."

Virgil continued, "But tell me, my friend, how did it happen that such a powerful desire for wealth found a place in your heart, despite the wisdom you possessed? How did this covetousness take root?"

Statius, moved slightly to laughter by Virgil's words, responded: "Each of your words shows great love. Things sometimes seem to trouble us, but the causes of our doubts are often hidden. You may think I was a greedy man because I was placed in this circle, but let me tell you, I was never excessively greedy. The consequences of my faults, though, have weighed heavily upon me for many moons. I was once blind to this vice, but through reflection and penitence, I turned away from it. Many will rise from their graves, still unaware of this fault, and they will not repent until their last moment. I, too, did not repent in life for this sin. But now, as I endure the consequences, I am cleansed of it."

Virgil then responded: "When you sang of the tragic war of Jocasta's womb, you did not have the light of faith. Good deeds are insufficient without faith, so what brought you to that realization, and when did you begin to see the light?"

Statius answered: "I was first guided by you, Virgil, and entered the grottos of Parnassus, drinking from the clear spring you showed me. You opened my eyes to God, just as one walking in darkness turns toward a light, which, although not for his benefit, guides others. You spoke of a renewed world, where justice would return, and a new race would emerge from heaven. Both poet and Christian, I owed you my guidance. Through your words, I was drawn to the Christian faith, and I suffered alongside the early Christians, helping them through the persecution they faced."

He continued: "Before I led the Greeks in the stories of Thebes, I was baptized in secret, out of fear, and lived as a Christian though I still conformed to Pagan rites. I spent five centuries in the fourth circle for this lukewarmness. But now, having left the mistakes of my past, I wish to know where the old Roman playwrights—Terence, Caecilius, Plautus, and Varro—reside in the afterlife. Do they dwell in the depths of hell, and if so, in which part?"

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Virgil answered: "They, along with many others, are in the first circle of darkness with that great Greek poet, the most cherished by the Muses, and we converse with them often. Among them are Antigone, Deiphile, and Ismene, along with other figures like Tiresias' daughter and the bride of Peleus. They live on that mountain where we have our discussions."

We were now nearing the top of the mountain, and Virgil directed our steps. We came across a tree with beautiful fruit, fragrant and pleasant to the smell. A crystal stream ran from the rock above, and as we approached the plant, a voice from the leaves spoke, "Be careful of me," and then added, "Mary thought more of the joy and honor of the wedding feast than of herself. The women of ancient Rome were content with water to drink. Daniel lived on pulse and gained wisdom. The first age was as pure as gold, and hunger made acorns sweet, thirst turned every river into nectar. The Baptist in the wilderness lived on locusts and honey, and in this way, he reached the greatness recorded by the Evangelist."

**Purgatorio: Canto XXIII**

My eyes were fixed on the green leaf, like one who wastes his time chasing something trivial, when I heard Virgil warn me: "Son, our time is precious. Do not linger. Move on."

At that, I turned my face and steps towards the sages, feeling more energized by their company. I moved forward, feeling no exhaustion. Then, I heard a mixture of weeping and a song: "My lips, O Lord!" The sound stirred both pleasure and sorrow in me. I asked, "What is this I hear, dear father?"

Virgil replied, "These are spirits who, as they journey, may be paying their debt to duty."

As we continued, a crowd of spirits passed us, silent and devout. Their eyes were hollow, their faces pale and emaciated. They looked like the victims of famine, and I thought of the race that had lost Jerusalem, those whose misfortune is written in their eyes.

One spirit looked at me with deep, hollow eyes and cried out, "What grace is this vouchsafed me?" I recognized the voice before I could place the face. It was Forese, the spirit whose transformation I now saw. "Ah! Respect this withered skin," he said. "Speak to me. Tell me who you are, and who those two spirits are that accompany you. Don't refuse me conversation."

I replied, "Your face, which I mourned when you passed away, now fills me with sorrow once again. Tell me, by heaven, what has brought you to this condition? Don't ask me to speak yet; I am not in a state to answer. It is not me but another that compels me."

Forese responded, "The fruit and the water we passed; that was virtue's influence, infused by the eternal will, which causes us to pine here. Each spirit here, who was once excessively indulgent in gluttony, now suffers hunger and thirst as a form of purification. The smell of the fruit and the water is what inflames our desire to feed and drink, and this torment repeats over and over as we pass, and it fuels our pain."

Then, I asked, "Forese, if this is so, how have you come so soon, for only a few years have passed since you left this world? How is it that you are here and purified already?"

He answered, "I have been brought here by the tears shed by my wife Nella. Her devotion and prayers have hastened my ascension. She is the reason I am here, freed from the lower circles. God sees her devotion, and it has made her even more precious in His eyes. As she ranks higher for her virtuous deeds, she has drawn me to this place of purification."

Then, with a heavy heart, Forese spoke of his wife, how much he loved her, and how her prayers had led him here. He warned that soon there would come a time when the women of Florence would be warned against their immodesty, when their actions would draw divine punishment, especially against those who think it right to display their bodies.

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I asked, “But if you loved her so, and she was such a virtuous woman, how could you have lived with such disregard for your faith before? You, who were once a poet and praised the gods, how did you come to embrace Christianity?”

He replied, “I, too, had once lived as you say, a poet and a pagan. But through God’s grace and the light of faith, I was drawn toward the Christian truth. I wept with the early Christians for their suffering, and I forsook the old ways. Though I was baptized secretly out of fear, I turned to the true faith. I have paid for my former indifference.”

Then, in response to my question about the great poets of old, he explained, “They, along with myself, reside in the first circle of darkness, where we often converse on matters of poetry. Among those, the names of Antigone, Deiphile, and Ismene, along with many others, are known.”

We then continued our ascent, and Virgil directed our steps. Soon we came to a tree bearing beautiful fruit, and a crystal-clear stream flowed from the rock above. As we approached the tree, a voice from the leaves said, “Be careful of me.” The voice then continued, speaking of the simplicity of the past: “Mary, the mother of Christ, thought more of the wedding feast than of herself. The early Roman women were content with water, and Daniel lived on simple food, gaining wisdom. The first age was pure, and hunger made acorns sweet. The Baptist lived on locusts and honey and achieved greatness in doing so.”

**Purgatorio: Canto XXIV**

Our journey was not slowed by our conversation, nor did our conversation slow our journey. We spoke and walked on, as swiftly as a ship with the wind at its back. The shadowy forms, which appeared to be dead, looked at me with deep wonder when they realized I was alive. I continued speaking, saying, "He may be traveling more slowly than he otherwise would, for the sake of others. But tell me, if you know, where is Piccarda? Tell me if I will see any notable souls among this crowd, who are watching me."

Virgil answered, "My sister (the one for whom I cannot decide if 'beautiful' or 'good' is the more fitting name) is even now crowned and triumphing in Olympus." He continued, "Since our austere diet has made our appearance so withered, it is permissible here to name each one. This," and he pointed, "is Buonaggiuna of Lucca; and beyond him, that face, thinner than the others, belonged to a man who guarded the church. He was from Tours and purified himself through severe abstinence, rejecting the rich eels of Bolsena and cups of muscadel."

He showed me many others, one by one, and all seemed content. No dark gestures of sorrow could I see in any of them. I saw Ubaldino, grinding his teeth in hunger, and Boniface, who had wielded the crozier over a large flock. I saw the Marquis, who used to drink at Forli, yet never could be sated. I also saw him from Lucca, who seemed to take special notice of me. I heard him whisper something about Gentucca, though I could not catch all of it, as it murmured in the distance, where justice fixes its sting.

"Spirit," I said, "it seems that you wish to speak with me. Let me hear you. Let us both indulge in the mutual desire to converse."

He began, "There is a woman who has yet to cover her brow with the veil of modesty, and she will make my city more pleasing to you, despite the scorn others may pour upon it. So heed this warning. If anything false was implied in my whisper, the event will prove it. Tell me, do you know the man who is the author of the new poem, which begins 'Ladies, ye who study the lore of love'?"

I replied, "Consider me as one who is the scribe of love, ready to take up my pen whenever he breathes, and write as he dictates."

He continued, "Brother, the obstacle that once hindered me and Guittone, preventing us from reaching the sweet style I hear you speak of, has now been removed. I see how you spread your wings as the writer guides them, which no question ours did not. He who seeks a grace beyond this sees not the distance between one style and another."

With that, he was silent, contented by the acknowledgment.

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Just as birds migrating near the Nile take flight in an organized way, so the spirits, as they turned, moved faster with an eagerness fueled by both leanness and desire. Like a man tired of his steed's trot, who slows down to catch his breath, Forese lingered behind the holy group, asking, "When shall I see you again?"

I replied, "I do not know how long my life will last, but know this: when I return, my wishes will have arrived before me. Since the place where I now live is slowly losing all its goodness, and a grim ruin seems to be threatening it."

"Go now," he cried. "Behold! He whose guilt is greatest is passing before my eyes, dragged by a furious beast. He is speeding towards the valley where no redemption is possible, each step faster than the last, until a blow strikes him, leaving him shattered and lifeless. Not much farther will those wheels roll before you see what I have told you."

He departed with rapid strides, and we were left to continue our journey with the other spirits who were such mighty marshals of the world.

Once he had gone out of sight, the path ahead revealed another tree, thick with fruit and blooming fresh. Below it, a multitude stood, raising their hands, shouting something toward the boughs. It was like children begging, but their pleas went unanswered. The tree's owner held the object they desired, but kept it out of reach.

When we approached, we heard a voice from the thickets: "Move on, do not linger. The true fruit is higher up, the one that Eve tasted and from which was taken this plant." With that, we moved forward, passing the thickets, and continued along the path.

Suddenly, we heard a voice: "Why do you walk so pensively, you three alone?" I froze, startled, and looked to see from where it came.

I beheld a figure, shining so brightly that it seemed as if no glass or metal had ever glowed so red. "If you desire to ascend," the figure said, "you must turn here. This way leads to peace." His countenance dazzled me, and I turned to my guides. We walked on, as the air around me was filled with a sweet fragrance, like the wind of May, and a soft voice: "Blessed are those whom grace so illumines that appetite in them does not go beyond what is ordered by temperance."

**Purgatorio: Canto XXV**

It was the hour when a climber needs to be strong, for the sun had left the Taurus sign and entered the Scorpion's path. Just as someone who doesn't pause, pressing on regardless of what may happen because some urgent need drives them forward, we entered our way, one after the other, because the narrow, steep scale could only be climbed by one at a time.

Like a young stork that lifts its wings, eager to fly but not yet daring to leave the nest, I had a desire to ask my guide a question, but this desire arose and fell, coming to the point where I was about to speak, only to be restrained by our speed. But the teacher, undeterred, spoke: "Do not hesitate to ask the question that trembles on your lips."

Encouraged by his words, I began, "How can there be leanness where there is no lack of nourishment?"

"If you had remembered how Meleager was consumed by the same fire, burning both from the outside and within," he replied, "this would not trouble you. And had you considered how in a mirror your reflection moves, you would understand that what now seems hard would appear no harder than the pulp of ripe fruit. But to clarify your doubt fully, here is Statius! I call upon him, and he will now be the healer of your confusion."

Statius then began, "Listen, son, and let these words clear your mind. Blood, well-concocted, when it is not absorbed by the thirsty veins and remains in excess, is drawn from the table of nourishment in the heart. It gives strength to the limbs, working its way down and being absorbed. It eventually descends to places where shame prevents further description. Then it blends with another's blood, merging to perform its work, forming a new creation. This is where the work of nature begins. It's at this stage that the soul takes on life and animation, moving and feeling as it does. It is then that the spiritual power begins to shape the soul, making it both aware and capable of reflection.

"At this stage, when a soul is newly created, memory, intelligence, and will are infused with divine and human qualities. This results in a powerful soul, far more aware and active than before. When this new soul reaches its full potential, as with the sun's rays, the soul begins to function actively. It can interact with the external world, and as it does so, it takes on a form that mirrors its inward nature."

"Consider the sun's warmth: just as the sun changes the nature of wine, so does the spirit, as it enters the body, change and become a vital force. As soon as the soul is placed in the body, it becomes capable of understanding and forming desires, guided by the will of its Creator. This explains why the soul in the body is capable of great action."

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After Statius had explained, we continued on our journey. We reached the last part of our climb, and turning to the right, a new challenge awaited us. A fiery precipice sent up flames, and the wind blew them back, keeping them confined.

We had to walk along the edge, carefully, as one wrong step could have led to disaster on either side—fire on one, and the abyss on the other. Virgil cautioned, "Here, your eyes must stay focused. A small deviation, and we will lose our way."

Suddenly, I heard a hymn from the flames, "O God of mercy!" I felt a strong desire to turn, but I kept my eyes ahead. As I looked, I saw spirits walking through the flames. I was moved to observe them and shared my view with theirs.

At the end of the hymn, they cried out loudly, "I do not know a man!" Then, in a lower voice, they resumed their song, and when it ended, they shouted, "To the woods!" They praised those who lived chaste lives, extolling their virtues. While they sang, the flames embraced them. This is the task of purification, a healing that requires deep and lasting effort.

**Purgatorio: Canto XXVI**

As we walked single file along the edge, my guide frequently warned me: "Pay attention, it's important that I caution you." The sun, now fully in the western sky, had shifted from the blue of the morning to the white light of midday, and as I passed, my shadow made the burning flame glow even redder. At this strange sight, many spirits marveled at what they saw.

This prompted one spirit to speak about me: "He seems no insubstantial figure." And then, eager for more certainty, the spirits reached out to me, careful not to cross the boundary of the burning flame. One spoke, saying, "O you, who follow the others, perhaps not slower than they but moved by reverence, answer us. We burn in thirst and fire. Not only I, but all of us here thirst for your answer more than an Indian or an Ethiopian thirsts for cool water. Tell us, how is it that you make yourself a shadow against the sun? Have you not yet entered the inescapable toils of death?"

I was about to speak when my attention was caught by a new sight. Halfway up the burning path, I saw a crowd of spirits, who as they walked forward, looked at each other with eager eyes, each one briefly touching the other with a quick kiss, then continuing onward. They reminded me of ants, all rushing together, trying to find their way.

The spirits parted after their greeting, but as they did, I heard loud shouts from both groups. Those who had just arrived shouted "Sodom and Gomorrah!" while the others shouted, "Pasiphae entered the cow to satisfy her lust!" Then, like cranes migrating, part of the crowd flew toward one end and part toward the other, shouting their own song of grief.

After a while, the same spirits who had asked me questions earlier approached again, eager to hear my response. I had noted their questions and now, I replied, "O spirits who are secure in your faith and preparing for peace, my limbs, neither crude nor aged, are here with me, as I continue my journey. There is a lady on high, by whose grace I now travel through your realm. But soon, your utmost desire will be fulfilled, and the highest heaven, filled with love, will receive you. Tell me, who are you, and what is the name of this multitude that follows you?"

The spirits stared in awe, as though confused, and after a brief moment of wonder, one of them spoke again. "O blessed one, who, preparing for death, now experience our limits, tell me, who are you? Perhaps you have heard of us. You asked about our crimes. Ours was the sin of Hermaphroditus. We, too, broke the law of humanity by following our lust like beasts, and we now bear the disgrace of that. We know our sin. I am Guinicelli, and I have already cleansed myself of it. Though my time was short, I repented before my last breath."

Hearing Guinicelli's name, I was filled with joy, as he had been a guide to me in my youth. "So, I asked, was it through repentance that you found this peace?"

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Guinicelli replied, "Yes, it was. But there is another whose name I wish to speak of. He, whose music has no rival, stands above all. He is the master of both poetry and prose, and I ask that you offer a prayer for him."

He pointed to a spirit further along, one whose mother tongue had been far more beautiful than mine, one who had passed down poetic traditions that I now revere. "You will find him among those I point to. Offer your prayer for him."

With that, Guinicelli disappeared into the flames. I then moved on to meet the spirit he had pointed to, and asked his name.

"Because of your kindness, I will not hide my name," the spirit said. "I am Arnault. In my life, I composed songs of sorrow for my past folly. Now I wade through this fire, hoping for the day when I will be freed. Please, remember my suffering as you continue on your journey." With that, Arnault too vanished into the fire.

**Purgatorio: Canto XXVII**

The sun had now moved to the position it takes when its rays first shine on the heights, where its Maker's blood was shed. The time was like when it moves into the sign of the Scorpion, and the new fires of midday flash upon the Ganges' waters.

It was evening when suddenly the angel of God appeared before us, his face radiant with joy. He stood at the edge of the flame, and with a voice so clear that it surpassed any human sound, he sang, "Blessed are the pure in heart." As we approached, he stopped us, saying, "Do not proceed further, holy souls! Enter here and listen attentively to the song that awaits you."

When I heard his words, I felt as if I had been struck dead. My hands clasped together, and I looked toward the fire, imagining the forms of those I had once seen alive, consumed by flames.

The spirits around me turned to look with compassionate faces. My beloved guide spoke to me, "You may feel pain, but you will not die. Remember, remember how I brought you safely through the dangers of hell. Now that I am closer to God, will you not trust me?" He reassured me that even if the flame burned me for a thousand years, no hair on my head would be harmed. He encouraged me to test the truth of his words by reaching out and touching my robe.

Despite my fears and doubts, I could not bring myself to move. The guide, seeing my hesitation, spoke again: "You are now separated from Beatrice by this wall." At the mention of Beatrice's name, my heart softened, and I relented. My guide smiled at my response, like a parent who smiles at a child who finally gives in. He entered the fire before me, and Statius, who had been some distance behind, was asked to follow.

I was overwhelmed with fear as I approached the fire, so hot that I felt it might melt me. Yet my guide, comforting me, spoke of Beatrice with such passion that his words eased my anxiety. "I seem to see her eyes," he said. Guided by his voice, we crossed through the fire, and I felt a divine presence in the light. "Come," the voice called, "Blessed are you who are chosen by my Father. Hurry, before the day ends."

As we ascended the mountain, the light from the setting sun was blocked by the rock, but soon the last shadow faded as the sun sank completely, and we could go no further due to our weariness. We found a place to rest, like goats who have skipped across the craggy cliffs and now lie down beneath the shade.

As I lay there, I gazed at the stars above, shining brighter than I had ever seen. And I drifted into sleep, a sleep that often brings prophetic dreams. I dreamt of a young and beautiful lady passing over a meadow, bending to gather flowers. She sang, "Know, whoever asks my name, I am Leah. I weave garlands for my brow and look into the mirror to adorn myself. My sister Rachel, however, stays by her mirror, contemplating her own beauty."

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At the dawn of morning, as I woke, I saw my guide already awake. He said, "The delicious fruit that satisfies the soul's hunger will be yours today." His words filled me with such desire to continue that I felt my wings growing with each step. We climbed higher, and when we reached the top of the mountain, my guide turned to me and said: "You have now seen both the fires of purgation and of hell. You have reached the place where my knowledge cannot go further. You are now free to choose your way. You have overcome the steep path, and now, you may go where you wish. You are sovereign over yourself."

### Purgatorio: Canto XXVIII

As I walked through the celestial forest, where the new day's light made the leaves glow with a vibrant green, I was eager to explore its boundaries. The air, constant and never changing, gently caressed my face as a soft wind. The trees, obedient to the breeze, leaned towards the direction where the holy mountain cast its first shade, yet their feathered inhabitants still sang joyfully, welcoming the early hours of the day.

As I continued, I reached a stream that gently curved to the left. The water, clearer than any I had seen, flowed without the touch of the sun or moon, remaining perpetually dark in its path, shielded from any light. I paused, staring at the stream, when I noticed a lady walking alone, singing and picking flowers. Her presence caught my attention, and I called to her, "Lady, beautiful and full of love, if your appearance speaks the truth of your heart, please come near so that I may listen to your song. I am reminded of Proserpine, who, in the time of her sorrow, wandered and lost the bloom of spring."

As she turned toward me, with grace like a dancer, she came closer, her eyes lowering modestly. She stopped by the stream and raised her gaze toward me, her beauty radiating such brilliance that it seemed to rival the goddess Venus herself. She stood on the opposite bank, smiling, as her hands continued to weave the intricate colors of the flowers into her garland.

Only a few paces separated us, but the river between us felt as impassable as the Hellespont, which separated the lovers Leander and Hero. I longed to cross, but the stream blocked me.

She spoke, saying, "Strangers, you wonder here in the land where human nature first began. If you are suspicious of my smile, listen to this psalm: 'Thou, Lord, hast made me glad.' This will clear your doubt. And to you, who are the first to speak, ask what you wish to know."

I responded, "I do not understand how the sound of the forest and the rushing stream can be reconciled with what I have heard about this place."

She replied, "I will explain. The First Good, whose joy is only in Himself, created man for happiness. He gave this land as a promise of eternal peace. However, through his own fault, man fell. In sorrow, he traded his laughter for sadness. To prevent earthly vapors from affecting the peace of this place, the mountain rose high, protected from the influence of the elements. The air flows freely on the summit, unimpeded by anything, and the trees here bear fruit without needing seeds. This stream, which you see, does not flow from veins like other rivers, but springs from a solid, eternal source. It feeds the land, bringing remembrance of good deeds on one side, and forgetfulness of sins on the other. This is why it's called Lethe here and Eunoe on the other side. Both must be tasted to work their powers. Though your thirst may now be satisfied, I leave you with a final thought. Perhaps the poets of the golden age, on the slopes of Parnassus, dreamed of a place like this, where man was innocent, and spring was perpetual, bearing the nectar of life."

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When she had finished, I looked at the faces of the poets beside me. I saw them smile at her words. Then I turned my attention back to the beautiful lady.

**Purgatorio: Canto XXIX**

Singing as though in love, she resumed and finished the song, saying, “Blessed are those whose sins are covered.” Like wood-nymphs moving through the forest, each eager to look and yet to avoid the sun, she moved forward against the current, up the green riverbank. I followed her, carefully watching her graceful steps, matching my pace with hers.

We walked for almost a hundred paces, with the bank curving on both sides, and I found myself facing east. But before we went much further, she suddenly turned and said, “My brother, look and listen.” And then, a sudden light spread across the great forest, so bright that I wasn’t sure whether it was lightning or something else. The light didn’t flash and vanish like a lightning bolt, though, but remained and grew in brightness, making me wonder what it could be. Along with it, a sweet melody filled the air.

At that point, I began to chastise the audacity of our first parent, who, despite the earth’s obedience to the heavens, was the only one—woman—who could not endure being veiled. If she had borne it devoutly, I would have had such ineffable joy from the start, and for a long time already.

As I walked through that forest of fresh, fragrant flowers that never fade, I was both suspended in thought and still expecting a greater joy. Ahead of us, the air under the green branches glowed like a blazing fire. I could hear a song distinctly from within the glow.

“Oh, ye thrice holy virgins!” I cried, “If I’ve ever suffered hunger, cold, or sleeplessness, I now call on you to bestow your grace on me. Now let Helicon, the river of the muses, pour forth his stream, and let Urania rise with her choir to aid me, as I try to express things that almost mock the grasp of thought.”

After walking for a while, what seemed like seven trees of gold appeared ahead, but as I got closer, I realized they were not trees but golden tapers, standing tall and burning brightly. The flames around them were more brilliant than the moon shining in the clear sky at midnight.

Filled with wonder, I turned to my guide, and he, equally amazed, looked at me. Then I turned my gaze back to those radiant figures, which were coming toward us slowly. They moved so slowly that a bride on her wedding day would have passed them.

The lady called out, “Why are you still so drawn to these lights, and not looking at what follows them?”

I looked behind them and saw a group walking behind, dressed in clothes so white that nothing on earth could compare. On my left, the water reflected back my image, just like a mirror would.

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When I reached a spot along the river's edge, where only the stream separated me from them, I stopped to get a better view. I saw the flames continuing their journey, and as they passed, the air behind them seemed to be painted with colors as vivid as the brightest pencils. The seven colors, marked by the sun's rays and the moon's light, were perfectly distinguished.

These flaming banners moved beyond my sight, stretching out in a line, with ten paces between the outermost ones. Beneath a sky so beautiful, I saw twenty-four elders, walking in pairs, each wearing a crown of lilies.

They all sang together: "Blessed are you among the daughters of Adam, and blessed is your beauty forever!" After them, the flowers and fresh herbs on the other side of the river appeared untouched by their passage, as if light in heaven follows the light of the sun.

Then, following them, four animals appeared, each crowned with green leaves and having six wings, each wing full of eyes. The eyes of Argus would seem like this if they were alive. Reader, I will not waste more words in describing them, for there's no need to explain further. But read Ezekiel, as he paints them from the north, how he saw them come by the Chebar River in a whirlwind, cloud, and fire, and you'll find them just as he describes them. The only difference here is the flags they carry.

The space surrounding the four creatures was enclosed by a chariot. It was a triumphal chariot, drawn by a Gryphon's neck, with its wings stretched high between the three colors of the flag. The wings did not touch or disturb one another as they rose out of sight. The Gryphon's body was golden, while the rest was white and tinged with red.

Such a chariot had never graced the pomp of Augustus or Africanus, nor could the sun's own chariot compare. The sun's chariot, after all, was the one that had fallen to ruin at Tellus' prayer—such was the mysterious judgment of all-seeing Jove. Three nymphs danced around the right wheel, one so red that her form could barely be seen within the flame, another looking like she was made of emerald, and the third, as white as freshly fallen snow.

At the other wheel, a group of four in purple robes moved with celebratory steps, one of them leading the others. One of them had three eyes on his forehead.

Behind all this, two old men appeared, dressed differently but carrying themselves with the same solemnity. One seemed like a wise counselor, while his companion bore a sword that looked terrifying as I viewed it from the river's edge.

After them came four others, of humble appearance, and at the very end, one old man walked while asleep, with a shrewd look on his face. All of them were dressed similarly to the first group, but instead of lilies, they wore crowns of roses and red flowers.

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When the chariot reached us, there was a great thunderous sound. At that, the chosen ones seemed to stop. They halted where the first flags had arrived, and the procession paused.

**Purgatorio: Canto XXX**

As soon as the unsettling polar light, which knows neither rising nor setting, nor the shadow of any cloud except for sin, the fair ornament of the first heaven, stood firmly fixed, guiding everyone there safely, just as the lower heaven does for the steersman on his way to port, immediately the saintly souls who had come in front, between the Gryphon and its light, turned toward the chariot to rest. And one, as though commissioned from above, in holy chant three times loudly proclaimed, "Come, spouse, from Lebanon!" The others all joined in the song, and at the last judgment, the blessed will rise from their tombs, each lifting his newly clothed flesh as on the sacred litter at the voice of that elder, and a hundred messengers of eternal life will leap up. "Blessed are you who come!" they will cry, "And from full hands scatter lilies that never wither!" And as they sang this, they scattered flowers over their heads and around them on all sides.

I had seen before, at dawn, the eastern sky all rosy, and the opposite sky deep and beautiful, serene. The sun's face was so shaded by rising mists that the eye could gaze at it for a long time. So, in a cloud of flowers that rose from angelic hands, falling both inside and outside the chariot, and shrouded in a white veil with an olive wreath, a virgin appeared to me, clothed in a green mantle, dressed in the color of living flame.

And over my spirit, which in former days had dwelled so long in her presence, no trembling fear came. My eyes no longer recognized her, yet from her moved a hidden power. At her touch, the power of old love was awakened within me.

No sooner did the heavenly influence strike my vision, a power that had thrilled me even as a child, than I turned to my left, panting, as a child runs to his mother's breast if something has frightened him. I would have cried out, "There is no blood in me that does not quiver. The old flame now shows signs of reviving fire," but Virgil, my dearest father, had gone. Virgil, the one to whom I had entrusted myself for safety. And even though I had lost our primal mother, it did not help to stop my cheeks from being stained with tears.

"Dante, weep not that Virgil leaves you; weep not yet. You must feel the sting of another sword, and you will weep for that."

Just like a ship captain who walks the deck to encourage his crew as they handle the sails, when from the mast all hands are busy, thus on the left side of the chariot, I saw the virgin who had appeared earlier veiled in that festive angelic shower.

As I turned at the sound of my name, I was compelled to register it, and she addressed me with a voice full of royalty, still holding a certain power over me. "Look carefully," she said, "I am, indeed, Beatrice. What? You have finally approached the mountain? Did you not know, man, that your happiness is complete?"

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I lowered my eyes to the clear water of the stream, but when I looked at my own reflection, I recoiled, feeling such a weight of shame on my forehead. With the same stern majesty that a mother looks upon her awe-struck child, she gazed at me. A bitter flavor mingled with her pity. She broke off her speech, and suddenly the angels sang: "In you, O gracious Lord, my hope has been." The song did not go further than that, but then, the words "Thou Lord, hast set my feet in ample room" resounded.

As snow, which lies on the living rafters of Italy, when it is drifted high by the rough Sclavonian winds, and the land where no shadow falls causes it to melt quickly, so I, without a sigh or a tear, felt the ice in my heart transform into spirit and water. With deep anguish, I wept, and through my lips and eyes poured forth the sorrow from my heart.

The virgin still stood at the right edge of the chariot, immovable, and addressed the bright souls with a voice filled with pity: "You, who keep eternal vigil in the day, so that neither night nor sleep steals from you a single step of life, hear my words, for they are meant for him who stands weeping. His sorrow now must match his transgression. Not only through the operation of the great orbs that mark every seed to its predetermined end, as the constellations align with either good or bad fortune, but also through the generosity of heavenly graces, which rain down from heights that our eyes cannot perceive, this man was, in his early life, gifted so wonderfully that all good habits grew within him. But the more fertile the soil, the more evil seeds take root, and the more it is left untended, the more it runs wild."

These traits once upheld him; for I showed him my eyes, and led him in the path of virtue. But when I reached my second age and left my mortal body for the immortal, he abandoned me and turned to others. When I rose into spirit, and beauty and virtue encircled me, I became less dear to him, and he valued me less. His steps turned to deceitful paths, following false images of good that promise nothing. And it did not help me to ask for his return, either in dreams at night or otherwise; he ignored me, falling deeper until he could see the children of perdition. To this end, I visited the realms of the dead, and one who has guided him thus far received my weeping pleas. It would violate God's will if Lethe, and such food, were tasted without the cost of repentance."

**Purgatorio: Canto XXXI**

“Now, you!” she resumed without delay, her words turning to me. “You stand beyond the holy stream, so now answer this: Is this true? A matter so grave requires your admission.” The question hit me with such strange amazement that I couldn’t answer before my words failed me.

After a brief pause, she spoke again: “What are you thinking about? Answer me. The waters of the river have done no harm to your memories of evil yet.” My answer came with mixed feelings of fear and confusion, a hesitant “Yes,” so weak that I almost needed help to understand it. Just like a crossbow that is bent too far, when released with all its force, its aim falters, this is how I felt, bursting into tears and sighs under the weight of my emotions. My voice came out weak.

She began again: “When my desire led you to love the good that sets a boundary to our hopes, what obstacle did you face? What chain or barrier stopped you from continuing your progress? What temptation or promise of ease led you to turn aside?”

A bitter sigh escaped me, and I could hardly find my voice to answer. “Your beauty, which had withdrawn, and the deceiving pleasures of present things, diverted my steps,” I said, wailing.

She responded, “Had you remained silent or denied what you confess, your sin would not have been hidden more. Such an eye notices it. But when the sinner’s cheek breaks into the precious stream of self-accusing tears, in our court the wheel of justice runs contrary to its usual course. However, for your benefit, and so that you may be stronger when you hear the Siren’s voice again, cast aside the reason for this grief and listen as I explain how differently your buried flesh should have led you.”

“Never did you see, in art or nature, anything so sweet as the body that enclosed me, which now lies scattered to dust. If such sweetness failed you with my death, what after that, from mortal things, could have tempted you? When you first felt the effects of perishable things, upon my departure to better realms, you should have clipped your wings to follow me and never again stooped to be harmed by fleeting joys like a fleeting girl or other vanity. The new, untested bird may sometimes fall prey to the hunter, but in the sight of one whose wings are full, the net is useless, and the arrow misses its mark.”

I stood silent, like children, ashamed and not speaking, their eyes fixed on the ground, acknowledging their faults and condemning themselves.

She continued: “If hearing this pains you, raise your eyes and see what will help.”

With less reluctance than a sturdy holm tree bent by the wind, I raised my face. And as I did, I saw the vision I had before of those beautiful beings vanish, and I looked again at Beatrice, who had turned towards the animal, who united two natures in one form. Even beneath her veil,

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which was parted by the green river, she appeared so much more beautiful than before that she outshone all others.

A rush of remorseful thoughts pierced me. Everything that had once seemed dear now appeared loathsome to me. The sharp awareness of my mistake weighed on my heart so strongly that I collapsed to the ground. What happened next, only she who caused it knows.

When my strength returned, I found the lady who had first appeared to me standing over me. “Do not release me,” she cried, “do not let go.” As she spoke, she dragged me up, pulling me with such speed that I was as swift as a shuttle crossing the wave.

As we neared the blessed shore, I heard the sweet words “Tu asperges me” (Thou shalt sprinkle me), which I cannot recall or describe clearly. The beautiful lady stretched her arms around my head and immersed me, where the wave was fitting to cleanse me. Then, rising, she placed me among four lovely nymphs, who danced in a perfect circle. They covered me with their arms, and one by one, they each wrapped me in their embrace.

“We are the nymphs,” they sang, “and in heaven, we are stars. Before the earth ever saw Beatrice, we were appointed to tend her. We will guide you to her eyes, and when you see the light of gladness in them, your sight will become sharper than ours.”

Then they led me to the Gryphon’s breast, where Beatrice stood, facing us. “Do not hold back your gaze,” they said. “You are before the emeralds, where Love once shot his arrows at you.”

I looked up and saw Beatrice’s eyes, and in them I saw a wondrous reflection, the twofold nature of the Gryphon shining through. It seemed as though I was watching one thing that appeared in two forms, always changing but never moving, just like a mirror’s reflection.

Filled with amazement, I felt joy as my soul fed on the vision, and as I gazed, I felt a growing desire for more. Meanwhile, the other three, with gestures that showed their higher rank, continued their song, dancing in a festive circle.

“Turn, Beatrice!” they sang, “O turn your holy sight on this faithful one, who has walked so many weary steps just to see you. In our prayers, please reveal your face, so he can see your second beauty, hidden until now.”

O radiant beauty, eternal light, who could ever describe you as you were, when you revealed yourself beneath the quiet heaven, and showed your true form to the open air?

**Purgatorio: Canto XXXII**

My eyes were so intent on getting rid of their ten years' thirst, that I was unaware of anything else. I was so absorbed in the sight of the saintly brightness that drew me in, I didn't even notice the sacred virgins turning my gaze to the left. From their lips came the warning: "Do not gaze too long!"

For a moment, my vision struggled, like one who has been struck by the sun, but soon it recovered. My sight was now more focused on a smaller object, compared to the overwhelming sight I had just seen. On the right, I saw the glorious procession turn, facing the sun and sevenfold lights, their front facing the opposite way. It was like a well-disciplined army, their shields raised, turning in unison before they could change position. Likewise, the heavenly procession passed us, as the car's beam lowered. The attendants around the wheels moved, and the sacred burden on the Gryphon moved smoothly, as if no feather on him had trembled. The lady who had drawn me through the wave, now accompanied by Statius and me, followed the wheel, which, in its turn, marked a smaller arc.

Through the high wood, now empty (blame the woman who was deceived by the serpent), I moved in time with the angelic harmony. We had advanced as far as an arrow's flight, when Beatrice descended. At once, a voice all around cried, "Adam," as we circled a plant that was stripped of its flowers and leaves. Its branches, which rose taller as we approached, were so high that even the Indians, in their forests, might have marveled at them. "Blessed are you! Gryphon, whose beak has never taken that tree, pleasant to taste. For from here, the appetite was twisted to evil." The animal, half-bird, half-beast, responded, "Yes, for thus the generation of the just are saved." He turned to the chariot pole, broke off the widow branch, and left it bound to the trunk from which it grew.

Just as when great streams of light come down from above, mingling with the radiance that ascends after the setting of the scaly sign, our plants start to bloom, each wearing its usual colors before the sun yokes his fiery steeds beneath another star. Thus, the plant, once bare of leaves, now bloomed anew, its color faintly red but deeper than violet, just before the sun's rays.

An unearthly hymn arose. I couldn't understand it, nor could I endure its beauty to the end. If I had the skill to paint how the unseeing eyes, when they heard Syrinx's song, closed in sweet sorrow, I might compare it to the way I fell asleep. But those who try to imagine sleep miss it, and I will skip to when I woke, and describe how suddenly a flash of splendor tore through my sleep, and a voice cried out: "Arise, what are you doing?"

Just as the chosen three on Mount Tabor were allowed to see the blooming tree whose fruit is desired by angels and makes heaven's eternal feast, so, returning to myself, I saw standing above me the one who had guided me across the stream. "Where is Beatrice?" I asked, uncertain. "Look there," she replied, "She's seated beneath the fresh leaves on its root. See the choir

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surrounding her. The others, moving to higher realms with a sweeter melody, follow the Gryphon."

I don't know if she finished her words, but by then my eyes were fixed on her, and everything else faded away. She sat alone on the ground as if guarding the chariot bound to the two-formed beast. The seven nymphs circled around her, each holding a light to protect it from the northern wind and southern gusts.

"A little while longer you shall be a forester here, but forever a citizen with me in that true Rome, where Christ, a Roman, dwells to guide the world. Keep your eyes on the car, and write down what you see when you return."

Thus spoke Beatrice. And at her feet, humbly, I bent my thoughts and my gaze, just as she had asked. At once, a fiery bird of Jove descended onto the tree, and with a strong strike, its beak split the trunk and shattered its buds and leaves. It struck the car with all its might, and it staggered, like a ship tossed about in a storm, pushed by the waves.

Then, a fox leaped into the chariot, seemingly starving for all good food. But, rebuked by the saintly maiden, it fled, fast as its body could carry it. After that, I saw the eagle fly into the chariot, lining its inside with its feathers. A voice, full of sorrow, cried out from heaven: "O poor bark of mine! How badly are you loaded!"

Then, it seemed that the earth split between the wheels of the chariot, and a dragon emerged, its tail driving into the car. Like a wasp pulling out its sting, it dragged the chariot's base along, and then went away rejoicing. What remained, once the dragon had gone, was the lively turf, green with plants, now dressed in plumes, which had once been offered with a pure and noble purpose. The chariot, now transformed, bore heads at its ends, three on the beam and one on each side, with the first like oxen, but each with a single horn on their front. It was like a monster no one had ever seen.

At the top of the chariot, I saw sitting a shameless whore, whose gaze wandered freely. At her side, a giant stood, as if no one could take her from him. They mingled kisses, and her eyes, full of lust, turned towards me. Then the giant, full of jealousy and rage, lashed out, dragging the monster away so far across the forest that only its shadows remained, shielding the harlot and the new form of the beast from my view.

**Purgatorio: Canto XXXIII**

“The heathen, Lord, are coming!”—thus the threefold choir began, and then the virgin band joined in. They began their sweet psalmody, weeping, and Beatrice, who had been listening, was deeply moved. Her expression was so sad that even Mary, standing beside the cross, seemed less affected. But when they gave her space to speak, she stood up, her face glowing as bright as fire, and answered: “A little while more, and you will not see me; and a little while later, my beloved sisters, you will see me again.”

Then she motioned to the seven, and, signaling only to me and the remaining sage, she indicated that we should follow her.

She moved on, and before she had even set her tenth step on the ground, our eyes met. With a gentle face, she said, “Hurry, so that if I speak to you, you will still be in the right position to listen.” When I hastened to her side, she began: “Brother, why don’t you ask any questions as we walk together?”

I started to answer but couldn’t find my voice, speaking in halting and incomplete words: “Lady, you know what I need, and you know what will fulfill my need.”

She replied, “I will rid you of your fear and shame. You must stop speaking as if you were dreaming. Let me teach you: the vessel you saw the serpent break is no more. Let the one who is responsible for it not think he can escape God’s vengeance with a simple apology. Without an heir, that eagle, who left the chariot adorned with feathers, will not be.”

She paused, then added, “I see, and therefore I speak: the stars are already coming, whose conjunction, unhindered and without any obstacle, will bring forth a time when someone sent by God (marked by the numbers five hundred, five, and ten) will slay the wicked one and the accomplice of her guilt, the giant. And if my words, dark as the Themis or the Sphinx, do not persuade you (since like them they confuse the intellect with blindness), know that soon events will reveal the truth, and no harm will fall on the flock or the fields. Be warned, and as I speak, teach these words to those who live lives that are a race toward death. When you write them, remember what you saw of the plant that has been spoiled twice. Whoever robs it or plucks it sins against God, who created it for his own use alone. For the taste of it, in pain and longing, the first soul longed for five thousand years or more, when the one who punished the fatal desire did so in himself.”

“Your reason is asleep if it believes that this height and the reversal of the plant’s nature has no reason behind it. If it weren’t for the vain distractions, like the numbing waters of Elsa, that cloud your soul, you would have seen in that moment how God’s justice is represented in the forbidden tree. But since I see you hardened, as if turned to stone, and so covered in stains that

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your eye is dazzled by my words, I will make sure that, if not written, at least painted in your mind, you understand the cause: one must bring home his staff wreathed with palm."

I said, "Like wax, sealed and unchanging, my mind now bears the imprint of your words. But why does your speech soar so high, beyond my comprehension? The more I strain to reach it, the more I lose it."

She answered, "It's so you can understand the school you've followed and see how far behind it falls when it tries to understand my words. You will realize your art is as far from the divine as the difference between the earth and heaven."

I responded, "I do not remember being separated from you, nor do I feel guilt for such an act." She smiled and replied, "If you cannot remember, then recall how recently you drank from the river of Lethe. As smoke reveals a flame, in your forgetfulness, you should recognize the fault of your wandering will. From now on, my words will be as clear as they need to be for you, in your unpracticed view."

The sun, now reaching its highest point in the sky, shone even brighter, and as it turned, it seemed as if the procession had halted at the edge of a dark shadow. I saw the Tigris and Euphrates, flowing from one source, as if lingering at parting. "O light of enlightenment! O glory of our kind!" they cried. "Please tell us what this water is, flowing from one source but diverging from itself?"

The answer came: "Ask Matilda; she will teach you."

Then, as someone clears themselves of blame, the fair maiden spoke: "He has learned this and more from me, and I am confident that Lethe's waters have not hidden it from him."

Beatrice added: "Perhaps another, more pressing care that often clouds the memory has made his mind dark. But look! There is Eunoe! Lead him there; as you are accustomed, revive his weakened strength." As one does when taking no excuses, she called to Statius in a courteous manner, "Come with him."

Had there been more space to continue, I would have sung of the sweetness of that drink, but since the story has its limit, my art checks me. I returned from the holy wave, renewed, as new plants are renewed with fresh foliage, pure and fit to climb to the stars.

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The Divine Comedy  
Paradiso  
By Dante Alighieri  
(Abbé's Library)

**Paradiso: Canto I**

The glory of the one who moves everything fills the universe and shines brighter in some places and dimmer in others.

I was in the heaven that receives the most light from Him, and I saw things that no one can describe or even understand, unless they come down from there.

Because when we get close to what we desire, our minds get so absorbed in it that we can't remember or fully grasp it afterward.

Whatever of the holy realm I could hold in my memory, that is what I will talk about here.

O Apollo, for this final task, make me a vessel of your power, just as the beloved laurel asks!

Until now, one peak of Parnassus has been enough for me, but now I need both to enter the other side.

Come into my heart and inspire me, as you did when you drew Marsyas out of his scabbard.

O divine power, lend me your strength so I can make visible in my mind the image of the blessed realm.

You'll see me approach your favorite tree and crown myself with the leaves that you and the theme will make me worthy of.

Father, so rarely do we gather these leaves, whether for Caesar's triumph or for a poet, (this is the fault and shame of human nature)

That the foliage of Peneus should bring joy to the joyous god of Delphi when someone truly thirsts for it.

A little spark can turn into a great flame; perhaps, after me, others will pray that Cyrrha may respond better.

To mortals, the world's light rises through different paths, but by the one that circles four and unites with three crosses,

It goes in a better direction, with a better star, and the world's wax is shaped more after its own nature.

That passage almost made it morning on one side and evening on the other, and one half of the sky was completely white, while the other was black,

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When I saw Beatrice turn to the left, gazing at the sun; never did an eagle focus so intently on it!

And just as a second ray always follows the first and ascends again, like a pilgrim longing to return,

So, through her action, my eyes and mind became fixed on the sun, beyond what I was used to.

There are many things that are allowed here, that would be forbidden to us on earth, because this place is made for human beings.

I couldn't handle it for long, but when I did, I saw it sparkle all around, like iron coming out of the fire,

And suddenly it seemed that day was being added to day, as if the one with the power had decorated the sky with another sun.

With my eyes on the eternal wheels, Beatrice stood focused, and I, looking at her, moved to a different place,

At her sight, I became inwardly like Glaucus, who, after tasting the herb, became a peer of the gods under the sea.

To explain this change in words is impossible; the example will be enough for anyone to experience it by grace.

If I am only what you newly created me to be, O Love who rules the heavens, you know it, because you lifted me with your light!

When now the wheel, which you make eternal, made me aware of it by the harmony you regulate,

Then it seemed to me that heaven was so lit by the sun's flame that no rain or river had ever made a lake so vast.

The new sound and great light stirred in me a longing for their cause, a longing I had never felt so strongly before,

And she, who saw me as I saw myself, to calm my disturbed mind, opened her mouth before I could ask,

And she began: "You've made yourself so dull with false ideas that you don't see what you should if you shake them off.

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You're not on earth as you think you are; like lightning fleeing its proper place, you're returning there."

If I had been freed from my previous doubt by her brief words, more smiling than spoken, I became even more trapped in a new one.

And I said: "I had already been at peace from my great amazement, but now I'm amazed at how I surpass these light bodies."

She, after a pitying sigh, looked at me as a mother looks at a delirious child;

And she began: "Everything, whatever it is, has order within itself, and this order is what makes the universe resemble God.

Here, the higher creatures see the footprints of the Eternal Power, which is the end where everything leads.

In the order I'm speaking of, all natures are inclined by their different destinies, more or less near to their origin;

And so they move forward to different destinations over the great sea of being, and each is carried by the instinct given to it.

This one bears fire toward the moon; this one is the motive power in human hearts; this one binds the earth together.

It's not just the created things without intellect, but also those with intellect and love, that are moved by this force.

The Providence that governs all of this makes heaven eternally peaceful with its light, where that which moves fastest moves.

And now, we are being carried to our destination by the power of that cord, which aims its arrows at a joyful target.

It's true that sometimes the form doesn't match the intention of the artist, because the material doesn't respond as it should,

Just as sometimes a creature with power can deviate from its course, even when it is impelled to move in a certain direction,

(Just as you might see fire fall from a cloud) if the first impulse is stopped by some false pleasure.

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You shouldn't wonder at your ascent any more than at a stream flowing from a high mountain to the lowlands.

It would be a marvel if, without hindrance, you were sitting below, as if on earth the living fire were quiet."

Then she turned her face back to heaven.

**Paradiso: Canto II**

You who are in your little boat, eager to listen, following behind my ship as it sails along, stop and look back at your shores. Don't go out to sea, because if you lose track of me, you might get lost yourselves.

The sea I'm sailing on has never been sailed before. Minerva guides me, Apollo leads the way, and the nine Muses point out the stars to me.

You few who are already lifting your necks to the bread of angels, the bread that you eat here and never get full from, you can sail into the deep sea, keeping my path ahead of you on the water that smooths itself again.

The people who sailed to Colchis were not as amazed as you will be when they saw Jason turned into a ploughman!

Our endless desire for the divine realm carried us forward, almost as quickly as you see the heavens move.

Beatrice looked up, and I looked at her. In the time it takes an arrow to fly from a bow and unlock itself from the notch, I found myself in a place that caught my attention. And Beatrice, who could see my thoughts, turning to me, happy and beautiful, said, "Focus your mind on God, who has brought us to the first star."

It seemed like a cloud surrounded us, shining, dense, solid, and bright, like a diamond when the sun strikes it.

The eternal pearl took us in, just like water takes a ray of light, without breaking it.

If I was a body, and we don't understand how one dimension can fit into another (which has to happen if one body enters another), the desire to see the essence where God and our own nature were united would burn even more strongly.

Here you will see what we believe by faith, not by reasoning, but as the first truth that man believes.

I replied, "Lady, I give thanks to Him who has removed me from the mortal world, as devoutly as I can. But tell me, what are the dark spots on this body, which on Earth lead people to tell the tale of Cain?"

She smiled a little and said, "If the opinion of humans is wrong where the senses can't unlock things, then the arrows of wonder shouldn't bother you now, because, following the senses, you see that reason has limited power. But tell me what you think of it yourself."

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And I said, “What seems different to us up here is caused, I think, by bodies that are rare and dense.”

She replied, “You’ll see your belief immersed in error if you listen carefully to the argument I’m about to present against it. The eighth sphere shows you many lights that differ in quality and quantity, with different aspects. If this dimness were caused by rarity and density alone, there would be only one kind of light, more or less spread out equally. Virtues must, by necessity, come from formal principles. And these, except for one, would be destroyed by your reasoning.”

“Also, if rarity were the cause of the dimness, this planet would either be entirely made of matter that’s thin like air, or, just as fat and lean alternate in a body, this planet would alternate between thick and thin. If it were the first, the sun’s eclipse would show light passing through it, like light passing through something thin.”

“That’s not the case, so we must examine the other possibility. If I can disprove this second idea, your opinion will be wrong.”

“But if this rarity doesn’t go all the way through, there must be a limit, beyond which its opposite stops the light from passing. The foreign light is reflected back, just like a color coming back from glass, which behind itself hides lead.”

“You may say that the sunbeam looks dimmer here than elsewhere because it’s reflected further back. You can test this yourself. Take three mirrors and place one more distant one between the two closer ones. Turn toward the mirrors, and place a light behind you to shine on all three mirrors, with the light reflecting back to you.”

“Even though the farthest image isn’t as bright, you’ll see that it’s just as radiant as the nearer ones.”

“Now, just like snow remains cold and the same color after the warm sun touches it, you will remain in your intellect, informed with such a living light that it will tremble in its appearance to you.”

“Within the heaven of divine peace revolves a body, whose power gives existence to everything it contains. The next heaven, with its many eyes, divides this existence into different essences, distinguished from it and yet contained within it.”

“The other spheres, by their differences, act and arrange all the distinctions inside them, leading them to their ends and effects.”

“Thus, these organs of the world, as you can see now, proceed from grade to grade, taking from above and acting below.”

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“Pay attention to how I’m coming to the truth you seek so you’ll know how to cross the river in the future. The power and motion of the holy spheres must proceed from the blessed engines, just as the artisan’s hammer makes a craft.”

“The heaven, made beautiful by the many lights, takes its shape from the profound Intelligence that turns it, and becomes a seal of that Intelligence.”

“Just as the soul expands through the different parts of your body, adapting itself to various faculties, so the Intelligence spreads its power among the stars, revolving in its unity.”

“A diverse power makes a different mix with the precious body it gives life to, in which, like your life, it is united.”

“From the glad nature it comes from, the mixed power shines through the body, just as joy shines through the living eye.”

“From this comes everything that appears different from light to light, not from dense and rare matter. This is the formal principle that creates the dark and the bright, according to its goodness.”

### Paradiso: Canto III

The sun that had once warmed my heart with love had revealed to me the beautiful truth, showing me its sweet aspect through repeated proofs and reassurances. And so, in order to admit that I had been convinced and was confident, I lifted my head to speak.

But a vision appeared, so close that it drew my attention entirely, and I completely forgot about what I had intended to confess.

It was like seeing our faces reflected through polished glass or calm, clear water—clear but not deep enough to lose sight of the bottom. I saw many faces, eager to speak, so that I was thrown off, misunderstanding them. They appeared as reflections, and I mistakenly thought they were the true source of the love between man and fountain.

When I realized this, I turned my eyes to see who they were. But I saw nothing, and then turned my eyes back toward the light of my guide, Beatrice, who smiled and kindled a holy light in her eyes.

"Don't be surprised," she said, "that I smile at your mistaken idea. It's because your understanding is not yet grounded in truth, and you're turning toward emptiness. The true beings you see here have only come to give a sign of the celestial realm, which is the least exalted."

She continued: "This explanation is given in a way that your mind can grasp, since you can only understand what your senses can perceive. This is why Scripture accommodates human faculties, assigning God hands and feet and meaning something else. Holy Church represents Gabriel, Michael, and the one who healed Tobias, in a human form."

"What Timaeus says about the soul doesn't match what you see here because it seems like he means something different from what he says. He says the soul returns to its star, believing it was separated from there when nature formed it. Maybe his words have a different meaning that shouldn't be dismissed."

"If he means that the soul returns to the influence and consequences of its star, perhaps his theory touches on a truth. This misunderstanding once led the world astray, invoking gods like Jove, Mercury, and Mars."

"The other doubt, the one that bothers you less, doesn't lead you away from the truth. It concerns the justice of God seeming unjust to mortals, and that's a matter of faith, not heretical sin."

"But let me clarify this so you can fully understand. If someone suffers violence without cooperating with the one using force, they are not excused. Will never truly submits unless it wills to, but when it is distorted by violence, it still reacts as nature would in fire. If it yields

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more or less, it still cooperates with the force. These souls, having power to return to holiness, did so."

"If their will had been perfect, like Lawrence on the gridiron or Mutius burning his own hand, they would have been compelled to return to the path they were dragged from. But such a solid will is rare."

"Now that I've explained this, I've refuted the argument that was troubling you. But there's still another question to consider. It's not something you can easily understand on your own."

"I've made sure to put into your mind that a beatified soul can never lie because it's close to the primal truth. Now, you might have heard Piccarda say that Costanza, who loved the veil, contradicts what I've told you. But remember, sometimes people do things out of reluctance to avoid greater harm."

"Think of Alcmaeon, who was forced by his father to kill his mother. He should have admitted wrong, rather than making things worse by keeping his vow. Similarly, Agamemnon, the great Greek leader, had to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia, causing much grief."

"Christians, be more serious in your actions. Don't be like feathers blown around by every wind, and don't believe that every water will cleanse you. You have the Old and New Testament and the guidance of the Church. Let this be enough for your salvation."

"Don't let an evil appetite lead you astray. Be like men, not foolish sheep, so that those who mock you won't succeed."

"Don't be like the lamb that leaves its mother's milk, foolishly fighting with itself."

Beatrice spoke these words to me, and then turned back to the place where the world is most alive.

Her silence and change in expression made me silent, as my eager mind was filled with new questions. Like an arrow hitting its target before the bowstring has settled, we moved into the next realm.

There I saw my Lady so joyful that, as she entered the brightness of that heaven, the planet seemed to shine even more brightly.

And if the star itself was changed and smiled, how much more did I, who am naturally so changeable in every way!

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Just as in a peaceful pond, the fish swim toward what comes from outside, thinking it's food, I saw over a thousand shining spirits drawing near to us, each saying, "This is she who will increase our love."

As each one approached, the light around them became more filled with beatitude, shining brighter from them.

Think, reader, if this was all that was revealed, how desperately you would want to know more. You'll see how I, too, desired to know more as their true nature became clear before my eyes.

One of these holy spirits spoke, saying: "O well-born soul, you've been granted grace to see the thrones of eternal triumph. We are illuminated by the light that spreads throughout all of heaven. If you wish to know more, ask us freely."

Beatrice then spoke: "Ask, speak, and believe them as you would believe in gods."

I realized how you hide yourself in your own light, drawing it from your eyes, which shine when you smile. But you don't know who you are or why you're in the sphere that hides itself from humans in foreign light.

I said this to the light that spoke to me, and it became even brighter than before.

Just as the sun hides itself when there's too much light, so this saintly figure hid itself in its own radiance and answered me in a way that will be explained in the next canto.

### Paradiso: Canto IV

"If I flame with love for you beyond what is seen on earth, so much that the strength of your eyes is overwhelmed, don't be surprised. This comes from perfect vision, which, as it comprehends something good, moves toward it naturally.

I see that the eternal light is already shining in your intellect, and when it is seen, it always sparks love. And if something else draws your love, it's just a reflection of that same light, misunderstood, shining through.

You want to know if, by doing another good deed, a broken vow can be compensated for, to keep the soul from further obligations."

Beatrice began speaking with these words, and continued her argument as someone who speaks without interruption:

"The greatest gift God gave in His creation, and the one most aligned with His goodness, is the freedom of the will. With it, intelligent creatures—human beings and angels—were endowed.

Now, if you reason from this, you will see the high value of a vow, especially when, in making it, you align your will with God's. When you consent, it's as if God consents with you, and a pact is formed between God and man. This pact is a sacrifice made with the treasure of the will, a sacrifice that is fulfilled by its own act.

Now, what compensation can be made for this sacrifice? Do you think you can undo what you offered by doing good with ill-gotten gains?

Now you understand the greater point, but because the Church has the authority to dispense with certain things, which seems to contradict the truth I've shown you, you still need to consider the matter further, because the food you've taken requires more understanding to digest.

Open your mind to what I reveal and keep it there. It's not enough to just hear something without truly retaining it.

In the essence of a sacrifice, two things come together: one is the act of offering, the other is the agreement made. The agreement is never invalidated unless it is fulfilled, and this has been discussed in detail above.

For this reason, the Hebrews were commanded to offer sacrifices, even though sometimes what was offered could be exchanged for something else, as you should know.

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The material offered can be substituted, but no one should shift the burden of the offering without first considering both the white and the yellow keys. If the substitute doesn't hold the same value as the original, then the substitution is foolish.

Therefore, whatever thing has such great value that it outweighs all others cannot be satisfied by anything less.

Let mortals never make a vow lightly. Be serious and faithful in your promises, as Jephthah should have been with his first vow.

Jephthah, when he made his vow, should have said, 'I've done wrong,' rather than making an even worse choice by sticking to it. Just like the great leader of the Greeks, who caused Iphigenia to weep, and her tears made both wise and simple people mourn for her tragic fate.

Christians, be serious in your actions. Do not be like a feather blown by every wind, and don't think that every water will cleanse you.

You have both the Old and New Testaments, and the guidance of the Church. Let this be enough for your salvation.

If an evil appetite leads you astray, be as men, not as foolish sheep, so that those who mock you may not succeed.

Do not be like a lamb that abandons its mother's milk, frolicking and fighting with itself without sense."

Thus Beatrice spoke to me, and then she turned back, eager, to the place where the world is most alive.

Her silence and the change in her expression silenced my eager mind, which already had new questions. Like an arrow hitting its target before the bowstring has stopped vibrating, we moved into the next realm.

There I saw my Lady so joyful, as she entered the brightness of that heaven, that the planet seemed to shine more brightly because of it.

And if the star itself changed and smiled, how much more did I, who by my nature am easily changed in every form!

Just as in a peaceful pond the fish gather to something coming from outside, thinking it's food, I saw more than a thousand shining beings drawing toward us, each saying, "This is she who will increase our love."

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As each one approached, the shade around them became filled with beatitude, illuminated by the light coming from them.

Think, reader, if this were the end, how desperately you'd want to know more. You'll understand how I desired to know more about them as they became clear to my eyes.

One of those holy spirits spoke, "O well-born soul, who has been granted the grace to see the thrones of eternal triumph, we are lit by the light that spreads throughout all heaven. If you wish to know more about us, feel free to ask."

Then Beatrice spoke: "Speak freely, and believe them as you would believe in gods."

I realized how you hide yourself in your own light, drawing it from your eyes, which sparkle when you smile. But you don't know who you are or why you're in the sphere that hides itself behind foreign rays.

I said this to the light that spoke to me first, and it became even brighter than before.

Just like the sun, which hides when there's too much light, when the heat overcomes the dense vapor, so the saintly figure hid itself in its own radiance and answered me in a way that is explained in the next Canto.

### Paradiso: Canto V

“If in the heat of love I burn with such intensity that it surpasses anything seen on earth, to the point where the strength of your gaze is overcome, do not be surprised. This comes from perfect vision, which, as it comprehends something good, moves toward it with its full force.

I can already see that the eternal light is shining into your intellect, and this light, when seen, always stirs love. And if anything else draws your love, it's only a reflection of the same light, misunderstood, that shines through.

You want to know if, by doing another good deed, a broken vow can be made up for, in order to free the soul from further obligation.”

With these words, Beatrice began her explanation, and she continued without interruption, just like someone who doesn't pause in their speech:

“The greatest gift that God has given in His creation, the one closest to His own goodness and the one He values most highly, is the freedom of the will. It is the gift that endowed intelligent creatures, both human and angelic, with the ability to choose.

Now, if you reason from this, you will see the high value of a vow, especially when, in making it, you align your will with God's. When you consent, it's as if God consents with you, closing a pact between God and man. This pact is a sacrifice made with the treasure of the will, a sacrifice that is fulfilled by its own act.

Now, what compensation can you give for this sacrifice? Do you think you can undo what you offered by doing good with ill-gotten gains?

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Open your mind to what I reveal and keep it there. It's not enough to just hear something without truly retaining it.

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Therefore, whatever thing has such great value that it outweighs all others cannot be satisfied by anything less.

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I said this to the light that spoke to me first, and it became even brighter than before.

Just like the sun, which hides when there's too much light, when the heat overcomes the dense vapor, so the saintly figure hid itself in its own radiance and answered me in a way that is explained in the next Canto.

### Paradiso: Canto VI

After Constantine, the eagle, turned away from the course of heaven, which it had once followed under the guidance of the ancient figure who took Lavinia, it remained in the farthest part of Europe for more than two hundred years. From there, under the sacred wings, it ruled the world, passing power from one ruler to another. Eventually, it settled on mine own shoulders.

I was Caesar, and now I am Justinian. By the will of the primal Love, I took from the laws that which was redundant or useless, and before I focused on this task, I believed in one nature in Christ, and with that belief, I was content.

But blessed Agapetus, the supreme pastor, showed me the way to a sincere faith through his words. I believed him, and now I see clearly, just as you can see the truth and falsehood of any contradiction.

When I joined the Church, God, in His grace, inspired me with this high task, and I devoted myself fully to it. I entrusted my army to Belisarius, the right hand of heaven, and with that, I took a rest.

Now, having answered your first question, I must continue, as the nature of the question compels me, in order to show you why men act against the sacred standard, both those who claim it and those who oppose it.

Behold the great power that has made it worthy of reverence, starting from the moment when Pallas died and gave it sovereignty. You know that it made its home in Alba for over three hundred years, until the three to three battle began again.

You know what it achieved, from the Sabine wrong to Lucretia's sorrow, in the seven kings, overcoming the neighboring nations. You know what it accomplished, led by the Romans, against Brennus, Pyrrhus, and others.

Torquatus, Quinctius, Decii, and Fabii—those who received fame that I willingly honor—struck down the pride of the Arabians, who, following Hannibal, crossed the Alps, and they were victorious under the Roman standard.

Pompey and Scipio triumphed while still young, and the land where you were born seemed bitter at their victories. Then, when Caesar came by the will of Rome, it brought peace to the whole world.

What it achieved from Var to the Rhine, Isere, Saone, and the Seine, and every valley the Rhone touches, you know. When it left Ravenna and crossed the Rubicon, it was such a triumph that no tongue or pen could describe it.

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From Spain, it moved toward Durazzo, and Pharsalia, causing pain even to the Nile. It saw the places where it began—Antandros and Simois—and returned there, showing its power.

It defeated Juba, then turned back to the West, where it heard the Pompeian clarion. What it did with Brutus and Cassius led them to Hell, and Modena and Perugia mourned.

Cleopatra wept because of it, fleeing from it and meeting death by the serpent's bite. It continued with the next Caesar, bringing the world to peace and closing Janus's temple.

But what this standard achieved, before and after, would appear faint and dull in comparison to what the third Caesar did, under the living Justice. He made the wrathful standard serve to enact vengeance.

Now listen to my answer, for it continues. Later, it ran with Titus to avenge the ancient sin. When Lombardy bit the Holy Church, Charlemagne came to her aid and victoriously defended her.

Now, you can judge the crimes of those whom I accused, the cause of all your miseries. Some oppose the public standard with the yellow lilies, while others claim it for their own party, so it is difficult to tell who sins more.

Let the Ghibellines work under another standard, for trouble always follows those who separate it from justice. Let this new Charles not strike it down, nor let him and his Guelfs think they will be triumphant.

The sons have often wept for the father's crime, and let him not believe that God will change His banner for the lilies.

This little planet adorns itself with good spirits, who have worked to bring fame and honor after them. Whenever their desires reach upward, the rays of true love must also shine, but they lose their intensity as they ascend.

But in heaven, each soul's happiness corresponds to its merits, and we see them neither more nor less than what they deserve. This living Justice makes our affection sweet, so that it can never be twisted into iniquity.

The diverse voices make beautiful music, and so the different levels of heaven create harmony among the spheres. And here in this heavenly realm shines the light of Romeo, whose beautiful work was unjustly rewarded.

But those who worked against him, the Provencals, they have not laughed, and so the wrongdoers suffer. Romeo, a poor man and a pilgrim, had four daughters, each a queen. And when malicious words led him to summon this just man, he gave him seven and five for ten.

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And thus, he departed poor and stricken in years. If the world could know the heart he had, it would praise him more, though it lauds him now.

**Paradiso: Canto VII**

*"Hosanna, holy God of hosts,  
Shining with your light,  
Happy flames of these holy spirits!"*

Thus, returning to their melody, this substance, which had a double light, was seen by me to sing. The others, moving to their dance, veiled themselves from me with a sudden distance, just as sparks rush away swiftly.

I was filled with doubt, and within myself I said, "Tell her, tell her, speak to my Lady who quenches my thirst with her sweet light."

And yet, the reverence that governs my whole being, which is greater than any thought or feeling, bowed me down like someone drowsy.

Beatrice, seeing this, did not let me linger in this state for long. She smiled at me in a way that would make anyone happy even in the fire. She said:

"By the wisdom that cannot fail, you have wondered about how a just vengeance could be justly avenged, and it has made you think. But I will quickly untangle this for you; listen carefully, for these words of mine will give you an understanding of a great truth."

"By not enduring the force that restrains a person for their own good, a person who was never born to be, damning themselves, they have damned their entire offspring. The human race lay in error for many centuries until it pleased the Word of God to descend into it, where the nature that had alienated itself from its Maker was united with Him in person through His eternal love."

"Now, turn your mind to what I say: this nature, when united with its Maker, was pure and good. But alone, it was banished from Paradise because it turned away from the path of truth and life. Therefore, the punishment that the cross bore, measured by the nature assumed by Christ, was never as justly felt by any other, and none was ever as unjust, considering who the Person was that suffered, within whom such a nature had contracted."

"From that one act, there came many consequences. To God and to the Jews, the death was pleasing; Earth trembled, and Heaven was opened."

"It should no longer seem difficult for you to understand that a just vengeance was avenged by a just court."

"But now I see that your mind is still tangled in thought. You ask, 'I understand what I hear, but I don't know why God chose this specific mode for our redemption.'"

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"Brother, this is a mystery that is hidden to the eyes of everyone whose love is not fully mature in the fire of divine love. Truly, as one looks at this point for a long time and sees little, I will now explain why this method was the worthiest."

"Divine goodness, which is free from all envy, burns so brightly in itself that it radiates eternal beauty. Everything that comes from this is everlasting because it is never removed and always retains its original imprint."

"Everything that proceeds from this divine goodness is entirely free, untouched by the influence of new things. The more closely conformed it is, the more it pleases, because the blessed ardor that radiates through all things is most vibrant in what is most like itself."

"This divine goodness has been a great advantage to humanity; without it, humanity would fall from its noble state. Only sin can strip us of this, and that leads us away from the Supreme Good, leaving us dimmed by its light."

"Your nature, when it sinned, was cast out of these dignities, just as it was cast out of Paradise. It could not recover by its own efforts, unless it passed through one of two ways: either God granted pardon through mercy, or man made satisfaction for his folly."

"Now, fix your mind on the eternal plan, as far as you can, and listen carefully. Man, in his limitations, could not satisfy on his own. His pride in thinking he could rise, made him fall. For this reason, man has been excluded from the ability to satisfy by himself."

"Therefore, it was necessary for God, in His own ways, to restore man to his perfect state—either directly or through both methods."

"Because the action of the doer is more pleasing the more it reflects the goodness of the heart, Divine goodness was content to use every method to lift you up again. There has never been or will be such a grand act as this, whether through the first or second way."

"God, in His infinite goodness, was more generous in making man capable of lifting himself up than if He had simply pardoned him. All other methods would have been insufficient for justice, were it not that the Son of God humbled Himself to become incarnate."

"Now, I return to answer fully your question. You say: 'I see air, fire, water, and earth, and their mixtures, which come to corruption and endure only a short while. Yet, these things were created, so if what you say is true, why do they corrupt?'"

"Angels and the land you are in are created, just as they are in their full existence. But all the elements you mention and everything made from them are informed by a created virtue."

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"The matter they have was created, and so was the influence that informs them. The soul of every creature, whether brute or plant, draws the influence of the holy lights. But your own life immediately inspires the Supreme Beneficence, and it becomes so enamored with it that it desires it forever."

"From this you may also argue your resurrection. If you think again about how human flesh was created at the time when the first parents were made."

### Paradiso: Canto VIII

The world used to believe in its peril that the beautiful Cypria, the goddess of love, radiated her power, turning the third epicycle. That's why the ancient nations paid her homage with sacrifices and prayers in their misguided beliefs. They honored both Dione and Cupid as her mother and son, claiming that Cupid had sat on Dido's lap. They took the name of the star that chases the sun, now following it, now preceding it.

I didn't realize that we were ascending to it, but I believed fully that we were in it, seeing my Lady, who seemed to grow even more beautiful.

Just as a spark within a flame or a voice within another voice can be heard when one is steady and the other moves, I saw other lights within that bright light moving in a circle, speeding up and slowing down, as if they were guided by their inner vision.

Even if the wind had blown down from a cold cloud, rapidly and invisibly, it would have seemed slower than the divine lights I saw coming toward us, moving faster than any earthly winds.

And behind the ones that were most in front, I heard a cry of "Hosanna!" so beautiful and filled with joy, I felt a longing to hear it again.

Then one light came closer to us and began to speak: "We are ready for your pleasure, so you may rejoice in us. We move with the celestial Princes, in one circle and with one thirst, just as you once spoke of in the world: 'You, who, intelligent, move in the third heaven.' We are filled with love, and a little rest will not make us less joyful."

After I had offered my eyes to my Lady, who had smiled and assured me, I turned my gaze back to the light, which had promised so much.

"Say, who are you?" I asked with deep affection.

How it grew with joy, shining even brighter when I spoke! It said to me: "The world possessed me for only a short time, and if it had been longer, much evil would have been prevented. My joy keeps me hidden from you, surrounding me like a creature wrapped in its own silk. You loved me well, and if I had stayed on earth, I would have shown you even more of my love."

Then it spoke of the lands and places it would have ruled if not for the violence of human desires. It mentioned several regions it would have governed, including the lands of the Rhone and the sea, and how they had been harmed by greedy rulers.

"If only my brother understood this," the light continued, "the greed of Catalonia would not have been a threat." The light seemed to feel for the plight of those who suffer under bad leadership, especially in places where power was misused.

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Then, with a calm that overflowed with joy, the light told me: "You will find what you seek here. Every good thing begins and ends with God. This fills me with joy, and makes me believe that you can see the truth as I do."

I responded, saying, "Now that I understand, I see it clearer. But I wonder, how can sweet things come from bitter seeds?"

The light responded: "If I show you the truth, you will understand. All things are directed by God's providence, and He governs with a wisdom that far surpasses our human understanding. The world's movements are not random, but guided by a greater plan."

It continued to explain that the divine intelligence behind these things is so powerful that everything falls into its rightful place. The flow of the world and the heavens are carefully controlled, and without this divine guidance, everything would collapse into chaos.

The light spoke of how human nature, limited as it is, can't satisfy its own needs but must rely on divine intervention. This is why God restored humanity through Christ, and why justice was necessary.

And then, in a final teaching, the light pointed out that if people followed nature's foundation and pursued it, they would lead virtuous lives. However, people often stray from this path, mistaking worldly power for divine guidance.

### Paradiso: Canto IX

After Charles had enlightened me, he told me of the betrayals his descendants would face, but he added, "Be patient and let the years pass." And so, all I can say is that rightful sorrow will follow their wrongs.

The holy light we were in had already turned back toward the Sun, as everything good does, which gives life to all things. How deceived are souls who turn away from such good, and place their hearts in vain things!

Then, another light appeared, and it brightened outwardly, showing its will to please me. Beatrice, whose eyes were still fixed upon me with affection, reassured me with her approval.

"Please bring swift resolution to my question," I said. "Show me that what I think in you, I can truly see reflected."

The light responded, still fresh to me, from within its depths: "In that part of Italy between Rialto and the sources of Brenta and Piave, there rises a hill. On that hill, a torch once descended that greatly affected the region.

Out of one root were both I and that torch born. I was Cunizza, and I now shine here because the radiance of this star overtook me. But I forgive the cause of my fate, and I do not grieve over it, which might seem hard for you to understand.

Of this brilliant and precious jewel near to me in heaven, great fame remained, and before it fades, in a hundred years it shall be five times more. Look at man, and see if he should make himself excellent, so that he may leave behind a better life!

The current population, confined by the Adige and Tagliamento, shows no remorse. But soon Padua will change the water that bathes Vicenza, because the people are stubborn and resist duty.

And in Feltro, the crime of its unholy pastor will cause weeping—a crime so monstrous that it has no comparison. The Ferrarese blood, which would fill a great vat, will be a gift from a priest to prove his allegiance. Such gifts are given to match the people's desires.

Above us, there are mirrors, Thrones you call them, which reflect the judgment of God. This is why we find satisfaction in these utterances."

Then, the light became silent, as if turning elsewhere, by the same divine wheel that it entered.

The next joy I saw was like a ruby struck by sunlight, and I understood that joy shines above in the same way a smile brightens below, but here, the shadow darkens as the mind grieves.

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"God sees all things, and in Him, blessed spirit, your sight is clear," I said. "So nothing can be hidden from you. Why, then, does your voice not satisfy my longing? I would not need to ask if I were as you are in me."

The light began speaking again, explaining: "The greatest valley of the earth, except for the sea that encircles the world, extends so far that it once created the meridian where it had been the horizon. I once lived on the shore between the Ebro and Magra rivers, where my name was known."

"Folco, they called me. And now this heaven imprints itself on me, just as I once imprinted myself on it. No woman ever burned with more passion than I, except for those ancient lovers. But here, we do not repent. We smile, not at our mistakes, but at the power that made and foresaw everything."

"We see the art that adorns the good, which governs the world above, turning the lower world in its proper order."

"To satisfy your desire, I will explain further. You wish to know who is in this light beside me, shining like a sunbeam in clear water. That light is Rahab, who, when she helped Joshua, was taken into this heaven as the first soul of Christ's triumph."

"Her place here is deserved, as she favored the first victory of Joshua in the Holy Land, a victory that the Pope now forgets. Your city, which came from the one who first turned his back on his Maker, brings forth and scatters evil, leading both sheep and lambs astray by turning the shepherd into a wolf."

"For this, the Gospel and the great Doctors are abandoned, and only the Decretals are studied, showing their meaning only in the margins. This is the focus of the Pope and the Cardinals—far from Nazareth, where Gabriel unfolded his wings, and far from where the true calling of Peter's followers lies."

### Paradiso: Canto X

As I looked into the Son with all the love that each of them eternally breathes, I saw the primal and unutterable power that governs everything.

Whatever exists in the mind or before the eye, with such perfect order, can only be enjoyed by contemplating this divine source.

Now, Reader, focus your vision with me on the lofty wheels, to that part where one motion meets the other, and begin to contemplate, with joy, the Master's work. He loves it so much that His gaze never strays from it.

From that point, the oblique circle branches off, the path that the planets follow, to fulfill the world's needs. Without this inflection, much of the power in the heavens would be wasted, and many powers below would cease to exist.

If the planets' paths were even slightly different, much would be missing from the balance of the world, both above and below.

Stay with me now, Reader, as I explain this, and think about what I've set before you, because I want you to experience joy, not weariness, in this contemplation.

I've presented the concept, so now feed your mind with it. All my focus is on the theme I've been given to write about.

The greatest of nature's ministers, the one who uses the power of heaven to shape the world and marks time with His light, was revolving along the spirals, joined to the higher part of existence.

I was with him, but I wasn't aware of the ascent, only like a person is aware of a first thought before it arrives.

And Beatrice, who moves from good to better, so quickly that time doesn't measure her action, must have been radiant in herself. And the light of the sun, which I entered, wasn't seen through color but through light.

Even though I call on genius, art, and practice, I can't describe it fully. Believe that it's possible to imagine, and long to see it for yourself.

If our imaginations are too small for such great things, it's no wonder, since no eye could ever see beyond the sun.

In this place was the fourth family of the high Father, who eternally satisfies Himself, showing how He breathes life and creates.

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Beatrice said: "Give thanks, give thanks to the Sun of Angels, who has raised you to this state by His grace!"

Never before had a mortal heart been so ready to worship, nor had it been so prepared to give itself completely to God, as I was at those words. All my love was absorbed in Him, and in my devotion, Beatrice faded from my thoughts.

This didn't bother her. She smiled at it, and the radiance of her smiling eyes made my mind split between many things.

I saw many lights, vivid and triumphant, creating a circle around us, more beautiful in sound than in their appearance.

This was like the daughter of Latona, who, when the air is thick, holds the thread that makes her ring.

In the court of Heaven, from which I return, there are many jewels so beautiful and precious they cannot be taken from this realm.

Their singing was the song of these lights. Anyone who doesn't have wings to fly up there will wait for their message in silence.

As soon as those burning suns had circled around us three times, they seemed like stars close to the fixed poles.

They were like ladies who, not leaving the dance, stop in silence, waiting until they've gathered the new melody.

Then one began: "When the radiance of grace, by which true love is kindled and grows by loving, within you becomes so resplendent that it guides you upward by the stair where no one can descend without reascending,

Who would deny the wine from his vial to your thirst, unless it doesn't descend to the sea?

Would you like to know with what plants this garland is adorned, which encircles the Lady who strengthens you for heaven?

I am one of the holy flock of lambs that Dominic leads down a path where those who don't stray are nourished.

The one closest to me on the right, my brother and master, is Albertus of Cologne. I am Thomas of Aquinas.

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If you want to be certain of the others, follow my words with your eyes, upward along the blessed garland.

The next brilliance comes from Gratian's smile, who helped both the Church and the Emperor in such a way that it pleased Heaven.

The one close to us that adorns our choir is Peter, who, like the poor widow, gave his treasure to Holy Church.

The fifth light, which is the fairest among us, shines from such a love that the world below is eager to know its news.

Within it is a lofty mind where knowledge was so deeply placed that, if the truth is true, no one has ever surpassed it.

Next, you see the light of the one who, in the flesh below, most examined the angelic nature and its ministry.

And in that other little light is smiling the advocate of the Christian centuries, whose rhetoric made Augustine wise.

Now, if you follow my praise from light to light, with your thirst already, you will come to the eighth.

By seeing every good, the sainted soul rejoices, which the deceptive world reveals to those who listen well.

The body from which it was hunted is lying in Cieldauro, and from martyrdom and exile, it came to this peace.

Look further on and see the flame of Isidore, Bede, and Richard, who was more contemplative than man.

The light from which your gaze returns is from a spirit who, in his meditations, found death slow.

It is the eternal light of Sigier, who lectured in the Street of Straw and analyzed the flaws in the truth."

Then, like a clock calling us to the time the Bride of God rises to meet her Spouse, one part urging the other, ting! ting! resounding with a sweet note that fills the spirit with love,

Thus I saw the glorious wheel move around, voices giving voice, in modulation and sweetness that cannot be understood,

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Except in that place where joy is made eternal.

### Paradiso: Canto XI

Oh, how foolish are the concerns of mortal men! How inconclusive are the arguments that cause you to waste your time in such a downward flight!

One person follows laws, another turns to aphorisms, some pursue the priesthood, others try to rule by force or persuasion, some become thieves, others focus on state affairs. Some indulge in the pleasures of the flesh, exhausting themselves, while some choose comfort and ease.

But I, free from all these distractions, was received into the heavens with Beatrice, with such overwhelming glory!

Once each soul had returned to its rightful place within the circle, it stood like a candle in a candlestick, its light glowing brightly.

Then, from within the brilliant light that had spoken to me before, I heard a voice begin. It was smiling and became even more radiant:

“Just as I am kindled by the rays of the Eternal Light, I understand the cause of your thoughts. You doubt and want me to explain in simpler terms what I meant when I said ‘where well one fattens,’ and when I said ‘there never rose a second.’ It is important to distinguish between these points.

The Providence that governs the world with wisdom, where all created vision is defeated before it can reach the deepest understanding, appointed two Princes to guide it—one by ardent love, and the other by wisdom. I will speak of one of them because both are equally deserving of praise, as their work is aimed at the same end.

Between Tupino and the stream that flows from the hill of the blessed Ubald, there is a fertile slope of mountain. From this slope, Perugia feels both cold and heat through Porta Sole, and behind it, Gualdo and Nocera suffer under their burdens.

From this slope, where the steepness breaks, a sun rose upon the world, just as the sun rises from the Ganges. So, when speaking of this place, do not just say Ascesi; say Orient, for that is its true name.

This sun, not far from its rising, began to bring comfort to the earth with its mighty virtue. In his youth, this sun incurred his father’s wrath for a lady, to whom no one opens the gate of pleasure.

She, without a suitor for over a thousand years, waited until he came. Despite all the great trials and the fear caused by Amyclas, she remained unmoved. Even though Mary still remained below, she ascended with Christ upon the cross.

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But I must not go too far into this. Francis and Poverty were the lovers in this story, and their unity became the cause of holy thoughts.

Their love, their joy, their sweetness, and their devotion inspired so much that Bernard, the venerable, first bared his feet in awe, running with peace, feeling that he was too slow.

Giles and Sylvester followed behind, bare of foot, happy to follow the bridegroom's humble way.

Then came the father, the master, with his Lady and his family, who now wore the humble cord. His heart was not burdened by shame for being Peter Bernardone's son, nor by the world's scorn.

With firm resolve, he approached Innocent and received the seal of his order. His life, so admirable, was crowned with glory, and soon the order grew. Through Honorius, the Eternal Spirit crowned his holy purpose.

After preaching to the Sultan and finding the people unready for conversion, he returned to Italy, where he received the final seal from Christ, which he bore for two whole years.

When the time came, Christ, pleased with his good work, drew him up to the reward for his lowliness. Before his ascent, he entrusted his beloved Lady to his friars, urging them to love her.

Now think of the man who was fit to guide the ship of Peter across the high seas. This man, our Patriarch, led his flock with wisdom. Those who follow his commands will see that he is carrying good fruit.

But as the flock grows, it becomes harder to keep them together. The farther they stray from the shepherd, the less they return with good fruit.

Some remain close to the shepherd out of fear, but they are few, and their devotion is only a small portion of the whole.

If my words are clear, and if you have been paying attention, you will be satisfied. For you will see how the plant that has been pruned will flourish, and how the words "Where well one fattens, if he strays not" are true.

**Paradiso: Canto XII**

As soon as the blessed flame had spoken the final word and given it voice, the holy millstone began to turn, and before it completed a full revolution, another joined it, and motion joined to motion, song to song.

This song transcends our Muses and Sirens in its beauty, as primal splendor outshines what is reflected. It is like two rainbows stretched across a tender cloud, parallel and matching in color, as Juno commands her handmaid to create them. The first rainbow, born outside, is like the one that symbolizes the world after the flood, established by God's covenant with Noah.

In the same way, two eternal garlands of roses surrounded us, answering one another, the outer to the inner, completing a grand harmony of light and sound.

After the dance and other grand rejoicings—singing, and the fiery effulgence of light blending with light—the celestial motion stopped together, as eyes must close when the will directs them, or open in unison when commanded.

Then, from the heart of one of the new lights, a voice came, directing me towards the star it represented, like a needle pointing to its star.

The voice began: “The love that makes me beautiful draws me to speak about the other leader, by whom so much good has been spoken of here, just as we are united in our purpose. It is right to mention the other, so that, as they were united in their warfare, their glory may shine together.”

The Christian soldiery, which had cost so much to rearm, moved slowly, uncertain, and in small numbers. But the Emperor, who reigns forever, provided grace for the host, not because it was worthy, but by grace alone.

And as was said, He brought aid to His bride, the Church, with two champions, whose deeds and words gathered the scattered people.

Between Tupino and the stream that falls from the hill of blessed Ubald, a fertile slope rises, from which Perugia feels both the cold and heat through Porta Sole. Behind it, Gualdo and Nocera suffer under their burdens. From that slope, where the steepness breaks, a sun rose upon the world, as the sun rises from the Ganges.

The place is not just Ascesi; it is Orient, if one speaks rightly. This sun began to make the earth feel its mighty virtue. In his youth, he incurred his father's wrath for a lady, to whom no one unlocks the gate of pleasure.

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This lady, abandoned and scorned, waited more than a thousand years until he came. Despite all the great trials, she remained unmoved. Even though Mary still remained below, she ascended with Christ on the cross.

But I must not go too far into this. Francis and Poverty were the lovers in this story, and their union became the cause of holy thoughts.

Their love, joy, and devotion inspired so much that Bernard, the venerable, first bared his feet in awe, running with peace, feeling that he was too slow.

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### Paradiso: Canto XIII

Let the reader imagine what I saw and retain that image firmly in his mind. Picture the fifteen stars that light up the sky in their respective regions, their brightness so great it surpasses all the constellations we see in the heavens. Picture the Wain, the Big Dipper, whose movement never fails to guide the sky night and day, with its pole remaining steadfast in place. Imagine the mouth of the horn, the point where the axis begins, around which the primal wheel turns.

Now, picture the two signs in the heavens, formed like the ones Minos' daughter created, the moment when she faced death. One set of rays is inside the other, both spinning in opposite directions. This is the true constellation and the double dance that circled around the point where I stood. It is as much beyond our usual understanding as the swift motion of the heavens outpaces everything else.

Their song wasn't about Bacchus or Apollo, but about the divine nature of the Trinity, with one person who is both divine and human. The dance and song fulfilled their purpose, and those holy lights began to grow brighter as they became happier, moving from one state of joy to another.

Then, from within one of the new lights, a voice emerged, which made me turn toward it, just as a needle points to a star. The voice said, "The love that makes me beautiful draws me to speak about the other leader, by whom so much has been said here. It's right to mention the other, so that, as they were united in their mission, their glory may shine together."

This is the Christian army that was slow and small at first, but the eternal Emperor, by His grace alone, provided for it. He brought the Church's Bride to safety with the help of two champions, whose deeds and words gathered the scattered people.

Now picture the land where the sweet west wind rises to refresh Europe, where the fertile slopes of Calahorra lie. It was under the protection of this mighty shield that the "amorous paramour of Christian faith" was born, destined to be a great warrior for the Faith. His mind was filled with such divine energy from the moment of his birth that his mother knew he was destined for greatness.

Soon, the man, later known as Dominic, joined in holy matrimony with the Faith, and the woman, his bride, saw in a dream the great fruit he would bear. From the very beginning, his life was devoted to spreading the truth, and he became an essential part of the Church's mission.

As soon as the marriage was complete, he took the vow of poverty, as did his followers. They lived humbly, walking barefoot and devoting their lives to Christ. Dominic, unwavering in his faith, received the seal of his order from Pope Innocent, and the order grew rapidly.

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Later, when he preached before the Sultan, seeking martyrdom, he returned to Italy, where he received his final seal. In his last days, he entrusted his beloved Order to his followers, instructing them to love it as he did.

Now think of this man, who was fit to guide the ship of Peter across the seas. His life exemplified the virtues of the Catholic Church, and his followers would continue his mission, carrying forward the truth.

However, as the flock grew, they became more scattered, with many straying far from their true purpose. Some remain close to the shepherd, but they are few. Much like how the thorn may bear a rose in the end, we see how a ship can sail smoothly only to crash at the harbor.

Let no one assume they understand the divine judgment without caution. For it often happens that opinion leads us astray, and feelings bind the intellect in ways that mislead us. Those who search for truth without skill often end up lost, as many philosophers have done before.

We should not be overconfident in our judgments, as we can never know everything. Just as the thorn can bear a rose or the ship can reach its destination only to perish at the harbor, we should not be too quick to judge others. For in the divine judgment, things are not always as they seem.

**Paradiso: Canto XIV**

As soon as the blessed flame had spoken the final word, the holy millstone began to turn, and as it revolved, it was soon joined by another circle, creating motion and song that harmonized with each other. The song that we heard was far greater than the music of our earthly Muses and Sirens. It transcended all the sweetness we know, just as primal light surpasses reflected light.

Imagine two rainbows, side by side, with colors as brilliant as those formed by Juno's command when she created them for her maid. The two rainbows' colors reflect one another, and as they move, they give a sense of what was happening here. This dance of light, which I witnessed in Heaven, is far beyond anything we know on Earth, so much so that it could even surpass the swift movement of the Chiana River.

They sang neither songs of Bacchus nor Apollo but celebrated the divine nature of the Holy Trinity, singing with a perfect harmony that pleased all who heard. They sang three times, repeating the One and the Two and the Three, which is the eternal song of God's glory.

In the brightest of the lights, I heard a voice that answered me modestly, as if it were the Angel's voice to Mary: "As long as the joy of Paradise lasts, our love will shine through and adorn us with a glowing light. This light will be proportional to the love within us, and the love grows as we see more of God's truth."

When our bodies are reunited, they will be even more radiant and pleasing because of their completeness. The light will increase in us, reflecting the power and goodness of God, and it will make us capable of greater visions of Him.

But just as a coal can glow and send out flames, overpowering the coal itself, the new light of our glorified bodies will overpower the light of our current spiritual state. Our bodies, though, will be strong enough to bear that light and will not grow weary of it.

At that moment, the two groups of souls appeared to be in agreement, and I understood that they were not just longing for their own bodies but also for the families they had left behind on Earth—fathers, mothers, and loved ones who were dear to them. Then, all around them, a new brightness emerged, like an evening sky brightening as the night fades.

I saw new forms and circles appear, glowing with such intensity that it was almost blinding. Then, I saw Beatrice, more beautiful and radiant than ever. She smiled at me, and I felt a greater sense of joy and gratitude fill my heart. Her smile uplifted me, and my eyes became fixed on her, pulling me upward toward a higher level of heaven.

As I was raised, I could feel myself filled with love for God, the source of all beauty. I made an offering to God in the universal language of the heavens, a prayer of thanksgiving for the grace I

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had received. I was filled with such intense passion that the offering was accepted before I even fully realized it.

Then I saw two lights shining in the form of rays, one bright and one slightly dimmer, yet both equally glorious. They seemed to represent the radiant power of the Holy Trinity. As I watched, I saw the two rays intersect, creating a sign of Christ's cross, illuminating the entire area. This cross seemed to shine with the brilliance of the sun, and as the rays intersected, they made music, lifting me even higher into the heavens.

The harmony of this divine music filled my soul with such joy that I became lost in it. The divine harmony was so powerful that it captivated me, just as a melody played on a harp captivates the listener, making them lose track of time. The music made me yearn for more, and I was so deeply moved that I felt bound by its sweet influence.

Though I had gazed upon Beatrice and seen her eyes, which were my source of joy, the joy from this divine experience surpassed everything else. In my longing to understand the mystery, I was unable to look away from the new vision unfolding before me. This vision of divine love and light was the highest form of joy, and I felt it purify me, bringing me closer to God.

And so, this joy, which I can only describe in vague terms, transformed me, making me more attuned to the divine presence. It is a joy that purifies, elevates, and draws one closer to God, like the intense warmth of a fire that refines everything it touches.

**Paradiso: Canto XV**

A benevolent will, in which the love that justly inspires us constantly manifests itself, just as, in the iniquitous, we see a will driven by greed—this kind of force silenced the sweet song of the lyre, quieting the sacred chords that Heaven's right hand adjusts.

How could the celestial beings, those substances, be deaf to the just requests, when they had grown silent together to provoke my desire for their prayer?

It is truly sorrowful when a person laments their love for something that does not last, for such a love only leads them to lose it forever.

Just as, in the pure and calm evening air, a sudden spark of fire occasionally appears, moving the eyes that were fixed in place before, this fire seems like a star changing position. But in the place where it burns, nothing is lost, and it only lasts for a moment, so too did a star emerge from the horn that stretches to the right, from the foot of the cross, shining out from the constellation.

The star was not severed from its ribbon but moved down the glowing band, just like fire moving behind alabaster.

This reminded me of the shade of Anchises, if we believe the greatest Muse, when he saw his son in Elysium. He said: “O my blood, O grace of God poured into you, as to you, whom Heaven's gate was opened twice?”

I paid attention to that radiant light, and then turned my sight to Beatrice. I was left astounded, for in her eyes, I saw such a smile that it seemed I reached the very bottom of both my grace and my Paradise.

Then, pleasant to the hearing and the sight, the spirit joined its beginnings in such a profound way that I did not understand it at first. It wasn't hiding from me by choice but by necessity, for the concept exceeded what mortals can grasp.

And when the intensity of this burning love was relaxed enough to reach our understanding, the first thing I understood was: “Blessed be You, O Three in One, who have been so kind to my lineage!”

The voice continued: “You have satisfied your hunger from the study of the great book, from which no black or white can ever be changed. You have found peace in this light, which I now speak from, thanks to her grace who gave you the wings to fly so high.”

You think that your thoughts come from God, who is the First, as the single unit that radiates out into the five and six, and therefore you don't ask who I am, or why I seem more joyous than any other in this crowd of happy souls.

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You are right in this thought, because both the small and the great look into the mirror of this existence, where before you think, your thoughts are reflected.

But now, to better fulfill the sacred love, in which I watch with eternal sight, let your voice openly proclaim your wishes, for my answer is already set.

I turned to Beatrice, and she heard my thoughts even before I spoke. She smiled at me in a way that made my desire grow even stronger. Then I began: "Love and knowledge, when the first Equality appeared to you, became of equal value for each of you. In the Sun that illuminated and burned you, they are both equally present, so much so that all comparisons fall short."

But among mortals, will and reason are often different, for reason is more apparent to you than it is to us. I, being mortal, feel this inequality. So I offer my thanks in my heart for this welcome, but not in speech.

I ask you, O living gem, set in this precious jewel, to satisfy my curiosity with your name.

The voice responded: "O leaf of mine, from whom I derived pleasure, even while waiting, I was always yours. The one from whom your race is named, and who for over a hundred years circled the mount on the first level, was both my son and your great-grandfather. You should shorten the long fatigue for him with your good deeds."

Florence, once calm, temperate, and chaste, did not have gold chains or crowns, nor ladies with lavish footwear and jewelry, but it was a city that knew modesty. No longer did the daughter of Florence strike fear into her father, and the measure of her dower was fair.

No longer were houses without families, nor had Sardanapalus come to demonstrate the vices of the court. Men like Bellincion Berti lived humbly, dressed in leather and simple attire, with their wives making thread and flax.

Oh, how fortunate those women were! Each knew her place and none were left behind for the sake of France. Some mothers cared for their children, telling them stories of Rome and Troy, living contentedly.

Such a life would have been a marvel at that time. Even the most renowned names, like Lapo Salterello, Cianghella, Cincinnatus, or Cornelia, would have been seen with reverence.

Mary gave me a quiet and beautiful life, one of safety and peace, and I was baptized both Christian and Cacciaguida in your ancient Baptistry.

Moronto was my brother, Eliseo my wife, and from Val di Pado came my surname. Later, I followed Emperor Conrad, who adorned me with his chivalric order, and together we fought for justice.

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I battled against those who wrongly claimed ownership of your land, and through martyrdom, I was freed from the bonds of the world. Thus, I came to this peace.

**Paradiso: Canto XVI**

Oh, you poor nobility, if you make people proud of you here, where our feelings are weak, it won't surprise me. But in Heaven, where desires are pure, I am proud of you.

Truly, you are like a cloak that quickly shrinks. Unless we patch you up day by day, time will pass and quickly tear you apart.

With 'You,' which Rome was the first to accept (where her family doesn't stay strong), I once again start speaking.

Beatrice, who was standing a little apart, smiling, looked like the woman who laughed when the first failure of Guinevere's story was written.

And I began: "You are my ancestor, you give me the courage to speak, you lift me up so that I am more than I am.

So many small streams fill my mind with joy that it feels happy just by being able to handle this and not break.

Then tell me, my beloved ancestor, who were your ancestors, and what years were marked during your childhood?

Tell me about the community of Saint John, how large it was, and who in it was worthy of the highest seats."

When a wind blows, a coal turns into flame, and I saw that light grow brighter at my encouragement.

And as it became more beautiful to my eyes, it spoke to me with a voice sweeter and more tender than before, but not in modern language:

"From the time of saying the 'Ave' until the birth, when my mother, who is now a saint, gave birth to me, who had been her burden,

Until the fire returned to its Lion five hundred fifty times and thirty more to be reignited beneath his paw.

My ancestors and I had our birthplace where the last district of the city is, by the one who runs in your yearly race.

It's enough to hear this about my ancestors; who they were and where they came from is better left unsaid.

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At that time, those who were fit to bear arms between Mars and the Baptist made up a fifth of those who are living now.

But the community that now mixes with Campi, Certaldo, and Figghine, was seen to be pure even among the lowest artisans.

Oh, how much better it would be to have neighbors like the ones I'm speaking of, and have your boundary at Galluzzo and Trespiano, than in the town, bearing the stench of Aguglione's rude people, or the one from Signa who already has sharp eyes for trickery.

Had the people who degenerate the most in the world not been a stepmother to Caesar but a kind mother to her son, some people who now call themselves Florentines, trading and discounting, would have gone back to Simifonte, where their ancestors once lived as beggars.

At Montemurlo, the Counts would still be there, the Cerchi in the parish of Acone, and maybe in Valdiglieve the Buondelmonti.

Intermingling of people has always been the cause of trouble in cities, like food that causes excess in the body.

A blind bull plunges headfirst more recklessly than a blind lamb, and often a single sword does more harm than five.

If you look at Luni, Urbisaglia, and how they have disappeared, as well as Chiusi and Sinigaglia after them,

You'll see that it's not a new or surprising thing for races to fade away, since even cities have an end.

All things of yours have their mortality, just like you; but in some things, it's hidden for a while and lives are short.

Just as the moon moves across the sky, covering and uncovering the shores without stopping, fortune does the same with Florence.

So it shouldn't be surprising what I'm going to say about the great Florentines whose fame is hidden in the past.

I saw the Ughi, the Catellini, the Filippi, the Greci, the Ormanni, and the Alberichi, all of them still known even in their downfall.

And I saw, as mighty as they were ancient, the ones from La Sannella, Arca, Soldanier, Ardinghi, and Bostichi.

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Near the gate, which now bears such a heavy new crime that soon it will be thrown off the ship, were the Ravignani, from whom descended County Guido, and whoever took the name of the great Bellincione.

He from La Pressa already knew how to rule, and already Galigajo had gold on the hilt and pommel in his house.

The Column Vair, Sacchetti, Giuochi, Fifant, and Barucci were already mighty, as were Galli, and those who blush for the bushel.

The stock from which the Calfucci were born was already great, and the Sizii and Arrigucci were already chosen to sit in curule chairs.

Oh, how I saw those who are undone by their own pride! And how the golden balls of Florence shone in all their mighty deeds!

Similarly, the ancestors of those who, whenever your church is vacant, make money by staying in consistory.

The insolent race, like a dragon, follows whoever flees, and is gentle as a lamb to anyone who shows them their teeth or purse.

It was already rising from low people; so it did not please Ubertin Donato that his wife's father should make him their kin.

Already, Caponsacco had descended to the market from Fesole, and Giuda and Infangato were already good citizens.

I'll tell you something incredible but true: one entered the small circuit through a gate named after the Della Pera!

Anyone who bears the beautiful shield of the great baron, whose renown and name the festival of Thomas keeps fresh, received knighthood and privilege from him;

Though with the people, he unites himself today, the man who binds it with a border.

Already the Gualterotti and Importuni were there; and the Borgo would be quieter if it remained unfed with new neighbors.

The house from which your lamentation is born, through just disdain that death brought among you, putting an end to your joyful life,

Was honored in itself and among its companions. Oh Buondelmonte, how you fled from the wedding at another's prompting!

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Many would be rejoicing who are sad, if God had given you to the Ema the first time you came to the city.

But the mutilated stone, which guards the bridge, required Florence to provide a victim in her final hour of peace.

With all these families, and others with them, Florence I saw in such great peace that she had no reason to weep.

With all these families, I saw her people so just and glorious, that the lily was never placed upside down on the spear, nor vermillion made by division.

### Paradiso: Canto XVII

Just like Clymene went to find out the truth about what she had heard against her son, I felt the same way. I realized I was like him, and so did Beatrice and the holy light that had first moved for my sake.

Therefore, Beatrice said to me, “Send out the flame of your desire, so that it comes out clearly with the stamp of your inner self. Not that our knowledge will be increased by your speech, but to help you learn to express your thirst, so that we may give you what you need.”

I replied, “Oh, my beloved tree (that lifts yourself up so high, so that no earthly mind can perceive, just as no triangle can have two obtuse angles), you see the contingent things even before they exist, focusing your gaze on the point where all times are present.

While I was with Virgil on the mountain that heals souls, and when I descended into the world of the dead, I was told some painful things about my future life. Even so, I feel strong enough to face the blows of fate. I would like to know what lies ahead, because foreseeing an arrow makes it come more slowly.”

I said this to the same light that had spoken to me before. And just as Beatrice willed, my will was confessed.

The light didn’t respond with vague words like the foolish people who once trapped themselves, before the Lamb of God was sacrificed to take away sins. It spoke clearly and directly, with the paternal love hidden and revealed through its smile:

“Contingency, which is outside of your material world, doesn’t exist in the eternal aspect. But necessity, which comes from the eyes, is like a ship sailing down a current. From this, just as sweet music comes from an organ, I see the time preparing for you.

As Hippolytus had to leave Athens because of his cruel stepmother, so you must leave Florence. This is already decided, and soon it will happen. The person who thinks it will make it happen, where every day Christ is bought and sold.

The blame will fall on the wronged party, as usual, but vengeance will prove the truth of it.

You will leave behind everything that you love dearly. This is the first arrow of exile shot at you. You will know how bitter the bread of others tastes, and how difficult it is to climb another person’s stairs.

The worst burden will be the bad and foolish company you’ll fall in with, for they will turn against you. But soon after, it will be them, not you, who will be ashamed.

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Their own actions will show their true nature, so it will be good for you to stand apart from them.

Your first refuge will be the kindness of the mighty Lombard, who carries the holy bird on the Ladder. He will show you such kindness that what is last with others will be first with him.

You'll see one who is marked by strength from birth, whose future achievements will be great. Although the people don't know him yet, only nine years have passed since he was born, but before the Gascon deceives the noble Henry, some signs of his virtue will show, as he won't care for money or hard work.

His magnificence will eventually be so recognized that even his enemies will have to speak of it.

Rely on him and his support; through him, many will be transformed, changing from rich to poor. You will remember him but will not speak of it—things that will seem unbelievable to those present.

Then the light continued: "These are the explanations of what was said to you. See the traps that are hidden behind a few turns of fortune.

But I wouldn't want you to envy your neighbors, because your life reaches into the future, beyond the punishment of their betrayals."

When the saintly soul became silent, showing it had completed its part in the weaving of the web I had set out, I began speaking, just like someone who yearns for advice and needs it, but isn't sure where to turn.

"Father, I see how time is bringing me a blow that will be hardest for those who resist the most. Therefore, it's wise to prepare, so that if the most precious part of me is taken away, I won't lose the others through my actions.

I've traveled through the world of infinite bitterness, and over the mountain from which my Lady lifted me, and through heaven, from light to light. I've learned things that, if I share them, will be hard for many to accept.

And if I'm hesitant in sharing the truth, I fear that I may lose my life among those who will later call this time the past."

The light that was smiling at me, my treasure that I had found there, suddenly flashed like gold in the sunlight. It then responded: "A troubled conscience, whether from its own shame or from another's, will find your words harsh at first, but in time, they will be a nourishing force.

Your cry will do like the wind, which hits the highest peaks hardest. This is a sign of honor.

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Thus, you will see within these circles, on the mount and in the valley of pain, only the souls known for their fame.

The spirit of the listener doesn't rest, nor does it confirm its faith by examples that are hidden and unknown, or reasons that aren't obvious."

**Paradiso: Canto XVIII**

Now, the blessed soul was rejoicing in its words, and I was experiencing my own joy, mingled with bitterness.

Beatrice, the Lady who was leading me to God, said: "Change your thoughts; consider that I am close to the one who frees everyone from wrong."

I turned toward the comforting voice and saw such love in her holy eyes that words can't explain. Not only do I distrust my ability to express it, but my mind can't even go back to that point without another guide.

I can say that, upon seeing her again, my heart was freed from all other desires. While the eternal joy that was shining on Beatrice from the divine light satisfied me with its reflected glory, she conquered me with the radiance of a smile and said to me, "Look around and listen; Paradise is not only in my eyes."

Just as we sometimes see the emotions of others in their gaze, if the emotion is so strong that it absorbs the soul, I saw the wish to speak to me in the holy light.

And it began: "In this fifth resting-place, on the tree that lives by its top, bearing fruit and never losing leaves, are blessed spirits who, before coming to Heaven, were so well-known that every Muse would be enriched by them.

So, look at the arms of the Cross. He whom I'm about to name will perform what is within a cloud of swift fire."

I saw a light pass across the Cross when the name Joshua was spoken, just as he did. I didn't notice the words before the act. Then, at the name of the great Maccabee, I saw another light begin to move, turning and spiraling in joy.

Similarly, I saw Charlemagne and Orlando, two figures I followed with my eyes, as the eye follows a falcon in flight.

Then came William, Renouard, and Duke Godfrey, and Robert Guiscard, whose light filled my sight. Each of these lights, moving and mixing, showed me how great an artist they were among the heavenly singers.

I turned to Beatrice, eager to see what she would say, and her eyes were so full of pleasure that they were more radiant than before.

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Just like someone who feels their virtue growing day by day, I felt my understanding expanding, and my vision of heaven became more intense. The miracle of this growth made me feel more and more enlightened.

Then, as a pale woman, after shedding her bashfulness, becomes aware of her transformation, I too realized the change in my vision, made possible by the clarity of the sixth star, which drew me closer.

Inside that bright, jovial light, I saw the sparkle of love that described our language clearly. And just as birds rise from the shore in celebration, forming groups that move in different shapes, so the holy lights flew in the same way, creating shapes like the letters D, I, and L.

They sang to their own music, and as they formed these shapes, they paused and became silent for a moment. Then, they displayed the vowels and consonants in a sequence, which I understood as part of the divine language.

The first words were "Diligite justitiam" (Love justice), and the last were "Qui judicatis terram" (You who judge the earth). The letters, arranged in this divine order, seemed to form the image of Jupiter, with silver and gold.

Then, more lights descended and rested at the top of the M, where they paused to sing about the good that draws them to itself.

Like sparks that fly up from burning wood, I saw more than a thousand lights rise and ascend in a manner determined by the sun. Each light rested in its place, and I saw the head and neck of an eagle depicted in the fire.

The artist who paints this scene is guided only by the divine, not by any external influence, as He is the one who remembers and forms the virtue for the nest.

The other beatitude, which first seemed to bloom a lily on the M, soon followed the imprint with a slight movement.

O gentle star! How many gems did you show me, demonstrating that all our justice is a result of that heaven which you illuminate!

I pray that the Mind in which your motion and virtue begin will recognize the smoke that clouds your rays, so that it may once again show wrath against the commerce in the temple that was built by signs and martyrdoms!

O heavenly soldiers, whom I observe, I ask you to pray for those who are on earth and have gone astray after bad examples!

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Once, wars were fought with swords; now they are fought by taking bread from the poor, whom the merciful Father provides for.

You, who write but erase, think of Peter and Paul, who died for this vineyard you are spoiling. They are still alive!

You can say with certainty: "My desire is so steadfast for the one who lived alone, who was led to martyrdom for a dance, that I do not know the Fisherman or Paul."

**Paradiso: Canto XIX**

Before me appeared the beautiful image with its wings spread wide. The souls within it were joyfully rejoicing, and each soul looked like a small ruby, where the sun's rays were burning so brightly that they reflected directly into my eyes.

What I am about to describe is beyond what has ever been spoken, written, or understood by imagination. I saw something and heard it as well—the beak speaking, uttering both “I” and “My,” when it was conceived as “We” and “Our.”

It began: “Being just and merciful, I am exalted here to a glory that no desire can exceed. On earth, I left a memory of myself, one that the evil-minded people still speak of, though they do not complete the story.”

Just as a single heat from many embers makes itself felt, so, from many loves, a single sound emerged from this image.

I then said: “O perpetual flowers of eternal joy, who make me perceive your manifold fragrances, break the long fast of hunger that I have endured. I know that if divine justice creates another realm in heaven, yours would not be hidden by any veil.”

“You know how attentively I listen, and you know the doubt that has kept me longing all this time.”

Just like a falcon, when it leaves its hood, moves its head and applauds with its wings, showing desire and making itself appear fine, I saw that standard—woven with divine grace—move in the air, filled with songs as if those inside were rejoicing.

It began speaking again: “He who turned the compass of the world, who within it devised both the occult and the manifest, could not make his power so impressively present across the entire universe that His Word would remain beyond excess.

This confirms that the first proud being, who was the model for all creatures, fell immature by not waiting for the light.

Therefore, each lesser nature is a limited receptacle for the infinite good that exists. Our vision, which is a ray of the intelligence that fills everything, cannot be so powerful that it doesn't recognize its origin far beyond what it can perceive.

Therefore, in eternal justice, the power of vision your world receives, as an eye sees into the ocean, penetrates. Though it may see the shallows near the shore, it cannot perceive the depths beneath, even though they are there, hidden by the depth.

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No light exists that doesn't come from the serene source, which never becomes clouded. All other light is either the shadow of the flesh or its poison."

"Now the cavern is opened to you, the one that has hidden the living justice that you so often questioned about."

You asked: "A man is born in India, and no one there speaks of Christ, nor reads, nor writes. He lives a good life by human standards, but dies unbaptized, without faith. Where is the justice that condemns him? Where is his fault if he doesn't believe?"

But who are you to sit in judgment from far away, with your limited vision? If the Scriptures were not over you, it would be an occasion for doubt.

O earthly creatures, O foolish minds, the primal will, which is good in itself, never moves away from the supreme Good. Everything is just as it aligns with this will. No created good draws it to itself; it causes that good by radiating outward."

Just as a stork flies around her nest after feeding her young, and the young look up at her, I lifted my eyes, and I saw the blessed image, whose wings moved, urged by many counsels.

The holy creatures sang and flew in a circular motion, forming shapes like D, I, and L. They sang to their own music and then briefly rested, becoming silent for a moment.

O divine Pegasus, who makes genius glorious and long-lived, illuminate me so I can bring forth the figures I have conceived! Let your power shine through these brief verses!

The lights then displayed vowels and consonants, in five times seven, and I understood the parts as if they had spoken to me.

The first words were "Diligite justitiam" (Love justice), and the last were "Qui judicatis terram" (You who judge the earth). The letters formed the image of Jupiter, inlaid with silver and gold.

Then more lights descended, and they paused at the top of the M, singing of the good that draws them to itself.

Like sparks flying up from burning logs, more than a thousand lights rose and ascended, each according to the sun's direction. They rested in their places, and I saw the head and neck of an eagle depicted in the fire.

The artist who creates this scene is guided only by God, who remembers and forms the virtue for the nest.

The other beatitude, which first seemed to bloom like a lily on the M, followed the imprint with a slight motion.

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O gentle star! How many gems did you show me, demonstrating that all our justice is a result of that heaven which you illuminate!

I pray that the Mind, in which your motion and virtue begin, may recognize the smoke that clouds your rays. May it show wrath once again against the commerce in the temple, which was built with signs and martyrdoms!

O heavenly soldiers, whom I observe, I ask you to pray for those who are on earth, for they have gone astray after bad examples.

Once, wars were fought with swords; now they are fought by taking bread from the poor, whom the merciful Father provides for.

You, who write but erase, think of Peter and Paul, who died for this vineyard you are spoiling. They are still alive!

You can say with certainty: "My desire is so steadfast for the one who lived alone, who was led to martyrdom for a dance, that I do not know the Fisherman or Paul."

**Paradiso: Canto XX**

When the one who illuminates the world descends so far from our hemisphere that all the daylight is consumed, the heavens, which were once lit only by him, suddenly reveal themselves again through many lights, one of which shines most brightly.

This act of heaven came to my mind when the banner of the world and its leaders had fallen silent in the blessed beak. All those living lights, far brighter, began to sing, but the songs quickly faded from my memory.

O gentle Love, who cloaks yourself with a smile, how intense you appeared in those sparks, which only carried the breath of holy thoughts!

After the precious and clear crystals that adorned the sixth light I saw, silence was imposed on the angelic bells. I seemed to hear the sound of a river flowing clearly from rock to rock, showing the abundance of its mountain source.

Just as the sound of a cithern takes form on its neck, and as wind fills the pipe of a rustic flute, so too did the murmuring of the eagle rise along its neck, as if it were hollow.

It became a voice and issued forth from the beak in words that my heart had been waiting for, words that I had written.

It began: "The part of me that sees and carries the sun in mortal eagles must now be looked at with attention. For of the fires I make my form, the eyes that sparkle in my head are the highest of all their kinds."

The first to speak was the one in the center of the Cross, the one who once sang of the Holy Spirit, who carried the ark from city to city. Now he understands the merit of his song, based on the reward given for his counsel.

The next in line, closest to my beak, is the one who comforted the poor widow for her son. Now he understands how costly it is not to follow Christ, through the experience of both this sweet life and its opposite.

The one who follows, at the top of the circle, postponed death through sincere repentance. Now he knows that eternal judgment does not change, though worthy prayer makes tomorrow out of today.

The next one followed, and under the good intent that bore bad fruit, he became a Greek by submitting to the pastor. He now knows that the evil that came from his good action did not harm him, even though it might destroy the world.

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The one in the downward arc you see, Guglielmo, is mourned by the same land that grieves Charles and Frederick, still alive. Now he knows how heaven loves a just king, and in his brightness, he still reveals it.

Who would believe, down in the errant world, that the Trojan Ripheus, in this circle, could be the fifth of the holy lights? Now he knows enough about what the world cannot see of divine grace, though his sight may not reach the bottom.

Just like a lark that flies freely in the air, first singing and then silent with contentment from the sweetness of the final song, such seemed to me the imprint of eternal pleasure, by whose will everything becomes what it is.

And though I was like glass to the color that envelops it, I could not remain silent, but from my mouth came: "What are these things?" forced out by the weight of my own thoughts. At this, I saw great joy in the light.

Then, with my eyes more awakened, the blessed standard replied to me, keeping me from remaining in wonderment:

"I see that you believe these things because I say them, but you do not see how. Even though you believe, they are hidden from you. You are like one who understands the name of something but cannot grasp its essence unless shown to him."

"The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence from fervent love, and from the living hope that overcomes divine will. Not in the way that one man overcomes another, but it conquers because it wants to be conquered, and in being conquered, it conquers through kindness."

"The first life of the eyebrow and the fifth causes your astonishment, because you see the angels' realm depicted. They did not leave their bodies as you think, but were Christians with a firm faith in the feet that suffered and had suffered."

"Even one from Hell, where no one ever returns to good will, returned to his bones, and that was the reward of living hope. He believed in Him who had the power to help him, and, in believing, he was filled with such fire that at his second death, he was worthy to come to this joy."

"The other, through grace, set all his love on righteousness. Therefore, from grace to grace, God opened his eyes to our redemption yet to come. He believed in it and never again suffered from the stench of paganism. He reproved the perverse people for it."

"The three Maidens you saw at the right-hand wheel were unto him for baptism more than a thousand years before baptism."

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"O you, predestination, how far your root is from the sight of those who do not see the First Cause in its entirety!"

"And you, O mortals! Restrain yourselves in judgment, for we who look on God do not yet know all the elect; and sweet to us is this deprivation, because our good is made perfect in this good, and whatever God wills, we also will."

**Paradiso: Canto XXI**

Once again, my eyes were fixed on my Lady's face, and with them, my mind was focused entirely on her, withdrawing from everything else. She didn't smile, but began speaking to me: "If I were to smile, you would become like Semele, turned to ashes, because my beauty, which grows brighter the higher we ascend the eternal staircase, is so radiant that if it were not tempered, all your mortal strength would be overwhelmed by it."

"We are now elevated to the seventh heaven, where it is illuminated by the Lion's fiery heart, radiating its power downward."

"Fix your mind's attention on the direction of your eyes, and let them become a mirror for the figure that will appear to you."

If someone could have known what my eyes experienced in that blessed face when I shifted my focus, they would have recognized how grateful I was for the obedience to my celestial guide. It was as if one side balanced the other.

I saw a staircase, bright as gold, stretching upwards to such a height that my eyes couldn't follow it. Descending from this height were so many lights that I thought every light in heaven was there.

It looked like the rooks at dawn: some taking flight, others returning to where they started, while others stayed and turned in circles. That was how the lights appeared to me as they gathered at a specific step, moving together in that pattern.

And the light closest to us became so clear that I thought, "I can clearly perceive the love you show me, but the one from whom I await the how and when of speech and silence stands still. Therefore, I would do well not to ask, despite my desire."

She saw my silence and, knowing all things, said to me, "Let your warm desire loose."

I responded: "No merit of my own makes me worthy of a reply from you, but for her sake who grants me the request, I ask: You who remain hidden in your beatitude, tell me the cause that draws you so near my side. Also, tell me why the sweet symphony of Paradise is silent here, while it resounds devoutly below."

She answered me: "You have mortal hearing as you have mortal sight, so they do not sing here for the same reason Beatrice has not smiled. I have come down the holy stairway to welcome you with words and the light that surrounds me. It is not love that makes me more ready, for as much love as burns here, even more burns above, as the flames clearly show."

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“But the high charity that makes us servants ready to follow the counsel that controls the world assigns us here, as you can see.”

I said, “I see well, O sacred light! how love, free here in this court, is enough to follow the eternal Providence. But it seems hard to me to understand why you, among your companions, were predestined for this office alone.”

No sooner had I spoken these words than the light in the middle of the group became a center, spinning like a fast-moving millstone.

From within it, the love responded: “A divine light is focused on me, piercing through this light I am surrounded by. This light, when joined with my vision, lifts me so high that I see the supreme essence from which all this light is drawn.”

“This explains the joy I radiate, for I make the clearness of the flame equal to my sight as far as it is clear.”

“The soul in the highest heaven, the seraph who most directly fixes its gaze on God, could not satisfy this question of yours. It is so deeply embedded in the eternal law that no created sight can reach it.”

“Moreover, when you return to the mortal world, take this with you, so that it does not presume to move toward such a goal. The mind that shines here is clouded on earth. If you understand this, you will know why it cannot accomplish here what it cannot perceive in heaven.”

The light’s words set a limit to my questioning, and I humbly refrained from asking further. Instead, I asked who it was that spoke.

“Between two shores of Italy,” it began again, “there rise cliffs, not far from your homeland. They are so high that the thunders seem distant below them, forming a ridge called Catria. Beneath it is a hermitage dedicated to worship.”

“The place where I lived became so devoted to God’s service that I lived on nothing but olives, passing the heat and cold lightly, content in my contemplations. That cloister used to be full of heaven’s bounty, but now it is empty, and soon it must be revealed.”

“I was Peter Damiano, and Peter the Sinner I was at the house of Our Lady on the Adriatic coast.”

“Little remained of mortal life when I was called and taken into the Papacy, which shifts from bad to worse. Cephas, and the Holy Spirit’s Vessel, came meager and barefoot, taking food wherever it could find it.”

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“Now the modern shepherds need someone to support them, so heavy are they, and to hold their trains. They cover their horses with cloaks, so that two beasts go under one skin. O Patience, that tolerates so much!”

At this voice, I saw many small flames descending and revolving from step to step, and every revolution made them brighter.

They gathered around the figure, and a cry so loud was uttered that it couldn’t be compared to anything I had heard.

**Paradiso: Canto XXII**

Overcome with amazement, I turned to my guide like a small child who always runs to the person they trust most for comfort. She, like a mother who immediately reassures her pale and breathless child with a voice that calms, said to me: “Don’t you know that you are in heaven? And don’t you know that heaven is holy, and everything here is done out of pure love?”

“Now that you have been startled by the cry, you can imagine how the singing would have changed you if I had smiled. The vengeance you will see before you die would already be clear to you if you had understood its prayers.”

“The sword above here doesn’t strike quickly or slowly; it seems so to those who fear or desire it. But now, turn your eyes toward the others. You will see very illustrious spirits if you look as I tell you.”

So I turned my eyes as she instructed, and I saw a hundred small spheres that radiated light, each one reflecting the others more beautifully. I stood there, holding back my desire to ask, feeling afraid to question too much.

Then, the largest and brightest of those spheres moved forward to satisfy my curiosity. I heard within it: “If you could see the love that burns among us, you would express your thoughts. But, so that you’re not delayed in reaching the high goal, I will answer the question you hesitate to ask.”

“The mountain where Cassino stands was once frequented by misguided people, and I am the one who first carried the name of Him who brought the truth to earth. So much grace shone on me that I led many towns away from the false worship that had deceived the world.”

“These other lights are contemplative souls, kindled by the heat that makes holy flowers and fruits grow. Here is Macarius, here is Romualdus, and here are my brothers, who stayed in their cloisters, steadfast in heart.”

I responded: “The affection you show me with your words, and the good expression I see in your faces, have increased my trust in you, as the sun causes a rose to bloom. So, I ask, if I may receive such grace, to see you with an unveiled face.”

The spirit replied: “Brother, your deep desire will be fulfilled in the highest sphere, where all desires are completed. There, every desire is perfect, complete, and always has been.”

“It is not in space, nor does it turn on poles; our stairway leads up to it, and from there it departs from your sight.”

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“Jacob saw it extending in its heavenly part when angels surrounded him. But no one can ascend it now, and my Rule remains below, wasted on paper. The walls that were once an Abbey are now dens of thieves, and the cowls have become sacks full of worthless flour.”

“Usury is not as displeasing to God as the fruit of monks who become insane in their desire. What the Church holds is for the people who ask for it in God’s name, not for one’s family or something worse.”

“Mortals are so fragile that good beginnings do not suffice on their own. Peter began with neither gold nor silver, and I began with prayer and abstinence, and Francis with humility. If you look at where each began and where they have ended, you will see how the white has become brown.”

“Even the Jordan river, and the sea parting at God’s will, are more miraculous than the decline we see in the world now.”

Then, after he spoke, he withdrew to his own place, and the band of spirits closed together, rising as swiftly as a whirlwind.

Beatrice, with a single gesture, urged me to follow them up the stairway, and her virtue made my nature overcome its limitations. It was as if my wings moved faster than any earthly motion.

As I continued, I saw the stars, and it felt like I had just glimpsed them as I reached the sign of Taurus. O glorious stars! What mighty force you possess, from which I understand my own inspiration.

With you, the father of all mortal life was born, and through you, I was destined to enter the heavenly wheel that turns all things. I pray that my soul, which now yearns for virtue, may gain enough strength to pass the difficult test ahead.

Beatrice said to me: “You are so close to final salvation, you should now have clear and sharp sight. Before you go any further, look down and see how vast a world you’ve already left behind. Let your heart rejoice as you approach the triumphant crowd that celebrates in this realm.”

I looked down through the seven spheres, and I saw the Earth in such a way that I smiled at its insignificance. That opinion which regards it as least is the one I agree with, for anyone who looks beyond can see its true smallness.

I saw the moon, and without the shadow that once made me believe it was dense, I now saw its true nature. I witnessed the movements of the sun, Hyperion, Maia, and Dione, and I understood the temperance of Jupiter between father and son.

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Then I understood the greatness and swiftness of the seven spheres, and how they reside in distant realms. The threshing-floor of our pride, seen with the eternal Twins, was now fully revealed to me, from the mountains to the harbors.

And with that, I turned my eyes toward Beatrice, the beautiful eyes I had followed all this way.

### Paradiso: Canto XXIII

As a bird sits quietly on her nest through the night, surrounded by her sweet brood, hiding everything from us, waiting to see their longing eyes and find the food to nourish them, which she eagerly anticipates, so was my Lady standing—vigilant and upright, turning toward the place where the sun is slower to rise. I gazed upon her, and seeing her thoughtful and longing, I became as one who yearns for something and is at last soothed by hope.

But the wait was brief. From one moment to the next, I went from waiting to seeing the heavens grow brighter. Beatrice exclaimed, “Look at the hosts of Christ’s triumphant procession, and all the fruits of these rolling spheres!” It seemed as though her face was ablaze, and her eyes were so filled with ecstasy that I could not describe it.

Just like the moon, smiling among the eternal nymphs who paint the heavens, I saw above the countless lamps a Sun that lit them all, just as our sun does the heavenly bodies. And through the living light, so clear and bright, it shone into my sight that I could not bear it.

Beatrice, my gentle guide, said to me, “What overwhelms you is a virtue that no shield can protect you from. The wisdom and omnipotence that opened the path between heaven and earth, for which there was so much longing before, are here.”

As fire from a cloud bursts out, expanding so much that it finds no space within, and falls to earth against its nature, so did my mind, expanding among those delights, leave itself behind. What it became, I cannot remember.

“Open your eyes and look at what I am,” she said. “You’ve already seen enough that you’re now strong enough to bear my smile.”

I was like someone who still holds onto a forgotten vision, trying in vain to bring it back. When I heard her invitation, I knew it was a moment deserving of great gratitude, and I would never forget it.

If all the tongues of the Muses were to come together to help me express it, they would only capture a tiny fraction of the truth of the holy smile and the holy light that it illuminated. The sacred poem of Paradise must skip over many things, just like a man who finds his way blocked.

Therefore, if you think of the weight of the theme, and of the human limitations carrying it, don’t blame it if it trembles under such a burden.

This isn’t a passage meant for a small boat. It requires a strong ship and a pilot who won’t spare himself.

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“Why does my face so captivate you that you turn away from the beautiful garden that is blossoming under the rays of Christ?” Beatrice continued. “There is the Rose in which the Divine Word became incarnate; there are the lilies whose fragrance led the way to righteousness.”

I, always willing to follow her guidance, turned to face the next challenge.

As I looked at the sun shining through a broken cloud, I saw a meadow of flowers that had been shadowed before. So, too, I saw many lights shining from above, illuminated by burning rays, although I couldn’t see the source of the light.

O gracious power that imprints such beauty! You elevated me so my eyes could take in what they couldn’t before.

The name of that fair flower, which I invoke morning and evening, has captivated my soul, drawing me to gaze upon the greater fire. When my eyes reflected the glory and magnificence of the living star, I saw across the heavens a little torch descending in a circle, forming a crown around the star, spinning in place.

The sweetest melody on earth would seem like a cloud that suddenly thunders, compared to the sound of that lyre that crowned the beautiful sapphire, which gives the clearest heaven its sapphire hue.

“I am the Angelic Love that circles around the supreme joy, the joy that breathes from the womb which housed our Desire. I will circle, Lady of Heaven, as you follow your Son, making the highest sphere more divine as you enter it.”

The melody that circled around sealed itself, and all the other lights joined in, singing the name of Mary.

The majestic mantle of all the holy volumes of that world, alive with the breath of God, spread over us its inner border, so far away that I could not yet perceive it.

So, my eyes did not have the strength to follow the crowned flame that rose near its origin. And like a little child, reaching out to its mother after feeding, the lights moved upward in a show of deep affection, revealing their love for Mary.

Then they remained, singing “Regina coeli” with such sweetness that the delight has never left me.

What abundance is stored in those rich coffers, which had been well tended in sowing here on earth! They now enjoy the treasure gained while in exile, and they live in the glory of what was acquired through tears.

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There, beneath the exalted Son of God and Mary, in victory, both the ancient council and the new triumph. And He who holds the keys to this glory reigns forever.

**Paradiso: Canto XXIV**

"O company chosen for the great feast of the Lamb, who feeds you so that your desires are always satisfied, if by the grace of God this man should experience a glimpse of what falls from your table, before death decrees the time, direct your thoughts toward his great desire and give him some relief; you drink forever from the fountain that feeds his thoughts."

Beatrice spoke these words, and the blessed souls, transformed into spheres on steadfast poles, flamed brightly like comets. And just like the wheels in a clock that appear to move slowly to the observer, the first wheel seeming motionless and the last one spinning quickly, so did these celestial dances give me a measure of their movement, whether slow or fast.

From the one I noted as the most beautiful, a fire of such joy burst forth that none could surpass it. Around Beatrice, it circled three times, creating a divine song so powerful that my imagination cannot repeat it. Therefore, I will not attempt to describe it, for our thoughts and words are too limited to capture its brilliance.

"O holy sister, who implore us with such devotion, your passionate love frees me from that beautiful sphere!" The blessed fire then directed its breath to my Lady, who spoke in the manner I have described.

She said: "O eternal light of the great man to whom our Lord gave the keys, which he took with him from this joyful realm, examine this man carefully on matters both light and serious, especially the Faith by which you walked upon the sea. If he loves well, hopes well, and believes well, you see it clearly, for you have insight into everything."

"But since this kingdom has made citizens through true Faith, it is good that he speak about it."

Just as a baccalaureate does not speak until the master asks a question, so I gathered my thoughts while she spoke, preparing myself for the coming inquiry.

"Say, good Christian, manifest yourself. What is Faith?" At this, I raised my brow toward the light from which these words had come.

I turned to Beatrice, who gave me a sign to pour forth my response.

"May grace, which allows me to confess," I began, "enable my thoughts to be clear!"

I continued: "As your dear brother, the truthful pen, wrote of it—he who led Rome onto the right path—Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. And this seems to me its true nature."

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I then heard: "You understand rightly, if you know why he placed it with substances and evidence."

And I replied: "The profound things that appear to me here are hidden from all eyes below. They exist only in belief, and on that belief is founded the great hope. This is why it takes the form of substance. And from this belief we reason, even without seeing more, and so it becomes evidence."

I heard again: "If doctrine below were understood this way, no subtle sophistry would find a place there."

Then the light responded: "You have already covered the weight and alloy of this coin very well, but tell me, do you have it in your purse?"

And I answered: "Yes, both shining and round, with no doubt in its stamp."

Then came a response from the profound light: "This precious jewel, upon which every virtue is founded, where did you get it?"

And I said: "The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which has been spread through both the old and new scriptures, proved it to me with such sharpness that compared to it, all other reasoning seems dull."

Then I heard: "Why do you accept these ancient and new postulates as the divine word?"

I responded: "The proofs that show the truth to me are the works that follow, which nature never touched—no hammer or iron could have created them."

The light asked: "Who assures you that these works were ever done? The thing itself that must be proved affirms nothing else to you."

"Were the world converted to Christianity without miracles," I said, "this alone would be enough. The others are not even a hundredth part of it. For when you entered the field poor and fasting, you sowed the good plant, which has become a thorn."

When I finished, the heavenly Court echoed through the spheres: "One God we praise!" and a melody rose that filled the heavens above.

Then the great spirit who had guided me, examining everything, spoke again: "The grace that plays with your intellect has opened your mouth up to this point. Now, you must express what you believe, and from where you received that belief."

"O holy father, spirit who saw the truth and overcame it, you want me to manifest the form of my belief here, and also ask me for its cause."

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And I responded: "I believe in one God, eternal and sole, who moves all the heavens with love and desire, but is Himself unmoved. I have not only physical and metaphysical proofs for this faith, but also the truth that rains down from this place—through Moses, the Prophets, the Psalms, the Gospel, and through you who wrote after the fiery Spirit sanctified you."

"In the three eternal Persons, I believe in one essence, united both in 'sunt' and 'est,' which is the foundation of my belief, stamped in my mind by the evangelical doctrine. This is the beginning, the spark, which grows to a vivid flame, sparkling like a star in heaven."

Just like a lord who embraces his servant with joy after hearing good news, the apostolic light encircled me three times, singing in approval of what I had spoken.

**Paradiso: Canto XXV**

“If it ever happens that the Sacred Poem, to which both heaven and earth have given their approval, which has made me lean for many years, should overcome the cruelty that keeps me out of the beautiful fold where I once rested as a lamb, an enemy to the wolves who war against it, I will return with a different voice and a different purpose. I will take the laurel crown at my baptismal font.

For through the faith that makes all souls known to God, I entered, and then Peter encircled my brow for her sake.

Then, a light moved toward us from the group where the first fruits of Christ’s vicarship were, and Beatrice, filled with ecstasy, said to me: ‘Look, look! Here is the Baron for whom Galicia is visited below.’”

Just as two doves express their love to one another in the air, circling and murmuring, so did I see two great princes greeting each other, welcoming one another, and praising the food eaten in heaven.

But when their greetings ended, each one stood silently ‘before me,’ so brightly that it overcame my sight.

Afterward, Beatrice smiled and said: “Illustrious life, who have described the blessings of our Basilica, make hope resound within this altitude. You know how often you personify it, as Jesus gave greater clarity to the three disciples.”

“Lift your head and be confident, for what comes here from the mortal world must be perfected in our light.”

This comfort came to me from the second light; so I lifted my eyes toward the hills, which had bent under the weight of the vision.

“Since, by His grace, our Emperor wills that you see Him face to face before your death, in the most secret chamber with His Counts, so that you may behold the truth of this court, and strengthen in yourself and others the hope that rightfully enamours below, tell us what it is, how it blossoms in you, and where it came from.”

The second light continued: “Say, good Christian, manifest yourself; what is faith?” At that, I raised my brow toward the light from which these words had come. Then I turned to Beatrice, who gave me a sign to pour forth from my heart.

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“May grace, that allows me to confess,” I began, “enable my thoughts to be clear! As your dear brother, the truthful pen, wrote about it—he who led Rome on the good path—faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. And this is its true nature.”

Then I heard: “You understand correctly, if you know why he placed faith with substances and evidence.”

I continued: “The profound things that appear to me here are hidden from all eyes below. They exist only in belief, and on this belief is founded the high hope. And from this belief, we reason, even without seeing more, and it becomes evidence.”

I then heard: “If doctrine below were understood this way, no subtle sophistry would find a place.”

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“Were the world converted to Christianity without miracles,” I said, “this alone would be enough. The others are not even a hundredth part of it. For when you entered the field poor and fasting, you sowed the good plant, which has become a thorn.”

When I finished, the heavenly Court echoed through the spheres: “One God we praise!” and a melody rose that filled the heavens above.

Then the great spirit who had guided me, examining everything, spoke again: “The grace that plays with your intellect has opened your mouth up to this point. Now, you must express what you believe, and from where you received that belief.”

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“O holy father, spirit who saw the truth and overcame it, you want me to manifest the form of my belief here, and also ask me for its cause.”

And I responded: “I believe in one God, eternal and sole, who moves all the heavens with love and desire, but is Himself unmoved. I have not only physical and metaphysical proofs for this faith, but also the truth that rains down from this place—through Moses, the Prophets, the Psalms, the Gospel, and through you who wrote after the fiery Spirit sanctified you.”

“In the three eternal Persons, I believe in one essence, united both in ‘sunt’ and ‘est,’ which is the foundation of my belief, stamped in my mind by the evangelical doctrine. This is the beginning, the spark, which grows to a vivid flame, sparkling like a star in heaven.”

Just like a lord who embraces his servant with joy after hearing good news, the apostolic light encircled me three times, singing in approval of what I had spoken.

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**Paradiso: Canto XXVI**

While I was still uncertain, my vision clouded, a breath came forth from the bright flame that had obscured it. This breath made me pay close attention and said:

“While you are recovering the sense of sight that you have lost by looking at me, it’s best that you speak and explain what your soul is aiming for, for your sight is not dead but bewildered. The Lady who is guiding you through this divine realm has the same power to heal as the hand of Ananias had.”

I said, “As she pleases, whether soon or later, let the cure come to my eyes that have burned with the fire she brought. The Good, which gives joy to this Court, is the beginning and end of all things, the writing that love reads in me, whether softly or loudly.”

The same voice that had taken the terror from me now spoke again, urging me to think deeply:

“Now, with a finer sieve, you must sift your thoughts. You need to explain who aimed your bow at such a target.”

And I replied, “Through philosophical arguments and the authority that descends from above, such love must have imprinted itself upon me. The Good, as far as it is good, when understood, ignites love in us, and it becomes even greater as it holds more goodness.”

“This Good must be aimed towards that Essence from which all good originates, for all things that are good are simply rays of its light. So, the mind must be drawn to it, and in loving it, it sees the truth.”

“This truth is revealed to my intellect by the demonstration of the primal love of all eternal substances. The voice reveals it to us in the truthful Author who says to Moses, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you.’ You also reveal it to me, starting with the Gospel, proclaiming heaven’s secrets to earth.”

I then heard, “By human intellect and by the authority it aligns with, reserve for God the highest of your loves. But tell me, do you feel other cords drawing you towards Him? Tell me how deeply this love affects you.”

I recognized the holy purpose of the Eagle of Christ, and I understood where he was guiding my confession. So, I continued:

“All of those things that have the power to turn the heart towards God have drawn me to charity. The being of the world, my own being, the death He endured so that I might live, and all the hopes of the faithful—these have moved me from a life of perverse love to a righteous one,

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placing me on solid ground. I love the leaves of the Eternal Gardener's garden as much as He has granted them good."

When I finished speaking, a sweet song resounded throughout heaven, and Beatrice, along with the others, exclaimed, "Holy, holy, holy!"

As when a person wakes from sleep because of a bright light, and in that moment they can't yet see clearly, so too did Beatrice's radiance chase away all darkness from my vision. I saw more clearly than before and, filled with wonder, I asked about a fourth light that I saw with us.

Beatrice answered, "That within those rays is the first soul who ever created the first virtue, gazing upon its Maker."

Just as a tree bends when the wind blows, then rises back up on its own, so I, amazed by her words, was moved to speak by a burning desire. I began:

"O apple, who alone were produced ripe, O ancient father to whom each wife is both daughter and daughter-in-law, I pray that you speak to me. You know my wish, and I speak it, though I am eager to hear it."

Sometimes an animal, struggling under a covering, makes its intent clear through the movements beneath it. In the same way, the primeval soul revealed to me, through its covering, its joy in giving me pleasure.

Then it spoke: "Without your uttering it, I understand your inclination better than you know, for I see it clearly in the truthful mirror, where all things are made clear."

"You desire to know how long ago God placed me in the lofty garden where this Lady has guided you. For 4,302 cycles of the sun, I dwelled in that garden. And the language I spoke was lost before those who worked on the tower of Babel began their task. For the world, through human pleasure, which is ever-changing, could not maintain reasoning."

"A natural action is for man to speak; but nature leaves the art of speech to you, to shape as you wish. Before I descended to the infernal realms, 'El' was the name for the Chief Good, and this is the root of all the joy that surrounds me."

"'Eli,' He was called, for men's actions are like leaves on a branch: one goes, and another comes. Upon the mount that rises above the waves, I was, in either a pure or sinful life, from the first moment to the second."

"As the sun changes its quadrant, to the sixth."

**Paradiso: Canto XXVII**

“Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!” all of Paradise began, and the melody filled me with such joy that it made me drunk.

What I saw seemed like a smile of the universe, for my joy entered through my hearing and sight.

O joy! O inexpressible joy! O perfect life of love and peace! O riches that are secure without desire!

Before my eyes stood the four torches, burning brightly. The first one began to shine even brighter, and it changed, becoming like Jupiter if he and Mars were birds and exchanged feathers.

That Providence which governs time and service imposed silence on the blessed choir.

Then I heard: “Do not be amazed if I change my color; for while I speak, you will see the color of all these change.”

“He who takes my place on earth, my place, my place, which has become vacant before the Son of God, has turned my cemetery into a sewer of blood and stench. The one who fell from here is appeased below by this.”

With the same color that the sun paints the clouds at evening or morning, I saw the whole sky filled with a hue.

And just as a modest woman, who is sure of herself, becomes afraid when she hears of another’s failing, so did Beatrice change her expression. And I believe that in heaven there was such an eclipse when the supreme Omnipotence suffered.

Afterward, his words continued in such a transformed voice that even his expression was not the same.

“The spouse of Christ has never been nourished by my blood, by Linus or Cletus, to acquire gold; but Sixtus, Pius, Urban, and Calixtus shed their blood for this blessed life.”

“Our purpose was never that our successors should seat the Christian people on either side, nor that the keys entrusted to me should be displayed on a banner that wages war on the baptized. Nor should I be used for privileges that are venal and false, for which I often blush with fire.”

“Wolves dressed as shepherds are seen above all pastures! O wrath of God, why do you still slumber?”

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“To drink our blood, the Caorsines and Gascons are preparing. O good beginning, how vile an end must you fall to!”

“But the high Providence, that defended the glory of the world with Scipio, will soon bring aid, as I believe. And you, my son, who will return to earth, open your mouth and do not hide what I have told you.”

Just as the frozen vapors fall to earth as snow when the celestial Goat touches the sun, I saw the ether in the opposite direction, filled with triumphant vapors, which had remained with us.

My sight followed these images until the medium of light exceeded and took my vision away.

Then Beatrice, seeing that I had stopped gazing upward, said: “Look down and see how far you have turned.”

When I first looked downward, I saw that I had passed through the entire arc of the first climate, from middle to end, and I saw the mad journey of Ulysses past Gades and almost to the shore where Europa became a burden.

The place of this threshing-floor was clearer to me, but the sun was below my feet, and I was further removed from the sign.

My mind, always in love with my Lady, burned more than ever as I turned my eyes to her.

And if either Art or Nature has created something to captivate the eyes and possess the mind, whether in human flesh or its portrayal, all of that would seem insignificant compared to the divine joy I felt when I turned to her smiling face.

The power of her gaze lifted me from the fair nest of Leda and propelled me into the swiftest heaven.

Its parts, full of life and height, were so uniform that I cannot say which one Beatrice chose for my place.

But she, aware of my desire, began to speak joyfully with such a smile that God seemed to rejoice in her face:

“The motion that keeps the center still while everything else moves begins here. And in this heaven, there is no other ‘where’ than the Divine Mind, where love turns it and the power rains down from it.”

“Within a circle, light and love embrace it, just as this realm does, and He who surrounds it controls it alone. Its motion is not measured by another, but it measures all the others, just as ten is measured by its half and its fifth.”

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“Now, I will explain how time has its roots here and leaves in other places. O greed, that draws mortals so, that no one can draw their eyes from your waves! Mankind’s will flourishes, but without interruption, it turns into wild fruit, and the true fruit fails.”

“Fidelity and innocence are found only in children; later, they take flight before the cheeks are even covered with down. One who prattles and loves, when speech is perfect, immediately desires to see the grave.”

“Even so, the skin becomes darker and more swarthy, like the fair daughter of the one who brings the dawn and departs with the night.”

“Do not be surprised that no one governs on earth. This is why the human race goes astray.”

“Before January is fully unwintered, the tempest that has been awaited will roar through the supernal circles, and the fleet will run its course, and the true fruit will follow the flower.”

### Paradiso: Canto XXVIII

After the truth about the present life of miserable mortals was revealed to me by her who enlightens my mind, I became aware of it. It was like seeing a candle's flame in a mirror when someone is behind it, before they are seen or thought of.

I turned around to confirm whether the reflection matched the truth, just as music matches its rhythm. In a similar way, I recalled how, when I looked into Beatrice's beautiful eyes, Love had captured me with its traps.

As I turned around and was touched by what appeared in the volume of that light, which we always observe when we gaze intently at its rotation, I saw a point that radiated light so intensely that the sight of it could not be sustained.

Any star that seems smallest here would appear to be a moon if placed next to it, just as one star is placed beside another. The light I saw at such a distance, which seemed like a halo encircling its light, was so swift that it exceeded any motion the world is used to.

This light was surrounded by another, then a third, and so on, until the seventh circle appeared, so large that even Juno's messenger could not encompass it. The eighth and ninth followed, moving slower, and the further they were from the first, the slower they moved.

The light closest to us, which shone most clearly, was the one with the least distance between it and the pure spark that seemed to be most filled with truth.

Beatrice, seeing that I was perplexed, said to me, "From that point, heaven and nature all depend. Behold the circle closest to it, and understand that its motion is driven by the burning love it has."

I replied, "If the world were arranged in the way I see in these circles, I would be content. But in the world of our senses, we can see that the further away the circles are from the center, the more divine they are."

"If my desire is to be fulfilled in this angelic temple, where only love and light reside, I still need to understand how the example and the exemplar do not follow the same path, because I am unable to comprehend it fully."

Beatrice responded, "It is no surprise if you find it difficult to understand such a knot, since it is hard to unravel without effort."

She continued, "The physical circles are wide or narrow depending on how much virtue is spread throughout. The greater the goodness, the greater the benefit, and the greater the body it can

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contain. Thus, this circle, which sweeps through the entire sublime universe, corresponds to the circle that most loves and knows.”

“Therefore, if you apply your measure of virtue to the circles, rather than their physical appearance, you will see how the more, the greater, and the less, the smaller, align in every heaven with its intelligence.”

Just as the air’s hemisphere remains clear and serene when Boreas blows from his mildest side, so was I, after Beatrice had provided me with her clear response. The truth was like a star in heaven.

Once she had finished speaking, the circles of light sparkled, and they sparkled so brightly that their number exceeded the number of squares in a chess game.

I heard them sing “Hosanna” in choirs, praising the fixed point that keeps them at their center, where they have always been.

Beatrice, who knew the doubts in my mind, said, “The first circles have shown you the Seraphim and Cherubim. These circles follow their bonds swiftly, to be as close to the point as they can, according to their vision.”

“The other Loves, which circle around them, are called Thrones of the divine countenance because they complete the first Triad. And you should know that they experience as much joy as their vision penetrates the Truth, where all intellects find their rest.”

“This explains how blessedness is founded in the ability to see, not in that which loves, and follows next. The merit of this seeing is the measure brought forth by grace and good will, which is how it progresses from grade to grade.”

“The second Triad, which germinates in this eternal spring, is not touched by the night. Perpetual hosannas flow from them with threefold melody, in three orders of joy.”

The three Divine Orders are: first, the Dominions, then the Virtues, and finally the Powers. The second order is followed by the Principalities and Archangels, and the last is entirely angelic.

These orders look upward, and they prevail downward, all attracted to God and drawing others to Him.

Dionysius, with great desire to contemplate these Orders, named and distinguished them, as I do. But Gregory later disagreed with him, and when he opened his eyes in this heaven, he smiled at himself.

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If a mortal presented so much secret truth on earth, you should not be surprised, for he who saw it here revealed it to him, with much more truth about these circles.

### Paradiso: Canto XXIX

At the time when both the children of Latona, the sun and the moon, are crossing the sky, accompanied by the Ram and the Scales, creating a line around the horizon, as long as they stay balanced at the zenith before they disrupt the balance and change their positions, so too did Beatrice keep her face smiling in silence, looking intently at the point that overwhelmed me.

Then, she began: "I will speak, and I ask not what you wish to hear, for I have seen it where every moment and place is centered."

It is not to acquire some good for Himself, which would be impossible, but so that His splendor, in its radiance, may say, 'I am,' in His eternity, outside time and all other limits, as it pleases Him, that the Eternal Love unfolded into new Loves.

He did not lie dormant before; neither before nor after did God proceed upon these waters.

Matter and Form, unmixed and united, came into being without defect, like three arrows from a three-stringed bow. And just as a beam of sunlight shines through glass, amber, or crystal, without any interval between its coming and full being, so from its Lord, the trifold effect radiated all together, without distinction of beginning.

Order was co-created in substances, and at the summit of the world, those substances produced pure acts. Pure potentiality was at the lowest part; midway between potentiality and act was a bond that can never be undone.

Jerome wrote to you about angels created long before the world was made, but this truth is written in many places by writers inspired by the Holy Spirit. You will see it if you look closely.

Even reason sees this to some extent, for it would not allow that the movers of the heavens could be so long in their imperfection.

Now you know both where and when these Loves were created, and how; already, three of them have been extinguished in your desire.

Not even one could count to twenty as quickly as one portion of these angels disturbed the elements of your world.

The rest remained and began this art, which you see with such delight, that they never cease from their circling.

The fall came from the cursed presumption of that one whom you have seen constrained by the burden of the world.

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Those whom you behold here were modest enough to recognize themselves as capable of such understanding, and for this reason, their vision was exalted by enlightening grace and their own merit, so that they have a full and steadfast will.

I would not have you doubt this, but be certain that it is meritorious to receive this grace, as the affection opens to it.

Now, much can you contemplate in this consistory, if you gather up these words, without further aid.

But since on earth, in your schools, they teach that the angelic nature hears, remembers, and wills, I will explain further so that you see clearly the truth that is confused below in such teachings.

These substances, since they were joyous in God's countenance, do not turn their sight away from that from which nothing is hidden.

Thus, they are not interrupted by new objects, and do not need to recollect through interrupted thought.

On earth, people dream not sleeping, thinking they speak truth when they do not, and the greater sin and shame lies in the latter.

Here below, you do not walk the same path philosophizing, but instead, you are led by appearances and your thoughts about them.

Even this above is endured with less disdain than when the Holy Scriptures are set aside or distorted.

They think not about the cost of spreading these beliefs and how it pleases God when humility keeps them close to the truth.

Everyone strives for appearances, making their own inventions. These are the subjects treated by preachers, while the true Evangel remains silent.

Some claim that the moon turned backward during Christ's Passion and blocked the sunlight, but they lie. The light hid itself of its own accord, and such an eclipse responded to Spaniards, Indians, and Jews alike.

Florence has more falsehoods like this than Lapi and Bindi, shouted from the pulpit every year, so that the lambs, who don't know any better, come back fed on lies, and the harm they cause is not excused.

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Christ did not say to his first disciples, ‘Go out and preach idle tales,’ but rather gave them a true foundation. This truth was so loudly proclaimed by them that they fought for the Faith, making shields and lances from the Evangel.

Now, men go out with jokes and tales, and if the people laugh, the preacher is satisfied, and nothing more is asked.

But there’s a bird hiding in the cowl of the preacher. If the common people were to see it, they would realize what they trust in, and how widespread the folly has grown on earth.

Saint Anthony fattens his pig with it, and many others, worse than pigs, pay with money but no true value.

But since we’ve digressed enough, let’s return to the right path, so that time is shortened.

This nature multiplies itself in numbers, beyond what speech or mortal imagination can reach.

If you pay attention to what Daniel revealed, you’ll see that there are thousands of numbers hidden in his prophecy.

The primal light, which irradiates all, is received in so many ways as the splendors with which it is mated.

Thus, since affection follows theceptive act, love’s sweetness is felt in varying degrees, either fervent or tepid.

Now behold the height and amplitude of the eternal power, since it has made itself so many mirrors where it is reflected, one remaining in itself as before.

**Paradiso: Canto XXX**

Perhaps six thousand miles from us, the sixth hour is glowing, and this world tilts its shadow almost to a level, when the mid-heaven begins to deepen, and here and there a star fades away, not shining as brightly as before. As the handmaid of the sun advances, the heavens close, light by light, until the most beautiful shines the brightest.

In a similar way, the Triumph that eternally surrounds the point that defeated me seemed enclosed by what it itself enclosed. Little by little, it faded from my sight. This made me turn my eyes towards Beatrice, but my sight could not find her, and my love was constrained.

If all that has been said about her were summarized into one single praise, it would still fall short of doing her justice. Not only does the beauty I witnessed transcend our understanding, but I truly believe that only her Maker can fully enjoy it.

I confess that I was overcome more by this moment than any poet, whether comic or tragic, has ever been by their theme. Just as the sun affects the sight of those who gaze upon it, the memory of that sweet smile deprived my mind of its very essence.

From the first day I saw her face in this life, to this very moment, the sequence of my song has never been interrupted. But now, I must stop following her beauty with my verse, just as every artist reaches the limit of their craft.

What I leave her to, will be a greater fame than any trumpet of mine could give. With voice and gesture, like a perfect leader, she began again: "We have come from the greatest body to the heaven of pure light. Intellectual light, filled with love; love of the true good, filled with ecstasy, a joy that transcends all sweetness. Here you will see the one host and the other of Paradise, and you will see them in the same forms you will witness at the final judgment."

As a flash of lightning disperses the sight, so that the eye is deprived of focus, so did a living light flash around me, enveloping me in such a veil of brilliance that I could not see anything.

"Ever the Love that calms this heaven welcomes into itself with such a greeting to prepare the candle for its flame."

As soon as these brief words entered me, I felt myself lifted above my own power. I was renewed with sight, so that no light, however pure, could overpower my vision.

I saw light flowing like a river, radiant between two banks, adorned with an admirable Spring. From this river, living sparks emerged and fell into the flowers like rubies set in gold. Then, as if intoxicated by the fragrance, they plunged back into the river, and with each plunge, another spark emerged.

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“The high desire that now moves you to understand what you see, pleases me all the more the more it grows. But before your great thirst is quenched, you must drink from this river.” These words came from the light of my eyes, and she continued, “The river, the topazes, and the laughter of the flowers are the foretellings of their truth.”

“It’s not that these things are difficult in themselves, but the difficulty lies in your side. You have not yet attained vision so exalted.”

No sooner had I dipped my gaze toward the water than it seemed to transform into a round shape before my eyes.

Just as a group of people, after removing their masks, seem different, so the flowers and sparks were transformed for me into greater glory, showing both courts of heaven.

“O splendour of God! Through You I saw the great triumph of the true realm. Grant me the power to explain how I saw it!”

There is a light above that makes the Creator visible to every creature, and in beholding Him, they find peace. It expands in a circular form so vast that its circumference would be too large to encompass the sun.

The appearance of this light is made of rays reflected from the top of the First Mover, which gives vitality and power.

Just as a hill mirrors itself in a still pool of water at its base, reflecting its beauty when abundant with greenery, so I saw all around the light mirrored in more ranks than a thousand, all those who have returned to us from above.

And if the lowest row contains such great light, imagine how vast the amplitude of this Rose in its highest reaches!

My vision, in its vastness and height, comprehended all the joy in its quantity and quality. In this realm, distances and positions are irrelevant; what matters is the direct rule of God, and natural law has no sway.

In the Eternal Rose that spreads and multiplies, breathing praise to the ever-spring Sun, Beatrice, like a silent bride who would speak, drew me near and said: “Behold the great expanse of the white robes. Behold the vast circuit of our city, so full that there are few places left unoccupied.”

Upon the great throne, where your eyes are fixed, the soul of noble Henry, the future Augustus, will sit. He will come to heal Italy before she is ready.

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Blind covetousness has made you like children who die from hunger while pushing away the nurse.

Soon in the sacred forum, a Prefect will arise who, openly or covertly, will not walk the same path as his predecessor. For long, God will not tolerate him in holy office; he will be cast down to the depths of hell, just like Simon Magus.

**Paradiso: Canto XXXI**

At that moment, the saintly host of Paradise appeared before me, like a snow-white rose, whom Christ had made His bride through His own blood. The other host, flying in the glory of Him who loves it and created it so noble, hovered like a swarm of bees, sinking into the flowers for a moment and then returning to the place of eternal love.

Their faces were like living flames, with wings of gold, and the rest of them was so white that no snow could compare. They moved gracefully from one bench to the next, carrying with them the peace and ardor they had gained through their movements.

Nothing could hinder the sight and splendor of this heavenly vision, for the divine light penetrates the entire universe in such a way that nothing can obstruct it.

This realm, secure and filled with happiness, was crowded with souls, ancient and modern, all focused on a single mark, all filled with love and devotion.

"O Triune Light, that satisfies the saints with your eternal presence, look down on our troubled world below!"

If the barbarians, coming from a far-off land covered by the stars of the northern sky, saw Rome and her noble works, they would be filled with awe—what must I, a traveler from Florence, have felt when I saw this divine spectacle!

As a pilgrim who delights in gazing at the temple of his vow, I turned my eyes around, observing all the ranks, now up, now down, now all around me. I saw faces full of charity, smiling in the light of God's grace, with postures adorned with every grace.

I had already comprehended the overall form of Paradise, but now my eyes turned with renewed desire to ask Beatrice about things my mind could not grasp.

I expected to see Beatrice, but instead, I saw an Old Man, clothed like the glorious people, filled with joy and compassion. "Where is she?" I asked, and he replied: "Beatrice has sent me to answer your questions. Look up to the third round of the first rank, and you will see her on the throne her merits have earned."

Without answering, I lifted my eyes and saw her, crowned with eternal rays. My sight, though, was so far removed from her that it seemed more distant than the farthest reaches of the heavens.

"O Lady, in whom my hope rests, and who endured to leave the imprint of your feet in Hell for my salvation, from all that I have seen, I recognize your power and grace."

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I pleaded, "You have brought me from slavery to freedom through all the ways and means available to you. Keep your magnificence toward me so that my soul, healed by you, may be freed from the body."

Then the Old Man spoke again: "To fulfill your journey perfectly, follow my advice and look around this garden. Seeing will refine your sight and elevate you toward the divine light."

As a pilgrim might come from Croatia to gaze upon the sacred Veronica, who never tires of her ancient fame, I too, as I gazed at the living charity of the man who had tasted of peace, wondered in awe.

"Son of grace, you will not know this blissful life by focusing only on the lowest place here. Look to the outermost circles and you will see the Queen of Heaven, to whom this realm is devoted and subject."

I lifted my eyes and saw a part of the realm surpass the rest in brightness, just as the light from the east surpasses that of the setting sun. In the center, a pacific banner gleamed brightest, with wings spread wide, and more than a thousand jubilant angels danced and sang around it.

I saw a beauty smiling at their joy, a beauty that filled the eyes of all the saints. If I had the power to speak as well as I can imagine, I would not dare to describe the joy I saw.

Bernard, seeing my eyes fixed in wonder, turned his own to the Queen with such affection that it made my own desire to gaze upon her even stronger.

**Paradiso: Canto XXXII**

Holy words:

"The wound that Mary closed and anointed, she who is so beautiful, was opened and pierced by the one who sits at the feet of her beauty. In the order that the third seats create, Rachel is seated lower than the others, beside Beatrice, as you see her now. Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, and the woman who was the ancestor of the singer, who, in sorrow, said, 'Miserere mei' (Have mercy on me), can be seen descending from seat to seat, moving down in rank as I pass through the Rose, from one leaf to the next.

Descending from the seventh row, similar to the ones above, are the Hebrew women, each following their respective place, divided by the different levels of the flower. This is in accordance with how Faith in Christ was viewed, and these women form the partitions dividing the sacred stairways.

On this side of the Rose, where the flower is perfectly full with each petal, are those who believed in Christ before He came. On the other side, with gaps between them, are those who looked to Christ after He had already come. Just as the seat of the Lady of Heaven divides this flower, so too does the seat of the great John, who, holy in life, suffered desertion and martyrdom. Also placed there are figures like Francis, Benedict, and Augustine, and many others who follow in sequence.

Consider the divine providence at work here. Both aspects of the Faith—those who believed before Christ came and those who believed after—fill this garden equally. However, the placement of souls in the Rose is not based on their merit but rather according to another's influence. These are spirits that were redeemed before having made any true choice.

You can recognize this in their faces and voices, which still seem youthful, as though they have not yet reached maturity. You may doubt, but I will clarify for you: in this realm, no random occurrence can happen. Everything is governed by eternal law. So, in this realm, some souls are placed higher than others, not by their own actions, but because of the grace they were given from God.

The King, who governs all of this realm with such love and joy, creates every soul with unique grace. It is written in Scripture that even in the early times, before the world was made, the souls that were to become saints had already been assigned their roles in God's plan.

These souls, however, did not earn their place based on deeds but because of the grace given to them. They were appointed to their roles according to God's divine plan, just as the twelve tribes of Israel were marked with a divine purpose.

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In the same way, all souls in this heavenly realm are not positioned randomly but according to the loving will of God, which governs them all. The greatest of these souls are those closest to God, who sit at the top, and those further down are still exalted by God's grace, but at different levels of enlightenment.

In this sacred and eternal order, each soul is given a seat, a place of honor, based not on merit but on the divine grace they received. The closer they are to God, the more they share in His glory, and this is how the divine arrangement of Heaven functions."

### Paradiso: Canto XXIII

The Virgin Mother, who is both the mother and daughter of her Son, stands higher and humbler than any other being in creation. She is the one who gave human nature such nobility that its Creator did not hesitate to become part of it. In her womb, love was reignited, the love that caused the flower of creation to bloom in the eternal peace of the universe. She is a torch of charity for us, and the living source of hope for those on Earth.

Lady, you are so great and powerful that anyone seeking grace and not turning to you will have their hopes dashed. Your kindness doesn't only respond to those who ask; it often anticipates the asking. In you, compassion, pity, magnificence, and all goodness unite. Now, this man, who has traveled from the depths of the universe, has witnessed spiritual lives one after another. He prays for the grace to lift himself toward ultimate salvation, and I, who desire this as much as he does, offer all my prayers to you, hoping that they don't fall short. I ask that you scatter the clouds of his mortality with your prayers, so that the greatest joy may be revealed to him.

I ask you, Queen, who can do anything you wish, to preserve the sound of this vision in his heart even after it ends. Let your protection guide his emotions and see Beatrice and all the blessed ones join their prayers to mine. The eyes of God, beloved and revered, turned toward the speaker, showing us how devout prayers are received with gratitude. Then, they looked toward the Eternal Light, which no creature can even hope to fully comprehend.

As I was nearing the end of my desires, Bernard gestured for me to look up, and I, with my vision purified, naturally turned my gaze toward the Divine Light. From that point forward, what I saw transcended anything that could be expressed with words. It was like waking from a dream, where the vividness of the vision stays in your heart but the details slip away.

The Supreme Light, far beyond mortal concepts, is the source of all creation, filling the universe with its essence. I could sense that within this Light, everything from substance to accident, from thought to action, was perfectly intertwined. It was a single, pure light—simple and all-encompassing. I realized that this unity was the key to everything, and I felt a profound joy in understanding even a small part of it.

The Light, which holds the entire universe together, is constantly in motion, yet everything is perfectly balanced and in its proper place. I tried to understand how it worked, but I could only see so much at a time, just like a mathematician trying to solve a complex problem. My mind was overwhelmed, but in the presence of this Light, I understood everything as it truly was, and I couldn't pull my gaze away.

I saw the Light divide into three circles, each a different color but of the same size. The second circle reflected the first, just as a rainbow's colors reflect one another. The third seemed like fire, radiating equally from both of the others. I was in awe, knowing that no words could capture the

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essence of what I was seeing. The Light is eternal, knowing itself, loving itself, and smiling on itself.

The circulation I witnessed within this Light seemed like a reflection of the perfect order of the universe. But just as a mathematician cannot fully grasp the solution to a problem just by thinking about it, I was unable to fully comprehend this vision. It was beyond me, but I was drawn to it with all my being. My desire to understand turned my mind and will, like a wheel, moving toward the Love that moves the sun and the stars.