

PURGATORIO



DANTE

ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

CONTENTS

<i>Purgatorio: Canto I</i>	2
<i>Purgatorio: Canto II</i>	4
<i>Purgatorio: Canto III</i>	6
<i>Purgatorio: Canto IV</i>	8
<i>Purgatorio: Canto V</i>	10
<i>Purgatorio: Canto VI</i>	12
<i>Purgatorio: Canto VII</i>	14
<i>Purgatorio: Canto VIII</i>	16
<i>Purgatorio: Canto IX</i>	18
<i>Purgatorio: Canto X</i>	20
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XI</i>	22
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XII</i>	24
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XIII</i>	26
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XIV</i>	28
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XV</i>	30
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XVI</i>	32
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XVII</i>	34
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XVIII</i>	36
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XIX</i>	38
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XX</i>	40
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XXI</i>	42
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XXII</i>	44
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XXIII</i>	46
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XXIV</i>	48
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XXV</i>	50
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XXVI</i>	52
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XXVII</i>	54
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XXVIII</i>	56
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XXIX</i>	58
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XXX</i>	61
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XXXI</i>	63
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XXXII</i>	65
<i>Purgatorio: Canto XXXIII</i>	67

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.”

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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."

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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."

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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.

"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 we can climb it easily. The one who knows best is most troubled by wasting time."

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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 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

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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."

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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.

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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.”

After just a few steps, I noticed a spirit ahead who seemed to want to speak with me. As the darkness of evening began to fall, 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 with her. Her mother, I fear, has stopped loving me since I’ve been gone, and this I believe is

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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 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.

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

“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,

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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.

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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."

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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.

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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."

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

"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."

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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."

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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.

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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."

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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.

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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?"

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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.

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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.

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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."

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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?"

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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."

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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."

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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.

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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.

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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?"

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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,

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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

PURGATORIO
ABBÉ'S LIBRARY

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.