

**Dante's**  
***Divine Comedy:***  
**A Retelling in Prose**

**David Bruce**

**Dedicated to Carl Eugene Bruce and Josephine Saturday Bruce**

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**Note: If you are unfamiliar with Dante and *The Divine Comedy*, you may want to read the Background Information near the end first.**

**Note: *Contrapasso* is divine punishment or divine retribution. It is a punishment that is appropriate for the sin. (Note the word “sin” here instead of “crime.” Not all sins are crimes. It is not against the law to be a glutton.)**

**Note: Two characters in this book are Dante the Pilgrim and Dante the Poet. Dante the Pilgrim is the character who is going from Sphere to Sphere. Dante the Poet is the same character, but older and wiser. Dante the Poet has visited the Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise and has much more knowledge than Dante the Pilgrim until the very end of the *Paradise*.**

## Dedicated to Carl Eugene Bruce and Josephine Saturday Bruce

My father, Carl Eugene Bruce, died on 24 October 2013. He used to work for Ohio Power, and at one time, his job was to shut off the electricity of people who had not paid their bills. He sometimes would find a home with an impoverished mother and some children. Instead of shutting off their electricity, he would tell the mother that she needed to pay her bill or soon her electricity would be shut off. He would write on a form that no one was home when he stopped by because if no one was home he did not have to shut off their electricity.

The best good deed that anyone ever did for my father occurred after a storm that knocked down many power lines. He and other linemen worked long hours and got wet and cold. Their feet were freezing because water got into their boots and soaked their socks. Fortunately, a kind woman gave my father and the other linemen dry socks to wear.

My mother, Josephine Saturday Bruce, died on 14 June 2003. She used to work at a store that sold clothing. One day, an impoverished mother with a baby clothed in rags walked into the store and started shoplifting in an interesting way: The mother took the rags off her baby and dressed the infant in new clothing. My mother knew that this mother could not afford to buy the clothing, but she helped the mother dress her baby and then she watched as the mother walked out of the store without paying.

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The doing of good deeds is important. As a free person, you can choose to live your life as a good person or as a bad person. To be a good person, do good deeds. To be a bad person, do bad deeds. If you do good deeds, you will become good. If you do bad deeds, you will become bad. To become the person you want to be, act as if you already are that kind of person. Each of us chooses what kind of person we will become. To become a good person, do the things a good person does. To become a bad person, do the things a bad person does. The opportunity to take action to become the kind of person you want to be is yours.

Human beings have free will. According to the Babylonian Niddah 16b, whenever a baby is to be conceived, the Lailah (angel in charge of contraception) takes the drop of semen that will result in the conception and asks God, "Sovereign of the Universe, what is going to be the fate of this drop? Will it develop into a robust or into a weak person? An intelligent or a stupid person? A wealthy or a poor person?" The Lailah asks all these questions, but it does not ask, "Will it develop into a righteous or a wicked person?" The answer to that question lies in the decisions to be freely made by the human being that is the result of the conception.

A Buddhist monk visiting a class wrote this on the chalkboard: "EVERYONE WANTS TO SAVE THE WORLD, BUT NO ONE WANTS TO HELP MOM DO THE DISHES." The students laughed, but the monk then said, "Statistically, it's highly unlikely that any of you will ever have the opportunity to run into a burning orphanage and rescue an infant. But, in the smallest gesture of kindness — a warm smile, holding the door for the person behind you, shoveling the driveway of the elderly person next door — you have committed an act of immeasurable profundity, because to each of us, our life is our universe."

In her book titled *I Have Chosen to Stay and Fight*, comedian Margaret Cho writes, "I believe that we get complimentary snack-size portions of the afterlife, and we all receive them in a different way." For Ms. Cho, many of her snack-size portions of the afterlife come in hip hop music. Other people get different snack-size portions of the afterlife, and we all must be on the lookout for them when they come our way. And perhaps doing good deeds and experiencing good deeds are snack-size portions of the afterlife.

- The Zen master Gisan was taking a bath. The water was too hot, so he asked a student to add some cold water to the bath. The student brought a bucket of cold water, added some cold water to the bath, and then threw the rest of the water on a rocky path. Gisan scolded the student: "Everything can be used. Why did you waste the rest of the water by pouring it on the path? There are some plants nearby which could have used the water. What right do you have to waste even a drop of water?" The student became enlightened and changed his name to Tekisui, which means "Drop of Water."





# INFERNO

## Preface

*Contrapasso* is divine punishment or divine retribution. It is a punishment that is appropriate for the sin. (Note the word “sin” here instead of “crime.” Not all sins are crimes. It is not against the law to be a glutton.)

If you are unfamiliar with Dante and *The Divine Comedy*, you may want to first read Appendix A: Background Information.

## Chapter 1: The Dark Wood of Error (Inferno)

Just before Good Friday, April 8, 1300, Dante woke up to find himself in a dark wood. How he got there he did not know because he had wandered from the correct path little by little, not realizing for a long time that he had wandered from the straight path and was instead on the path of error. But midway in the threescore and ten years allotted to human beings in the Bible, the 35-year-old Dante had finally awoken to find out that he was not on the path he wanted to be on. Instead, he was in a dark wood in a dark valley, far from the light he wanted to see. And he felt fear rather than the reassurance he wanted to feel.

But Dante looked up and saw the light shining on the top of a hill. Light shows human beings the correct path to take, and light calms fears. A swimmer who has escaped dangerous waters will take a look at the waters when he is safe on shore. So Dante, who felt safer but still had a long way to go before he reached the light, looked at the dark path and the dark valley while resting before he attempted to climb the hill and reach the light.

The climb was harder than he expected because of Dante's weakness — one foot dragged behind the other. Worse, Dante was not alone. Just as he began the climb upward, a leopard blocked his path. Everywhere Dante went, the leopard went. Dante was unable to climb upward. Just when Dante thought that he could get past the leopard, a lion appeared and blocked his path. And then still more trouble! A she-wolf appeared, and again Dante's path upward was blocked. Dante was unable to climb upward; instead, the she-wolf, hungry, walked toward him, forcing him down the hill into the dark wood and the dark valley.

If Dante were to ever climb upward, he needed help. Some things cannot be accomplished alone. Some things require help in order to be accomplished, and some things require divine help in order to be accomplished.

Just then, Dante saw a figure coming toward him, and he cried out, "Whoever you are, have pity on me, whether you are a man or a spirit!"

The figure replied, "I am no longer a living man, although I lived in Rome while Caesar Augustus ruled, in a time when the wrong gods were worshipped. I was a poet, and as a poet I told the story of Aeneas, a refugee who survived the burning of Troy. But why aren't you climbing toward the light? This dark wood is no place to be."

*I know why you can't climb toward the light, the figure — Virgil — thought. You have sinned, and you are in the dark wood of error. Your sins are keeping you from climbing toward the light. The leopard is a manifestation of the sins of incontinence, the lion is a manifestation of the sins of violence, and the she-wolf is a manifestation of the sins of fraud. Sometimes, sins take on material form. Dante, I am aware that you have messed up your life so much that you need help to reach the light. Fortunately for you, help is here.*

"Are you Virgil, author of the *Aeneid*? Can you now help me, who have spent so much time studying and adoring your poetry?" Dante asked. "You, Virgil, taught me to write poetry. You, Virgil, taught me the style that has been so much admired. A beast has kept me from climbing to the light. Save me from the beast!"

"I can help you to go further toward the light," Virgil replied, "but we must go in another direction. The beast that keeps you from climbing the hill and reaching the light allows no one to get past her. She always blocks travelers. This she has always done and will continue to do until a champion arises to slay her. Such a champion will not be concerned with money or property, but will concern himself with wisdom, love, excellence, and virtue. The beast will not survive the encounter with the champion."

“But follow me. I will be your guide, and I will take you most of the way through your journey. First we shall visit a place of screams, and then we shall visit a place where souls rejoice in what may seem like punishment because they know that they shall reach Paradise. I shall take you as far as I can, and then a soul worthier than I am shall take you the rest of the way to your destination. I cannot take you that far because I did not worship the Supreme Emperor in the right way. The Supreme Emperor is the ruler of everything, and all of his citizens are happy.”

“Poet,” Dante begged, “in the name of that God Whom you did not worship rightly, please save me from this dark wood. Lead me to the place you mention, and let me see the gate that Saint Peter guards.”

Virgil led the way, and Dante followed him.



## Chapter 2: Dante Hesitates (Inferno)

The night began to fall, and although most men were preparing for bed and sleep, Dante was preparing for a rough journey in which he would battle the pity that he could so easily feel for other people. To tell this journey later, he would require the help of the Muses.

Dante was troubled. He said to Virgil, “Tell me if you think that I am able to undertake this journey. You wrote about Aeneas, who visited the Land of the Dead while he was still living. He deserved such special consideration because of who he is: the founder of the Roman people. And Rome became not just the center of an empire, but also the residence of the Popes. Aeneas learned much in the Land of the Dead — much that would help him as he fought to establish himself in Italy and to create the people who would found Rome and the papal seat.

“Another person who visited the Land of the Dead is Saint Paul, as we read in the *Visio Sancti Pauli*. He brought back from the Land of the Dead confirmation of the Christian faith.

“But who am I to make such a journey? I am not Aeneas. I am not Saint Paul. I do not think that I am worthy to undertake such a journey, and I cannot believe that any other man would think that I am worthy of undertaking it.

“But what do *you* think? You are wise.”

Dante was having second thoughts, and no wonder. This journey was not through pleasant country. This was not a journey of a tourist. Instead, this was a journey through a land of screams.

“A great journey is ahead of you,” Virgil replied, “yet you are shying away from it like a coward or an animal that is afraid of its own shadow. To put courage in your heart, let me explain why I am here. Let me explain the pity I felt when I learned that you had strayed from the path of truth and had found yourself in the dark wood of error.

“I was in Limbo with the other souls who deserve neither torture nor bliss. A beautiful and blessed lady came to me, and I knew immediately that I would do whatever she asked me to do.

“She addressed me, ‘Noble poet, who has been, is, and will be famous as long as human beings read poetry, a man has strayed from the path of truth and needs your help, if help is not too late to reach him and guide him. I want you to go and be his guide, and take him through the dark places. My name is Beatrice, and this man loved me while I was alive.’

“‘Lady, I will do all that you ask,’ I replied, ‘but please tell me how you come to be here. Obviously, you come from a much different place, so why are you here in Limbo, the first Circle of Hell?’

“‘I have no fear of Limbo, no fear of Hell,’ Beatrice told me. ‘Once souls are in the place from which I come, souls are incapable of being separated from God and they are incapable of ever feeling the other torments of Hell. The Queen of Heaven helps people in need, and she knows that this man needs help. She called Saint Lucia, to whom this man is devoted, and asked her to find a way to help him. Knowing that this man loved me while I was alive, Saint Lucia came to me and requested, ‘Beatrice, a man needs help. Can you help the man who loved you so much while you were alive?’ I then came to you, and I have asked that you be a guide for this man.’

“And so, Dante, I came quickly to you,” Virgil said. “Why are you afraid? Three heavenly ladies — Beatrice, Saint Lucia, and the Queen of Heaven herself — are all looking out for you. With three such champions on your side, what have you to be afraid of?”

The courage rose in Dante just as flowers rise toward sunshine.

“My courage has revived,” Dante said. “Beatrice and you are helping me, and I am eager to begin my journey. Let us start at once, as each of us is eager to do. You are my guide, and you are my teacher.”

Virgil led the way along a rugged path; Dante followed him.

### Chapter 3: The Gate of Hell (Inferno)

They arrived at a gate. Written on the ledge above the gate were these words:

“I am the way to a place of sorrow.

“I am the way to grief that lasts forever.

“I am the way to souls who are forsaken forever.

“Justice moved the creator of this place.

“Divine omnipotence created this place.

“As did Divine omniscience and Divine love.

“Before me only eternal things were made,

“And I am an eternal thing.

“Abandon all of your hopes, all of you who enter.”

Dante looked at the words above the gate, and then he said to Virgil, “These words are cruel.”

Virgil thought, *This is the beginning of your journey to truth, Dante, and you are still naïve. These words are not cruel. Anyone who is in the Inferno deserves to be here — the Supreme Emperor does not make mistakes.*

Virgil said to Dante, “Be brave now. Trust me, your guide. Now you will begin to see the souls who have lost the good of intellect.”

Virgil thought, *Human beings can tell the difference between good and evil. This is something that animals cannot do. A dog does not feel guilty if it eats the food of another dog. Human beings ought to use their intellect to determine the right thing to do and then use their free will to do it. The unrepentant sinners whom Dante will see being punished in the Inferno and outside its gate did not use their intellect and free will to do these things.*

Dante and Virgil heard shrieks piercing the air, and Dante asked Virgil, “Why are these souls grieving?”

Virgil replied, “Outside Hell Proper are the souls of those who never took a stand in life. While living, they were neither for good nor for evil, and now that they are dead, neither Heaven nor Hell wants them. These wretched souls who lived without taking a stand are punished with the angels who remained uncommitted during Lucifer’s rebellion against the Supreme Emperor. They did not commit themselves to evil, nor did they commit themselves to good. Even the souls in Hell feel superior to them because the souls in Hell made a choice: They chose evil.”

Dante then asked, “How are these uncommitted souls being punished?”

Virgil replied, “These souls did not truly live, and therefore they will not truly die and go to a final destination, whether Heaven or Hell. Even torment in Hell is preferable to what these souls feel. In addition, these souls did no lasting good or harm on Earth, and they will not be remembered on Earth.”

Dante looked at the souls, and he recognized a few of them, but he had no desire to remember or to record their names. They had done nothing to be remembered for, so their names ought to be forgotten.

Dante looked, and he saw their punishment: The souls were never still, for they continually chased a banner that continually moved and never took a stand. As the souls ran, hornets and wasps stung their naked bodies, and their blood and pus and tears ran down their bodies to the maggots on the ground.

Virgil thought, *In life, the uncommitted souls did not follow a banner; in death, they follow a banner endlessly, running after it as it travels here and here, never remaining in one place. Similarly, in life, these noncommitted souls never staked out a firm position. In life, these souls never felt deeply, either for good or for evil. Now, these souls do feel deeply, as hornets and wasps bite them. They bleed from the bites, and maggots eat the pus that flows to the ground. This punishment is fitting. What these souls avoided doing in life, they now do in death. Divine retribution is always deserved, and it is always fitting. Divine retribution is known as contrapasso.*

Dante then looked and saw another group of souls who had gathered at the shore of a river, and he saw that they looked eager for what was about to happen to them, although Dante knew that what was about to happen to them could not be desirable. He asked Virgil, “Who are these souls, and why do they look so eager?”

Virgil replied, “That river is called the Acheron, and I will explain all to you when we reach it.”

Dante stayed quiet; he worried that he had been too inquisitive.

Crossing the river in a boat was an aged man who shouted, “Grief is coming for you. No hope of Heaven exists for you. I will take you across the river to a place of darkness, ice, and fire.”

Seeing Dante, a living soul, the old man — Charon, the ferryman — thought, *Living souls always bring me trouble. Hercules once came down to the Inferno and carried out of it Cerberus, the three-headed guard dog of Hell. I want no part of a living man in the Inferno.*

He shouted at Dante, “Living soul, go away. Stay away from the dead.”

Dante did not move, so Charon added, “You cannot come this way. If you enter the Inferno, you must use a different boat.”

Virgil spoke, “Charon, this is not the time for anger. This living soul is here because omnipotent power has sent him here. You need know nothing more.”

Virgil’s words quieted Charon, but Charon’s eyes glowed deep in his eye sockets.

The souls on the riverbank were naked and shivering with fright, remembering what Charon had said about their doom. They were also cursing and blaspheming; they blasphemed God, and they cursed their parents and the day they were born and the entire human species, preferring that the entire human species should never have existed rather than for them to be where they now were. Crying, they waited for Charon’s boat to reach the riverbank, and then they boarded the boat as Charon hit with an oar any stragglers. The souls jumped into the boat like leaves falling from trees in autumn.

Virgil explained, “Whenever anyone dies without first having repented, they assemble here no matter where and when they died. They are eager to cross the river, be judged, and be punished, although at the same time they dread it. These souls were eager to sin while they were alive on Earth, so Divine Justice makes them eager for the punishment they so dread. The Supreme Emperor does not make mistakes, and every soul who is punished here deserves that punishment. When Charon makes it clear that he doesn’t want you here, it is a compliment.”

An earthquake moved the land, and a wind swept the terrain. Dante was so frightened that he fainted.

## Chapter 4: Limbo (Inferno)

Thunder sounded, and Dante awoke from his sleep. Charon had already ferried Dante and Virgil across the Acheron, and Dante saw before him the brink of Hell, a deep and dark and hazy place of agonized cries. Dante looked down, but he could see nothing clearly.

Virgil, his face very pale, told Dante, "Let us climb down now. I will go first; follow me."

"You are afraid, Virgil," Dante said. "If you are afraid of this place, how can I descend into it?"

"I am not afraid," Virgil replied. "My face is pale because I feel pity for the souls in Limbo, the first Circle of the Inferno. The color of fear is also the color of pity. Let us go. We have a long journey ahead of us."

Dante and Virgil walked down into the first Circle of Hell. There Dante heard no screams, but only sighs. Grief need not be accompanied by torture. Men, women, and infants were in this Circle.

"You aren't asking me which souls reside here," Virgil said to Dante, "but you ought to know that. It is part of the education you will receive in the Inferno. These souls did not sin, but they deserve to be here nevertheless. Even the souls who did great things while they were alive deserve to be here. Some souls were not baptized while they were alive, and as your faith tells you, baptism opens up Paradise. Or, if the soul lived before Christ was born, the soul did not worship God in the proper way. I myself lived before Christ and failed to worship God in the proper way. For these reasons, these souls — including myself — deserve to be here. We have no hope of ever achieving Paradise, yet we continually desire Paradise."

Dante, like Virgil, pitied the souls here. He asked Virgil, "Have any souls ever left here, either through their own merit or through the help of another?"

Virgil knew the event that Dante was elliptically referring to — the Harrowing of Hell by Christ — and he replied, "I was not long a resident here when a Mighty Warrior came and rescued out of this place such great forebears and Jews as Adam, Abel, Noah, Moses, Abraham, King David, Rachel, and many more. These souls deserved their salvation, and they were the first to be saved of all the souls who have ever existed."

Virgil and Dante continued walking as they talked, traveling through a wood, and Dante saw a fire lighting a residence where honorable souls gathered.

Dante said, "Obviously, this is a special place. Which souls enjoy the honor of residing here?"

"Those souls are still renowned in the living world," Virgil replied. "Their renown above also wins them special honor here."

Dante heard a voice saying, "The renowned poet who left us has returned. Let us greet him."

Four souls began walking toward Virgil and Dante.

Virgil identified them, "The soul in the lead, carrying a sword, is Homer, the mighty author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, epic poems about the Trojan War and its aftermath. Next is Horace, author of *Satires*, which teaches morality. Then comes Ovid, the author of the *Metamorphoses*, which collected many myths involving metamorphoses or transformations. Finally comes Lucan, the author of the *Pharsalia*, an epic poem about the civil war between Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great."

Together, the group, including Virgil, consisted of the greatest poets of antiquity. By honoring Virgil, the four great poets honored poetry.

The five poets of antiquity talked together briefly, and then they motioned for Dante to join them, an honor that made Virgil smile. And yes, it was a great honor, indeed. Dante's place as a poet is among the greatest poets of all time.

As they talked, they drew near the light. Arriving, they saw a castle circled by seven high walls and by a stream. Dante and the other poets needed no bridge to cross the stream; they walked on water as if they were walking on solid ground.

Passing through seven gates in the seven walls, they arrived at a meadow where renowned souls dwelled. Looking around, Dante recognized many of the souls. He saw heroes and heroines such as Aeneas, the hero of Virgil's *Aeneid* who survived the fall of Troy, took his father and son out of the city (although his wife perished), and led the Trojan survivors to Carthage and then to Italy, where he became the founder of the Roman people. He also saw Lavinia, the Italian princess whom Aeneas married in Italy. She and Aeneas became important ancestors of the Romans. Camilla, a female warrior who fought for the Italians against Aeneas in Italy, was also present.

Among the philosophers whom Dante saw were Democritus, a Greek philosopher who believed in the theory of atoms: the idea that matter is composed of imperishable and indivisible units. Dante also saw Diogenes of Sinope, aka "the Cynic," a Greek philosopher who advocated self-control and abstinence; and he saw Euclid, who is famous for his writing about geometry.

Dante also saw three great Muslims: the philosopher Avicenna, a Persian physician, philosopher, and scientist who memorized the Qur'an; the philosopher Averroës, an Arab who wanted to reconcile Aristotelianism with Islam; and the sultan Saladin, a great Muslim general and leader who captured Jerusalem from the Crusaders.

*The Supreme Emperor is not prejudiced, Virgil thought, except against unrepentant sinners. When Muslims deserve a place of honor, and yes, in the Inferno, this castle in Limbo is a place of honor, they get it.*

Virgil led the way once more. Dante followed him, leaving behind the virtuous pagans, and they arrived at a place of darkness.

## Chapter 5: The Lustful (Inferno)

Dante and Virgil descended, and they saw Minos, judge of the souls of the damned. Minos is a judge who never errs, but Minos is a monster. He has a long tail, and after he hears a sinner confess his or her sins, he wraps his tail around himself to indicate in which Circle of Hell the sinner will be punished. If Minos wraps his tail around himself three times, the sinner will eternally be punished in Circle 3. He then uses his tail to hurl the sinner down closer to where the sinner belongs.

Seeing Dante, Minos said to him, “You have come to an eternal place of pain. Be careful here. Enter carefully, and while you are here, be careful whom you trust. Do not allow anyone to fool you.”

Ever cautious, Virgil thought, *Charon the ferryman tried to keep Dante out of the Inferno. Everything that Minos says is wise, but I don't want him to scare Dante — Dante must travel through the Inferno.*

Virgil said to Minos, “Don't try to keep Dante from descending further. This journey is according to the will of the Supreme Emperor. That is all you need to know.”

Virgil and Dante passed by Minos, and they began to hear cries in the air. They reached a place of darkness and a storm. The tempestuous winds blow, and as they blow, the sinners caught in their grasp go high or low and from side to side with no control over their speed or position. The tempestuous winds blow them around Circle 2, and whenever they come to the place nearest to Minos, the sinners curse God.

Here in Circle 2 the sinners who are guilty of lust are condemned to eternal torment. These sinners ignored reason and did not control their lust.

*Here we see the first of four Circles that punish the incontinent, Virgil thought. These incontinent sinners gave up the good of intellect in order to give rein to their passion for sin. Instead of using reason to control themselves, they gave up control over themselves and engaged — enthusiastically — in sin.*

*Here we see a contrapasso. These sinners did not want to control themselves and their lust, and here they are not in control of themselves. They do not decide where to go; the tempest winds blow them around the Circle. The sinners control nothing.*

Dante saw many souls, and he asked Virgil, “Who are some of the souls whom I see being blown by the wind?”

Virgil replied, “Semiramis, an Assyrian queen of Babylon, was known for her lechery. She had the laws changed so she could marry her own son.

“Dido is also here. As you know, she had an affair with Aeneas, and when he left her in order to pursue his destiny, she committed suicide.”

Virgil thought, *Dido could have appeared in a lower Circle — the Circle devoted to punishing the suicides — but Minos the judge felt that it was more appropriate for her to be punished here. Minos is the perfect judge. The Supreme Emperor chose him, and neither the Supreme Emperor nor Minos makes mistakes.*

Virgil continued, “Paris and Helen of Troy are here. Paris ran off with Helen, the wife of Menelaus. Menelaus and his brother Agamemnon and a Greek army followed the pair to Troy, where the Greeks fought the Trojans in the Trojan War to get Helen back for Menelaus.

“Achilles, the Greek hero of the Trojan War, is also here. He fell in love with Polyxena, a daughter of Priam and Hecuba, the Trojan King and Queen, and he agreed to switch sides from

the Greeks to the Trojans in order to marry her. However, at the wedding Paris treacherously killed him.

“You also see Cleopatra here. The Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra had love affairs with both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony.”

Virgil thought, *Like Dido, Cleopatra committed suicide — she allowed a poisonous snake to bite her — and so Minos could have sentenced her to a lower Circle in Hell, but lust was the greatest of her sins, so Minos sentenced her to eternal punishment in Circle 2.*

Dante then said, “Virgil, I see two souls whom I would like to talk to in particular.”

“If you would like to talk to them, you can,” Virgil replied. “When they come close, call to them and they will come to you.”

When the two souls came close, Dante said, “Souls, if it is not forbidden, please speak to us.”

The two souls, male and female, like two doves leaving a flock, left the other souls and descended toward Dante and Virgil.

“O living creature,” said the female, addressing Dante.

*I know you, Virgil thought. You are Francesca da Rimini, and you are eloquent and charming. Still, you are where you belong. I know that, and I wish that Dante knew that, but he is still naïve because it is early in his journey.*

*If Dante were older and wiser, he would wonder why you called him “O living creature.” Dante is a living human being, not a creature. He is not an animal. Why are you referring to him as something that is less than human? I know why.*

*The sin of incontinence is about rejecting one’s humanity. We are humans, not animals, yet humans can rut without having recourse to reason first. Instead of making use of their intellect and free will, the incontinent sinners ignore those things. A human being can use intellect to figure out how much and what kind of sex to engage in, and a continent person uses his or her free will to resist illicit sex and to engage only in consensual and legitimate sex, but an incontinent person ignores his or her humanity and acts like an animal that is incapable of understanding the difference between right and wrong.*

*A human being can use intellect to know that adultery should be avoided and a human being can use free will to resist the temptation of adultery, but Francesca ignored her own humanity and succumbed to the temptation of committing adultery.*

*By committing adultery, Francesca did not recognize her own humanity, and by calling Dante a “living creature” rather than a human being, she is not recognizing his humanity.*

*Reason was not in control of Francesca while she was alive — desire was.*

Francesca continued, “You are so gracious, and you are so kind. I am honored that you have made your way here to pay us a social call.”

Virgil thought, *Why do you think that Dante is paying you a social call? Dante is not in the Inferno specifically to pay a visit to you. He is in the Inferno to discover what he must do to stay out of the Inferno after he is dead. Dante woke up in the dark wood of error, and this journey he is taking is intended to save his soul.*

*You think it is all about you, don’t you, Francesca? Like many other sinners in the Inferno, you think that you are the center of the universe.*

Francesca continued, “If only we were friends with the King of Kings, we would request of Him that he be with you.”

Virgil thought, *And why do you say ‘if only we were friends with the King of Kings’? Don’t you know where you are, Francesca? You are in the Inferno, suffering eternal torment. You will never leave here. Being damned for eternity is not like a little social quarrel that can be fixed with a few eloquent and charming words.*



Francesca continued, "Love conquered this one and made him want the beauty of my body. Love conquered me and made me delight in him who never leaves me. Love led us to be murdered suddenly. The one who murdered us will end up deep in Hell, in Caina."

*Interesting, Virgil thought. You are like most of the sinners in the Inferno. You don't blame yourself. Right now, you are blaming Love. Love — so you think — excuses you from the responsibility of using your reason to figure out right from wrong.*

*But you don't really believe that, do you, Francesca? If Love excuses you for committing adultery, that person who murdered you would be excused because he loved you. I know your story, Francesca. I know how you died.*

*And why are you referring to your partner in sin — the one by your side whom you committed adultery with — as "this one" instead of by his name? I know his name; it is Paolo. You can't stand him now, can you, Francesca? Every time you look at him, you are reminded of why you are in the Inferno. That is part of your eternal punishment, isn't it, Francesca?*

Dante was silent for a while, and then Virgil asked him, "What are you thinking about?"

Dante sighed and said, "These two loved each other so much."

*Wrong answer, Virgil thought. Those two sinned, those two did not repent, and those two are exactly where they belong.*

Then Dante turned to the two sinners and said to Francesca, "I pity you because of the torment you are suffering. But how did love lead you to commit the act that got you here?"

Francesca replied, "Remembering the happiness of the past will only increase the unhappiness of the present, but I will tell you. We were reading the tale of Lancelot and his love for the Queen. We were alone, for no one ever suspected us. We read about Lancelot kissing the lips he longed for, and this one by my side kissed me. The book we read was our Galehot. We closed the book, and that day we read no more."

*I can't believe that Dante is falling for this rubbish, Virgil thought. He doesn't know that Francesca is spinning him. She is telling only part of the story. She is leaving out all of the parts that would instantly condemn her. For example, she is leaving out of her story these important facts: 1) She and Paolo are married, but not to each other, 2) She is Paolo's sister-in-law, and 3) Her husband found her and his brother in bed together, and he killed them both.*

*In addition, once again Francesca is blaming not herself, but something else. Previously, she blamed Love. Now she is blaming a book: a book about the love of Sir Lancelot for Queen Guinevere. But what kind of love was that? It was an adulterous love. Queen Guinevere was married to King Arthur, and Sir Lancelot had taken an oath to be loyal to the King. And what happened as a result of that adulterous love affair? War broke out, King Arthur was mortally wounded, and Camelot fell as a center of civilization with the result that England fell back into the Dark Ages.*

*That book was your Galehot, you say. Galehot was the go-between for Lancelot and Guinevere; he was no one you should want to know.*

*Plus, you did not read that book correctly. That book warns against adultery. Nothing good came out of the adulterous love affair of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere. If you had read that book as the moral warning it is, instead of as the pornography you took it to be, you would not have committed adultery and you would not now be here.*

*You say, "We closed the book, and that day we read no more." Limbo has a library, and I have read a sentence much like that before in the Confessions of Saint Augustine. Paolo's name means Paul, and Saint Augustine was converted to Christianity by reading the work of Saint Paul. Like Francesca and Paolo, Augustine read a book. Augustine's book was by Saint Paul, who told him to turn to Christ. Augustine did that. Augustine wrote, "No further would I read; nor needed I." Instead of reading further, Augustine converted to Christianity.*

*Augustine's reading led him to turn to God, but Francesca and Paolo's reading turned them away from God.*

*Hearing Francesca's final words, Dante fainted out of pity for her and Paolo.*

*Dante, Virgil thought, you are still naïve, and you have allowed yourself to be scammed. God does not make mistakes. Francesca and Paolo are here because they deserve to be here. Exactly the same thing is true of every other sinner in the Inferno. Other sinners will try to scam you, and I hope that you wise up soon.*

*You are supposed to learn from these encounters, Dante. You are supposed to learn to take responsibility for your actions and not blame other people and things. You are supposed to learn that you have reason to help you decide what is right and what is wrong. You are supposed to learn that you have free will, which you can use to choose to do what is right and to avoid doing what is wrong. If you are going to stay out of the Inferno, these are some of the things you must learn. I can't learn them for you.*

## Chapter 6: The Gluttonous (Inferno)

When Dante regained consciousness, he discovered that he was in a new section of Hell — the third Circle. Here cold rain and hail and snow fell incessantly, creating mud and a stink like that of a gigantic garbage dump.

Dante and Virgil saw Cerberus, a three-headed dog with a swollen belly whose job was to howl incessantly to make the sinners here wish they were deaf, although the sinners also howled. Cerberus is also the guard of the third Circle. Like the sinners, Cerberus was a glutton, and Cerberus often bit the gluttons.

*Once again we see a Circle that is devoted to punishing sinners who are guilty of incontinence, Virgil thought. These sinners were not able to control themselves. They put their desires ahead of their reason. They made their desires — not their reason — supreme in their lives. These sinners ate or drank way too much. They became obese or alcoholic.*

Virgil had been this way before, and he knew what to do. To keep Cerberus busy long enough that he and Dante could pass, Virgil threw heaps of mud down Cerberus' three throats. Busy swallowing the mud, Cerberus let them pass.

The sinners whom Dante and Virgil passed lay on the ground. They seemed to have human form, but they lacked bodies. Only on Judgment Day would their souls be reunited with their bodies.

One sinner saw Dante and quickly sat up and said, "Do you know who I am? We lived at the same time for a while."

Dante looked closely at the sinner, but he admitted, "Your punishment must have changed you because I don't recognize you. But please tell who you are."

The sinner said, "Your own city — Florence, which is filled with envious people — once claimed me as a citizen. I am damned to this Circle because of my sin of gluttony. The Florentines gave me a nickname: Ciaccio."

*Ciaccio is a fitting name for a glutton such as you, Virgil thought. It means Hog or Pig.*

"Ciaccio," Dante said, "I pity you, and I want to cry, but since you mentioned Florence, can you tell me what will happen to that city that I love? The city has two political parties that fight each other. What is going to happen to them? Are all the men in Florence envious?"

"After much more fighting, one party will drive out the other party," Ciaccio replied. "Then within three years the positions will be reversed, and the party that was victorious will be defeated, and the party that was defeated will be victorious. Two men in Florence are just, but no one will listen to them."

*I understand more than you do, Dante, Virgil thought. Ciaccio is making a prophecy of your upcoming exile when you will be forbidden ever to return to your beloved Florence on pain of death. Like the other souls in the Inferno, I am able to see the future. However, I won't tell you about your upcoming exile. I am your teacher, but teachers don't tell all they know. Some things are better for a student to think about and discover for him- or herself.*

Dante asked, "Can you give me some more information, please? What has happened to Farinata degli Uberti, to Tegghiaio Aldobrandini, to Jacopo Rusticucci, and to Mosca dei Lambertini? Where are they? Are they in Heaven or in Hell?"

"They are in Hell," Ciaccio answered. "Their sins are worse than mine, so they are in deeper Circles than I am. If you continue your journey downward, you will see them. But if you ever make it again to the sweet, living world, remember me and ask our mutual friends to remember me."

*The deeper we go into Hell, the worse the sins that are being punished, Virgil thought. High in Hell, many of the sinners still want to be remembered on Earth. Very low in Hell, many of the sinners prefer to be entirely forgotten on Earth because of the vileness of their sins.*

Ciacco's gaze lost focus. He squinted, and then he lay down again in the mud with the other gluttons.

Virgil told Dante, "Ciacco will stay like that until Judgment Day. On that day, his soul will be reunited with his body."

"What will happen when his soul is reunited with his body?" Dante asked. "Will his torment be increased or lessened or just the same as now?"

"You have studied philosophy," Virgil replied. "Human beings were created with both a body and a soul. Together, body and soul are more perfect than they are separately. What is perfect can feel more perfectly than what is not perfect can feel. The sinners in Hell will feel their pain more intently, and the saved souls in the Supreme Emperor's kingdom will feel their bliss more intently."

They continued walking.

*This is another example of contrapasso, Virgil thought. Mud is plentiful in the third Circle of the Inferno because rain is always falling. The gluttons wanted to enjoy the good things, but now they are forced to live in uncomfortable surroundings — surroundings much like a muddy pigsty. The gluttons made pigs of themselves while living, and now, although they are dead, they live like pigs. The gluttons sleep in the mud like pigs, just like a glutton would go to sleep after enjoying a huge meal. After talking with Dante, Ciacco was unable to focus his eyes; he is now in a stupor, just as a glutton would be in a stupor after eating a huge meal. In addition, Cerberus bites the gluttons the way that the gluttons bit into their food.*

Dante and Virgil then saw Plutus, the arch-enemy of Humankind.

## Chapter 7: The Wasters, Hoarders, Wrathful, and Sullen (Inferno)

As Virgil and Dante approached him, Plutus clucked the nonsense words “*Papa Satan, pape Satan aleppe!*”

Virgil reassured Dante, “Plutus has no power to stop you from continuing your journey. Therefore, do not be afraid.”

Virgil then turned on the wolf-like Plutus and shouted, “Be quiet! This man here is on a mission from the Supreme Emperor!”

Plutus, deflated like a sail in a calm, sank to the ground, and was quiet.

*Plutus is an appropriate guard for Circle 4, Virgil thought. Plutus is also known as Pluto, and he is the pagan god of wealth, as well as the god who ruled the Underworld. It is fitting that he rules the Underworld because much wealth (gold, silver, diamonds) comes from under the ground. His association with wealth makes him a fitting guard for the sinners in Circle 4: the wasters and the hoarders.*

Virgil and Dante saw many souls now — more than in the Circles they had already passed through. These souls pushed heavy weights before them in the Circle, and when they met, they crashed the heavy weights together. One group shouted, “Why hoard?” The other group shouted, “Why waste?” Then they went around the Circle again, and they crashed their heavy weights together again, and they shouted again.

“Who are these sinners?” Dante asked Virgil. “From their haircuts, I see that many of them were priests. Were they all priests on this side?”

“These sinners were incontinent when it came to wealth,” Virgil replied. “Neither group could control themselves. One group hoarded their wealth, while the other group wasted their wealth. Many of the sinners you see here were Popes, cardinals, and priests — such people are unfortunately prone to greediness.”

*Here we see two groups of sinners being punished together because their sins, although opposites, are closely related, Virgil thought. The wasters and the hoarders are people who either saved as much money as possible and never spent it or people who spent every penny they could and never saved anything. Both types of people are sinners. To be good with money, living people need to spend some money to acquire necessities and good things; however, they also need to have an emergency fund. When it comes to money, living people need to seek a mean between extremes.*

*Limbo has a library, and so I am familiar with the work of Aristotle, whom I also studied while I was alive and who is also in Limbo so that I can consult him. The theory of the mean between extremes is a famous part of Aristotle’s ethical thought. He believed in moderation — as most Greeks did. If you had too much or too little of something, you would suffer from an excess or a deficiency of that thing. Think about food. If you eat too much food, you will be overweight. If you eat too little food, you will be underweight. You need to eat the right amount of food so that you will have a healthy weight. What you need is exactly the right amount. A different example: Courage is the mean between the extremes of cowardice (deficiency) and rashness (excess). The sinners here failed to find the mean between the extremes of miserliness and of wastefulness.*

“Shouldn’t I be able to recognize some of the sinners here?” Dante asked Virgil.

“No, you won’t be able to recognize anybody here,” Virgil replied. “Because of their sinful relationship with wealth, these sinners failed to accomplish anything notable while they were

alive. They failed to accomplish something great for Humankind. Because of that, they have no distinguishing characteristics here.

“Well, they do have some distinguishing characteristics, Those who are misers have tight fists; those who are wasters are without hair because they have spent even the hair on their heads. But as for recognizing a sinner and knowing his or her name, forget it.

“These sinners are exactly where they belong. They overvalued either wealth or what wealth can buy, and now no amount of wealth can rescue them from Hell. In Hell as in the living world, they bicker over what belongs to Fortune.”

“Who or what is this Fortune that you mention?” Dante asked.

“Fortune controls all the wealth that ever was and ever will be,” Virgil replied. “Fortune is a minister of God. She sees that money goes from person to person, family to family, country to country. She controls the Wheel of Fortune. At times, a person may be at the top of the Wheel of Fortune and be very prosperous, but as the Wheel turns, that person’s prosperity decreases. The thing to do is to know that the Wheel of Fortune will turn. While riding high on the Wheel of Fortune, save some wealth so that you are at least somewhat prepared when you are riding low on the Wheel of Fortune. The same applies to families and to countries. The Wheel of Fortune turns for individuals, for families as a whole, and for entire countries.

“Human beings dislike Fortune, but they should recognize that she is doing the work of the Supreme Emperor.

“But now let us continue on our journey.”

Virgil and Dante continued walking. They came to a spring, which created a stream of grey water, and they walked along the stream on a rough path. As they walked, the stream of grey water turned into a marsh that Dante learned is named the Styx.

In the marsh they saw muddy, angry sinners moving around and fighting each other. Not only did they hit each other with their hands, but they also kicked and bit each other — so great was their anger.

Virgil said, “Here in this Circle — Circle 5 — you see those who could not control their anger. We see the sinners on top of the marsh, yet other sinners are below the marsh, revealing their presence only by the bubbles rising to the top of the marsh.

“These sinners below the marsh say, if you listen closely, ‘We were sluggish while we were alive, and in our heart was the smoke of sloth. Now we are punished in the muck of Styx.’ So they say, but not clearly.”

*The sinners below the marsh are the slothful, Virgil thought. The slothful should have pursued the right things while they were alive, but they were slothful — lazy — and did not pursue them with the zeal that they ought to have shown for the right things. Along with their sloth, they were sullen — they bottled up their anger. It would have been better for them if they had expressed vigorous and righteous anger at sin and sinners.*

Virgil and Dante continued walking along the path by the marsh. Eventually, they reached a high tower.

## Chapter 8: The Boatman Phlegyas and Filippo Argenti (Inferno)

Before Dante and Virgil reached the foot of the high tower, they saw some lights. Two small lights appeared at the top of the tower, and then another light appeared far in the distance. They seemed to be signal lights. The presence of Dante and Virgil had been noticed, and someone or something had been alerted.

Dante asked Virgil, "What is happening here? What do the signal lights mean?"

Virgil replied, "The one who has been summoned is already approaching us across the swamp of the Styx. You should be able to see him approaching us now."

Dante looked and saw a boat crossing the swamp. Only one being was on the boat, and he shouted at Dante and Virgil, "You belong to me, now."

"Phlegyas, you are wrong," Virgil replied. "You will have our company only as long as it takes you to ferry us across the swamp."

Phlegyas was angry. He had thought that Dante was a new soul who would be tormented in the lower Circles of Hell, but he was mistaken.

*You are still angry, Phlegyas, Virgil thought. You have been angry for a long time. You became angry when the god Apollo raped your daughter. You were so angry that you set fire to Apollo's temple at Delphi. Because of that, Apollo killed you. You are a fitting guardian for Circle 5 of Hell, the Circle that punishes the wrathful.*

Phlegyas may have been angry at Dante and Virgil, but nevertheless he knew that he had to ferry them across the Styx. Virgil boarded the boat first. Because souls have no weight, the boat did not sink lower into the water. Dante then boarded the boat, which sank lower into the water, revealing that a living human being was on board.

As the boat crossed the Styx, a sinner in the water saw how heavily loaded the boat was. Knowing that a living human being was on board, and curious, and perhaps wanting to do violence to a living human being, the muddy sinner rose out of the muddy water and asked, "Who are you, still-living human? Why do you come here before you are dead?"

Dante replied, "I may have come here, but I will not stay here. Who are you, ugly and muddy sinner?"

The sinner replied. "I am one who cries."

"I recognize you," Dante said. "And may you cry and mourn here forever, damn you."

The muddy sinner reached toward the boat, but the ever-vigilant Virgil, Dante's guardian, shoved the soul away from the boat, shouting, "Stay away! Stay with the other sinners!"

Virgil then hugged Dante and said, "You have acted rightly. Blessed are you and the womb that bore you. This sinner was arrogant and no good memories of him exist in the living world. And here he is angry forever. Many living men are like this sinner. They think that they are VIPs in the living world, but after they die they will wallow in the mud of the Styx like pigs in a pigsty."

*Yes, you have acted correctly, Virgil thought. Previously, you felt pity for the sinners. You pitied Francesca da Rimini, charming bitch that she was. You also pitied Ciaccio. None of these sinners deserves any pity whatsoever. All of them are exactly where they deserve to be. God does not make mistakes. You are learning, Dante. You are at least beginning to feel righteous indignation, which is the mean between the extremes of irrational anger and sullenness. Sullenness, of course, is bottled-up anger.*

Dante said to Virgil, "I would like to see this sinner punished even more."

"You will see just that," Virgil replied. "A wish such as that deserves to be fulfilled."

Almost immediately, a group of sinners saw the sinner whom Dante hated. They shouted, “Get Filippo Argenti,” and they mangled him, making Dante happy.

Dante then began to hear the noise of wailing, and he looked at the tower, which was growing nearer.

“The tower is part of the city of Dis — the city of Lucifer,” Virgil said. “Its walls are high, and its residents are fierce.”

“I can see part of the city now,” Dante said. “I see mosques burning with flames.”

“The burning of the mosques provides a reddish light for the lower Circles of Hell,” Virgil said.

The boat arrived at the city of Dis. Wanting to get rid of his passengers quickly, Phlegyas shouted, “Get out of my boat now! This is the entrance you seek!”

Dante and Virgil disembarked, and they saw more than a thousand fallen angels — those who had rebelled with Lucifer against God — on the walls of the city. The fallen angels realized that Dante was still alive, and they shouted at him, “Who are you? What living person dares to come into the Land of the Dead? You, dead soul, may approach the city, but the living being may not. You, dead soul, will stay here with us — we will force you to. Let the living being try to retrace, alone, his steps to the living world — if he dares!”

Hearing this, Dante felt great fear. Virgil had been his guide and guardian throughout the Land of the Dead. He did not want to go anywhere in the Inferno without him. He cried to Virgil, “Please don’t leave me. You have been my protector, and I need you. If we cannot go forward, let us retrace our steps together.”

Virgil replied, “Fear not. No one can prevent us from continuing our journey. Think of the Supreme Emperor and the three Heavenly ladies who want us to take this journey. I will talk to the fallen angels alone. Stay here. Don’t worry — I won’t leave you alone in the Land of the Dead.”

Dante stayed where he was, and Virgil walked off. He did not go out of Dante’s sight, but Dante was unable to hear what Virgil and the fallen angels said to each other. Then the fallen angels raced back to the city of Dis.

Virgil was upset when he returned to Dante. Virgil’s eyes were downcast, and he murmured, “Who are such beings to forbid me to visit the lower Circles of Hell?”

Then Virgil said to Dante, “Don’t worry. This is a minor, temporary setback. These fallen angels cannot keep us from our journey. These fallen angels cause trouble, although they are always conquered. Once they tried to bar the gate into Hell to keep the Mighty Warrior from breaking into Hell and carrying away from Limbo the souls who belong in Paradise. The Mighty Warrior defeated the angels, and now the gate into Hell is always open, forever and forever. Earlier, you saw the words that were written above that gate.

“Already, Heavenly help is on its way. I understand much that concerns reason, but I cannot do everything. This time I need help from Heaven, and that help is already on its way. The Heavenly help will open the gate of Dis so that we may continue on our journey.”



## Chapter 9: The City of Dis (Inferno)

Dante's face had paled with fear as he saw that Virgil was returning after his unsuccessful attempt to convince the fallen angels to allow them to pass through the gates of the city of Dis.

Virgil waited, looking worried and saying, "We must pass through the gates. Nothing can prevent us from doing that. After all, we have been promised help. Or — no, we will receive help, but it is taking more time than I like for help to get to us."

Dante was afraid, and he asked Virgil, "Has anyone ever traveled to the bottom of the Inferno from Limbo?"

"That is an unusual journey to take," Virgil replied, "but I have traveled it before. Not long after I died, the sorceress Erichtho summoned my spirit to her and gave me a task to travel to the pit of Judas at the bottom of the Inferno and bring out a spirit for her to consult. This is something she had done before. While I was still alive, she sent a soul to the bottom of the Inferno to retrieve another soul who would foretell the victor of the Battle of Pharsalia, in which the forces of Julius Caesar defeated the forces of Pompey. Because I have traveled throughout the Inferno, I well know the path that we will take and I am familiar with the place we are now. This swamp of the Styx completely surrounds the city of Dis, which we *will* enter although not — as you know — without some trouble."

As they talked, Dante looked up at the city, and above its walls he suddenly saw the three Furies — the Erinyes — fly. They were winged avenging spirits covered with blood — they had snakes for hair, and their purpose in the ancient world was to wreck vengeance against children who killed their parents. These were the avenging spirits who pursued Orestes after he killed his mother, who had killed his father.

Virgil looked up, and he saw the Furies, whom he recognized: "Look! Megaera is on the left, Alecto on the right, and Tisiphone in the middle!" Virgil knew much about the Furies. Alecto had maddened Queen Amata and Turnus to rebel against and fight Aeneas when he and his refugee Trojans tried to establish themselves in Italy. Virgil knew how dangerous the Furies could be.

The Furies hovered in the air, shrieking and tearing their skin with their fingernails, drawing blood. They shouted, "Come, Medusa, and turn this living man into stone. We let Theseus get away from us too easily."

*This is a threat that needs to be taken seriously, Virgil thought. Any living human being who looks at Medusa, who also has snakes for hair, will instantly be turned into stone. In addition, the Furies and Medusa are still angry because Hercules released Theseus from the Inferno when he came into the Inferno to take Cerberus the three-headed dog to the Land of the Living.*

Virgil told Dante, "Turn around and cover your eyes because if you see Medusa your journey is over and you will not return to the Land of the Living."

Dante did as he was told, and Virgil also covered Dante's eyes with his hands. In doing so, both Dante and Virgil underestimated the power of God and of God's helpers.

Now came an important event. Sound blasted through the Inferno, and Hell trembled. A hurricane will tear through a forest, uprooting trees and destroying everything in its path. Such seemed to be this sound.

Virgil removed his hands from over Dante's eyes and told him, "Turn around and look."

Dante saw over a thousand sinners diving into the muddy marsh of the Styx the way that frogs will dive into the water to get away from snakes, their natural enemies. Then he saw a good angel walking on the water of the Styx, which did not even wet his feet. The good angel did not fear; instead, the good angel was filled with scorn for the sinners and the fallen angels.

Dante was going to speak to Virgil, but Virgil motioned for him to keep silent and to bow low.

The good angel reached the gate of Dis and touched it with his wand, and the gate immediately opened.

Filled with scorn, the good angel said to the fallen angels, "What do you think you are doing? You know that you are powerless against the One Who sent me. You gain nothing but defeat by opposing Him. As you should have learned by now, Ultimate Evil is powerless against Ultimate Good. When Lucifer rebelled against God, you fought on the side of Lucifer. Look where it got you!"

*This is much like another opening of a gate of Hell, Virgil thought. When the Mighty Warrior came to rescue the righteous saved souls from Limbo, these fallen angels opposed him, but nevertheless he rescued the souls, causing pain to those sinners who were and are condemned to reside in the Inferno forever. He also caused pain to the fallen angels who opposed Him just as this angel from the Supreme Emperor is causing pain to those fallen angels once again.*

The angel from God left; his face showed that he was thinking of more important things than opening the gate — something that was a mere distraction for him.

Dante and Virgil approached the gate of Dis and passed through it. No fallen angel dared oppose them.

Past the gate, Dante saw an ugly landscape. It was filled with sepulchers. These burial chambers were not closed; from them flames leapt up. From the inside of the burial chambers came cries of grief and pain.

Dante asked Virgil, "What kind of sinners are these who reside in the open tombs?"

"Arch-heretics and their disciples are buried here," Virgil replied. "The tombs hold many more sinners than you suspect, and each kind of heretic is entombed with the other heretics who believed incorrectly about God. The tombs burn more brightly for the greater heresies."

Dante and Virgil walked toward the tombs.

*I can understand why the guards here are the fallen angels and the Furies and Medusa, Dante thought. Medusa and the Furies are appropriate guards of this Circle because they are pagan figures, and of course pagans do not think correctly about God. The fallen angels are also appropriate guards of this Circle that is devoted to punishing heretics because they did not think correctly about God, as they chose to fight against Him rather than fight against Lucifer. Heresy is thinking incorrectly about God; the fallen angels, the Furies, and Medusa thought*

*incorrectly about God. Still, tombs don't need guards, so the guards here need hardly keep a close eye on the sinners in the tombs.*

## Chapter 10: Heretics in Flaming Tombs (Inferno)

As Dante and Virgil walked among the flaming tombs, Dante asked, “Can the people in these tombs be seen? After all, the lids are off the tombs. And the guards are not here, but on the tower and the walls of the City of Dis.”

Virgil replied, “Right now, the tombs are open, but on Judgment Day these sinful souls will be reunited with their sinful bodies, and then the tombs will be closed forever. Here you see the part of the cemetery where Epicurus and his followers lie. They committed heresy by not believing in life after death.”

*This is another example of contrapasso, Virgil thought. These heretical sinners did not believe in life after death. They believed instead that when they died they would be in a tomb forever, and that is exactly what will happen to them.*

“You ask: Can you speak to these souls?” Virgil continued. “That question will be answered for you very quickly. So will the question that you want to ask me but you have not asked yet.”

“I have not yet asked it because I am afraid of talking too much,” Dante said.

Just then, a figure stood up in the tomb, which was sunken into the ground. The top of his body was visible. The sinner said, “Oh, Tuscan, because of your accent I know that you are from Florence, my own city — a city on which I was perhaps too harsh while I was alive. Talk to me.”

Dante, startled, drew closer to Virgil, who said, “Turn around and look at Farinata degli Uberti, who while he was alive was a big man in your part of the world.”

Dante turned around and looked at Farinata, who stood like a statue. His face showed his disdain for the Hell he was in.

Virgil gently pushed Dante toward Farinata, the better for Dante to speak to the sinner, but Virgil also advised Dante, “Be careful which words you speak.”

*Yes, Farinata, Virgil thought. You are standing like the statue that you wish the Florentines would raise to you. You are proud, and you wish to be impressive as you stand here. But half of your body is in the tomb and half of your body is sticking out of the tomb. Although you would like to tower over Dante, Dante stands higher than you do. Although you would like to look like a dignified statue on a pedestal, you look somewhat silly.*

When Dante was standing alongside the tomb in which Farinata stood, the sinner said to him with contempt, “And just who are *your* ancestors?”

Dante told him. Because Dante was very familiar with Farinata’s biography, which was important in the history of Florence, he knew that Farinata’s family was very high born and much classier than Dante’s own family.

Farinata listened as Dante explained who his family was, and then Farinata said, “Your family was a bitter enemy of mine and to my family and my political party. I fought against them and scattered them not just once but twice.”

*This is at least partly true, Dante thought. Farinata and his family were Ghibellines, while my family consists of Guelfs. The Ghibellines exiled the Guelfs from Florence twice: in 1248 and in 1260. However, my party, the Guelfs, came back from exile twice and as we speak they are in fact still in control of Florence.*

A little angry, Dante said to Farinata, “You expelled them from Florence not just once but twice, but they returned to Florence not just once but twice. Returning from exile is an art that your family has not mastered.”

Just then, another shade popped his head above the tomb that Farinata was standing in. This sinner looked around as if he expected to see someone. That someone was not present, and the sinner began to cry. The sinner then said to Dante, “If your great genius as a poet makes it possible for you to visit the Inferno although you are still alive, then why isn’t my son here with you?”

Dante recognized the sinner. He was Cavalcante de’ Cavalcanti, a Guef. Farinata was a Ghibelline, so they were of opposing political parties. However, they were related by marriage — Cavalcante’s son had married Farinata’s daughter in a politically motivated marriage. This son was named Guido, and he was a poet whom Cavalcante considered to be at least the equal of Dante.

Dante replied, “Your son is not with me, but I am not alone. My guide is a poet whom Guido, your son, did not respect.”

*Be careful here, Virgil thought. I see a lot of pride. Farinata is obviously proud, standing as he does in imitation of the statue he wishes the Florentines would erect to him. Cavalcante is obviously proud of his son — overly proud, in fact, since you, Dante, are much the better poet. But Dante, do you really think that your great poetic genius is the reason why you are here in the Inferno? That is not the reason. You are here because you messed up your life so badly that three Heavenly ladies are going out of their way to teach you the right way to live your life so that you may avoid being damned when you die. This trip through the Inferno is not a reward for your great genius — although you are in fact a great poet. Instead, this is a last-ditch effort to keep you from being damned to Hell when you die.*

Cavalcante jumped up in the tomb and said, “You say that he *did* not respect your guide? Do you mean that my son is dead?”

Dante was surprised. The sinners were aware of the past, and he had heard them prophesy, so they knew the future. Why wouldn’t the sinners also know what was happening in the present? Because of his shock, he did not answer Cavalcante quickly, and the sinner disappeared back down in the tomb.

Farinata completely ignored Cavalcante. Instead, he started talking to Dante as if they had not been interrupted: “If they did not master the art of returning from exile, that causes me more pain than my damnation. But you yourself will learn within 50 months how hard such an art is to master. But tell me, why is your political party so hard on my family? Why won’t your political party allow my family to return to Florence?”

“Your question is easy to answer,” Dante replied. “It is because of the blood that stained the Arbia River red.”

*Yes, Dante thought, we Florentines remember that battle well. The Arbia River flows by the hill named Montaperti. In 1260, five years before I was born, you and the Ghibellines, including Ghibellines you had recruited from Siena, fought the Battle of Montaperti. You Ghibellines defeated the Guelfs and stained the Arbia River red with Guelf blood. But the Guelfs later regained control of Florence. In 1280, many Ghibellines were allowed to return to Florence; however, your family — the Uberti family — was not allowed to return to Florence. Why not? Because you got so many Florentines killed.*

Farinata sighed and said, “I was not the only one fighting in the battle. But after the battle, when everyone else was thinking of destroying Florence, I was the only one who opposed the city’s destruction.”

*Yes, you did, Virgil thought, but why did you do that? You fought against the Guelfs because you wanted political power in Florence. If Florence were totally destroyed, you would not be able to have power there. Like the other sinners in the Inferno, you are self-serving. You don’t want to take full responsibility for the blood shed in the Battle of Montaperti, and you do*

want to take full credit for saving the city of Florence when actually you wanted to save Florence just so you could rule it.

“Can you answer a question for me?” Dante asked. “I have been wondering for a while and have refrained from asking my guide how it is that you and the others here know the future but do not seem to have knowledge of the present.”

“We in Hell have faulty vision,” Farinata replied. “We do see the future, but we do not know what is happening in the Land of the Living at the present time. Only when a new sinner arrives here do we get news of present events in the Land of the Living. When Judgment Day comes and the tombs are closed forever, we will have no knowledge at all.”

*This is true, Virgil thought. After Judgment Day, no future events will occur. Every soul will be in its proper place, enjoying bliss eternally or suffering torment eternally.*

Dante then requested, “Will you tell Cavalcanti that his son is still alive? I did not answer him earlier because I was surprised that sinners here could have knowledge of the future and yet not have knowledge of the present.”

*Dante, you are still naïve, Virgil thought. Do you think that Farinata will ever acknowledge the existence of Cavalcante, even though Cavalcante’s son married his daughter? They will be tombmates forever, and they will not acknowledge each other’s existence forever. Farinata is not going to deliver your message.*

*Also, note that Cavalcante misunderstood you. He thought that you were saying that his son is dead, but you were not saying that. Heretics misunderstand God and religion.*

*Also, note that the sinners in the Inferno have faulty vision. They certainly had faulty vision when it came to the Supreme Emperor.*

*Finally, note the interruptions that we have seen here. Farinata interrupted you and me as we were talking, and Cavalcante interrupted you and Farinata as you two were talking. Obviously, we have people not communicating well here. People who oppose each other do not communicate well with each other — and sometimes they do not communicate at all.*

Virgil then called to Dante to come — they must continue their journey. Still, Dante asked one more question of Farinata: “With whom do you share your tomb?”

Farinata replied, “More than a thousand souls are here, including Emperor Frederick II and Cardinal Ottaviano degli Ubaldini. The others I shall not mention.”

*You are still proud, even in Hell, Virgil thought. You mention the names of two VIPs, but not the names of your other tombmates. Pride is a deadly sin, and look where it got you.*

Dante looked troubled as he remembered what Farinata had said about him — “you yourself will learn within 50 months how hard such an art is to master” — and Virgil said to him, “You have heard a prophecy of your future life. Remember it. Later, you will meet one who will clearly explain your future to you.”

The two continued their journey.

*Dante, I don’t think that you learned what you should have learned here, Virgil thought. Whenever you speak to a sinner, you have something that you should learn. Here you talked to two sinners who are guilty of heresy. You are not a heretic, and so you did not speak specifically about heresy here, but about something that is related to heresy: factionalism — specifically factionalism in politics and in poetry. Factionalism, or parties battling each other, can be seen in politics, in religion, and even in art, including poetry. Obviously, factionalism exists in politics, as we see with the Ghibellines and the Guelfs, and with the White Guelfs and the Black Guelfs. Extreme factionalism can be very bad, indeed. When a new faction comes into power in Florence, it bans the opposing faction, exiling them from Florence. Although factionalism can be seen in politics, as in the struggle between the Ghibellines and the Guelfs, or between the White Guelfs and the Black Guelfs, we also see factionalism in other areas. For*

*example, we can see factionalism in religion, as when we see the heretics being combated by those who have the true beliefs concerning religion and God. Factionalism can also exist in poetry. A new kind of poetry can replace the old style of poetry. A modern poet can disrespect an ancient poet.*

*Dante, what you should have learned here is to avoid extreme factionalism. I hope that you will learn that lesson as we continue our journey. I don't think you have learned that lesson yet. Instead, you and Farinata were battling each other verbally. Farinata pointed out that he had exiled your political party twice, then you pointed out that your political party had returned from exile twice but that his family had not returned from exile, and then Farinata prophesied that you would be sent into exile. Instead of your learning to avoid extreme factionalism, you and Farinata were engaging in it. Instead of talking together as citizens of the same city, you and Farinata were battling each other verbally. Farinata engaged in extreme factionalism during his life, and he ended up in the Inferno. Dante, unless you learn to avoid extreme factionalism, you may end up in the Inferno.*

## Chapter 11: Virgil Teaches Dante (Inferno)

Dante and Virgil arrived at a steep bank from which they could look down into the dark, deep pit of Hell. They did not stay there long, for the stench arising from the lower Circles was too rank for them to bear. They moved back from the edge of the pit onto a tomb. On the tomb was written a name and a sin. The name was that of Pope Anastasius II, and his sin was to be a heretical follower of Photinus, who denied the divinity of Christ, believing instead that both of His parents were mortal human beings.

Virgil said to Dante, “We cannot continue on our journey yet. We will stay here a while so that we can become accustomed to the stench arising from the lower Circles of Hell. Once we have become used to the stench, we will continue our journey.”

Dante replied, “That’s fine, but I don’t want to waste time while we wait. Do you have any ideas?”

*Well done, Virgil thought. You don’t want to waste time, and indeed time is not a thing to be wasted, especially now, when you are on a journey to save your soul.*

“Yes,” Virgil replied. “As we wait here, I will be able to tell you how Hell is organized. That way, you will be better prepared for what is to come.

“First, let’s have a review. Even before entering Hell Proper, you saw the Vestibule of Hell, where those who did not choose between good and evil are punished. These souls are not worthy of Heaven, and Hell does not want them. These souls did nothing memorable — good or bad — with their lives.

“After passing through the gate above which are words written by God, we crossed the River Acheron and you saw my residence in Limbo, the first Circle of Hell. In that place the virtuous pagans and the unbaptized reside. It is a place of sighs, not screams.

“Then you saw the first of the three great divisions of Hell according to the pagan idea of sin: incontinence, violence, and fraud. The sins of incontinence are less evil than the sins of violence and of fraud because the sins of incontinence are those of a lack of self-control, not of malice aforethought.

“Circles 2 through 5 are devoted to the sins of incontinence. In Circle 2 are punished those who could not control their lust. In Circle 3 are punished those who could not control their desire for food and drink. In Circle 4 are punished the prodigal and the miserly: those who could not control their desire either for money or for the things that money can buy. In Circle 5 are punished those who could not control their anger.

“In Circle 6 are those who committed heresy. Because heresy is an essentially Christian sin, it is outside the pagan classification of sins.

“Below are the final three Circles of Hell. These Circles are devoted to punishing those who are guilty of malice, which is committed through violence or fraud. Fraud is something that is committed only by human beings — animals are violent but do not commit fraud — and so God hates fraud more than he hates violence.

“In Circle 7 are punished those who have committed violence. There are three kinds of violence:

“One, a sinner can be violent against neighbors. A sinner can do this by harming the person or by harming the person’s property.

“Two, a sinner can be violent against self by committing suicide. A sinner can also be violent against self by so violently wasting his wealth that he courts death.



“Three, a sinner can be violent against God by blaspheming Him. A sinner can also be violent against God by opposing Nature, which God created; for example, the Sodomites oppose Nature by engaging in sex that is incapable of resulting in children.

“In Circles 8 and 9 are punished those who are guilty of committing fraud. Fraud is depriving another person of a right through the use of willful misrepresentation.

“The two major kinds of fraud are simple and complex. Simple fraud is punished in Circle 8. Simple fraud does not involve the betrayal of a special trust.

“Ten kinds of sinners engage in simple fraud:

“One, Seducers and Panders,

“Two, Flatterers,

“Three, Simonists,

“Four, Fortune-Tellers and Sorcerers,

“Five, Grafters — those who give or accept bribes,

“Six, Hypocrites,

“Seven, Thieves,

“Eight, Evil Deceivers/Those Who Misuse Great Gifts,

“Nine, Schismatics; that is, those who caused divisions (in families, in politics, in religion, etc.), and

“Ten, Falsifiers; that is, Alchemists, Evil Impersonators, Counterfeiters, and Liars.

“Complex fraud is punished in Circle 9. Complex fraud does involve the betrayal of a special trust. Complex fraud is fraud to which is added treachery toward those to whom we have a special obligation to be honest and forthright. Four kinds of sinners engage in complex fraud:

“One, Traitors against kin/family,

“Two, Traitors against government,

“Three, Traitors against guests or hosts, and

“Four, Traitors against God — the worst sin possible.”

Dante said to Virgil, “I don’t understand why the sinners in Circle 5, those who could not control their anger, are not punished in Circle 7 along with those who are violent. We saw the sinners in Circle 5 fighting each other. Isn’t that violence?”

“The two sins are different,” Virgil replied. “In Circle 5 are punished those who are guilty of one kind of intemperance — they did not control their anger. The violence they do is not out of malice but rather out of intemperance.

“In Circle 7 (and Circles 8 and 9) are punished those who are guilty of malice. Instead of being guilty of not controlling themselves, they are guilty of using their self-control to deliberately commit violence (or fraud).”

“I have one more question,” Dante said. “How is usury offensive to God?”

Virgil replied, “Human industry and Nature are related. Human beings are meant to work the way that Nature does. A farmer does good by growing plants. This is the sort of work that human beings are supposed to do. A craftsman also works with Nature by taking raw materials and turning them into useful products. A usurer lends money at interest and makes money that way. The usurer does not make anything; the usurer produces neither food nor useful items. God wants human beings to work with Nature and to be productive.

“Now we are ready to continue our journey. We have grown used to the stench, and you now have a better understanding of the organization of Hell.”

*I think you have learned quite a lot, Virgil thought. You have learned the main point: The deeper you go into Hell, the worst the sins become. The sins of incontinence are the least evil. Lust is the least evil sin of all. The sins of incontinence are punished outside the walls of the*

*city of Dis, which is the city of Lucifer. The sins of heresy, violence, and fraud are punished within the walls of the city of Dis.*

*The sins of fraud are the most evil. The sins of complex fraud are more evil than the sins of simple fraud. Being a traitor against God is the worst sin possible. As you would expect, Lucifer, the angel who led the rebellion against God, is the worst sinner of all time.*

## Chapter 12: The Minotaur and the River of Boiling Blood

As Dante and Virgil continued on their journey, they saw ruins. They also saw the Minotaur, one of the guards of Circle 7.

*I know your story, Dante thought about the Minotaur. You are the half-human, half-bull offspring of Pasiphaë, the wife of King Minos of Crete, who is now the judge of the damned in the Inferno. Virgil and I saw him earlier. Pasiphaë fell in love with a bull, and in order to have sex with the bull, she crept inside a lifelike cow that she ordered the skilled inventor Daedalus to create. The result of their sexual union was the half-bull, half-man Minotaur, which was so violent that Daedalus created a labyrinth for the Minotaur to live in. The Minotaur feasted on the flesh of young Athenians who were given to the Cretans as tribute and put into the labyrinth with him. Eventually, Theseus, the King of Athens, was able to kill the Minotaur. He was afraid that he would get lost in the labyrinth, but Ariadne, Pasiphaë's daughter, helped him by telling him to tie one end of a ball of string to the entrance, then enter the Labyrinth. He was able to find his way out of the Labyrinth by using the string.*

The Minotaur saw Dante and Virgil. The sight so enraged the monster that it began to bite itself.

Virgil called to the Minotaur, “Do you think that you are seeing Theseus again — the man who killed you? You are mistaken, beast! The man who is with me is here to see your misery.”

The Minotaur then began to twist and turn with anger, the way that a bull does just before it dies.

Virgil said to Dante, “Run past the Minotaur while it is distracted by its anger.”

Virgil and Dante made it past the Minotaur, and they began to climb over the ruins they saw, the result of a great earthquake. As Dante climbed over the ruins, the rocks moved, unaccustomed as they were to the weight of a living man.

“The last time I climbed down here to this Circle, there were no ruins,” Virgil said. “I remember that an earthquake struck just before the Mighty Warrior took from Limbo the souls of those who were destined for Heaven. You know that event as the Harrowing of Hell. That earthquake caused the ruins you see here.

“But now look into the valley. There you will see a river of boiling blood in which are punished those who were physically violent against others.”

Dante looked, and in addition to the river of boiling blood he saw Centaurs — beings with the body of a horse but the torso, arms, and head of a man. They were the guards here, and they were armed with bows and arrows.

*Have you noticed that so many guards in the Inferno are half-man, half-beast? Virgil thought. There is a reason for that. Sin can be bestial in nature. Certainly, the sins of violence are bestial in nature; after all, many animals are red in tooth and claw because they kill other animals in order to eat them. Human beings at their finest are not like animals; human beings at their worst are very much like carnivorous animals.*

The Centaurs saw Dante and Virgil, and one shouted at them, “Who are you, and for what Circle of Hell are you destined? Speak, or I will draw my bow!”

Virgil shouted at the Centaur, “I will answer your questions when we reach you and can talk to Chiron. You are as rash as ever, so I won’t answer you now.”

Virgil then said to Dante, “Not all of the Centaurs are violent — Chiron, the leader of the Centaurs, was the noted tutor of Hercules, the ancient physician Aesculapius, and Achilles —

but enough Centaurs are violent that they are appropriate guards of the violent who physically harmed others.

“The Centaur who challenged us is Nessus, who is violent. He seized Hercules’ wife, Dejanira, and tried to rape her. Hercules killed Nessus with an arrow that had been dipped in the poisonous blood of the monstrous Hydra, but before Nessus died, he told Dejanira to soak a shirt with his blood, and if she ever doubted Hercules’ fidelity to her, to have him wear that shirt. When Dejanira later gave Hercules the shirt to wear, the Hydra-poisoned blood of the Centaur burned Hercules’ skin so painfully that he committed suicide.

“Many of the Centaurs are as violent as Nessus. In Thessaly, the Centaurs were invited to a wedding, but grew drunk and tried to rape the women guests.

“As you can see, the Centaurs are the guards here. Being immersed in the river of boiling blood punishes these sinners who were physically violent against other people. These violent people caused the blood of other people to flow; now they are immersed in blood. Each sinner is appointed a certain level to be immersed in the river; the more blood the sinner caused to flow on earth, the more deeply they are immersed in the river. Centaurs shoot arrows at sinners who try to rise above their appointed level in the river.”

When Virgil and Dante reached the group of three Centaurs, Chiron, their leader, said to the other Centaurs, “Have you noticed how this one moves the stones he steps on? He is alive! The souls of dead people can’t do what he does!”

“This man is indeed alive,” Virgil said to Chiron. “My divine duty is to take him through Hell — a journey that he makes out of necessity. A soul from Heaven gave me this task. This living man is not a sinner trying to escape from Hell, and I am acting in accordance with the will of the Heavenly lady who came to me.

“Please give us a guide to escort us across the river of boiling blood at the ford. This living man needs to be carried over.”

Chiron ordered Nessus, “You be their guide and escort. Make sure that no one interferes with them.”

*Obviously, Chiron is intelligent, Virgil thought. He realized that Dante is a living man, and he immediately made up his mind to help us.*

As they moved along the river of boiling blood, Nessus pointed out some of the sinners being punished. Among the sinners up to their eyelids in boiling blood are cruel tyrants such as Alexander the Great. According to the Christian historian Orosius, Alexander the Great was cruel and violent. Attila the Hun, another noted warrior, is also immersed in boiling blood here. Being immersed in boiling blood up to his eyelids punishes Ezzelino, who burned 11,000 people at the stake on one occasion, here. Other violent sinners are up to their chests, waists, knees, or feet in blood.

As Nessus, Dante, and Virgil moved along the river, it got shallower and shallower until they reached the ford, and Nessus carried Dante and Virgil across it. Dante and Virgil dismounted, and Nessus crossed the river and returned to Chiron.

*Dante did not speak to anyone here, nor did he need to, Virgil thought. Although Dante has sinned, violence is not one of his sins.*

## Chapter 13: The Suicides (Inferno)

Not yet had Nessus reached the other bank of the river of boiling blood than Dante and Virgil were walking in a forest that did not have a path. No green leaves could be seen, but only black leaves. No smooth branches could be seen, but only entangled and crooked branches. No fruit could be seen, but only poisonous thorns. No grubby wood such as this exists anywhere in the Land of the Living.

Here were the Harpies, who are half-human and half-bestial. Part of them is female and human, and part of them is a bird. With their human faces, they shriek, and with their wings, they fly.

“Remember where you are,” Virgil told Dante. “We have left the river of boiling blood, and soon we will be in a desert of burning sand. Right now, we are in the second of the three areas that punish those sinners who are guilty of violence. This wood is more remarkable than you think right now. Look carefully around you. I will not tell you what you are seeing because you would not believe my words.”

Dante looked, and he listened. All he saw were grubby shrubs, but he could hear the sounds of lament coming from somewhere — he knew not where — in addition to the shrieks of the Harpies. Puzzled by the sounds of lament, he stopped.

One of Virgil’s powers was being able to read Dante’s mind. He knew why Dante was puzzled, and so he said, “Break off one of the branches you see in this forest, and your puzzlement will vanish.”

Dante broke off a branch, and the place where the branch had been attached to the shrub oozed with blood. The blood bubbled, and a voice complained, “Why do you injure me by tearing off one of my branches? Why don’t you pity the pain I am suffering? All of us shrubs were human beings once, but even if we had been snakes you should show us more pity.”

Dante dropped the branch he had broken off.

Virgil said to the sinner whose branch had been broken off, “I knew that my companion would never believe with words alone what he is now seeing, so I urged him to break your branch. Unfortunately, even though I wrote about a similar event in my *Aeneid*, I knew that my companion would not believe unless he had direct experience.”

*That is true, Virgil thought. In my Aeneid, Aeneas broke a branch and then the shrub began to bleed and to speak to him. It turned out that Polydorus, a Prince of Troy, was buried there. The prince was murdered with spears so the murderers could take his wealth. The body fell to the ground, and the spears took root and grew.*

“Please, tell my companion who you were. He can keep your name alive in the Land of the Living. You need not be forgotten. My companion is still alive, and he will return to the Land of the Living.”

“Your words please me very much,” the shrub said. “I want to be remembered. My name is Pier delle Vigne — Peter of the Vines. I served the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II.”

*Pay attention, Dante, Virgil thought. Remember who Frederick II is. Frederick II fought the Pope for control of Italy. He died in 1250, and we know that Frederick II ended up in the Inferno in a tomb with Farinata, so we know that he died an unrepentant sinner.*

“I was the Chief of Staff to Frederick II,” Pier delle Vigne continued. “I controlled who got access to the Holy Roman Emperor. I also advised Frederick II — I advised him on whether something was good or bad. I served him so faithfully that I lost sleep through overwork as well as losing my life. Envy turned up in the court of Frederick II, who was my Caesar. Envy

made all the others my enemies, and my enemies turned Frederick II — my Augustus — against me. False accusations were made about me, and they were believed. Even though I was loyal and just to Frederick II, I behaved unjustly against myself. When you return to the Land of the Living, tell everyone that I was loyal to my emperor. Tell everyone that I am here because of the blow that Envy gave me.”

*Be careful, Dante, Virgil thought. Like other sinners in the Inferno, Pier delle Vigne has told his story in a very self-serving way. He is blaming Envy for his problems. Envy turned everyone against him. Envious people convinced Frederick II that Pier was disloyal to him, so he put Pier in prison. While in prison, Pier committed suicide. Of course, we know that Pier — not Envy — was the person who committed suicide. In addition, Pier delle Vigne overvalued Frederick II, whom he calls “Caesar” and “Augustus.” And because Pier is in the Inferno, we know that he undervalued God. Of course, although Pier delle Vigne was loyal to Frederick II during Pier’s life, he was disloyal to God when he committed suicide.*

Virgil then said to Dante, “If you wish to know anything more, ask your questions now.”

“You may ask him questions,” Dante replied. “I am so overcome with pity for him that I cannot say anything more to him.”

*Why are you overcome with pity? Virgil thought. Do you pity him because of the false accusations that envious people made against him? That kind of pity is acceptable. Or do you pity him because he committed suicide? That kind of pity is unacceptable. I hope that you are learning not to allow yourself to be scammed by these sinners who, after all, are exactly where they ought to be. I hope that you have learned something since you spoke with Francesca da Rimini.*

*And, Dante, you have much to learn here. You will be under attack one day. You will lose your political position, and you will be exiled. Like Pier delle Vigne, you will be discouraged and you will wonder whether life is worth living.*

*The main thing you can learn here is to not act like Pier delle Vigne. Pier delle Vigne committed suicide, and he ended up in the Inferno. If you, Dante, commit suicide when you are discouraged, you can end up in the same place as Pier delle Vigne.*

*I know that you will be sent into exile, and I know that you will be discouraged, but if you wish to stay away from eternal punishment in the Inferno, you must respond to your discouragement differently from the way that Pier delle Vigne responded to his discouragement.*

*As human beings, we have free will, and we can choose how we respond to disaster. We can give in to discouragement and commit suicide, or we can respond in a more courageous way.*

Virgil then said to Pier delle Vigne, “So that my companion may keep your name, please tell him how souls become shrubs here, and please tell him whether a soul will ever leave these shrubs.”

“Briefly,” Pier said, “after a person commits suicide, Minos judges his soul and sends it here in Circle 7. The soul drops in this wood the way a seed drops. The soul germinates like a seed and grows into a shrub. The Harpies then feast on it, breaking its branches and causing it pain. By breaking a shrub’s branches, the Harpies give it an outlet through which to express grief as the blood comes bubbling from the wound.

“Like the other souls in the Inferno, we will be given our bodies on Judgment Day, but our soul will not be reunited with our body. Instead, our body will hang from our branches. We rejected our body, and therefore it will not be reunited with our soul.”

*Here we have another contrapasso, Virgil thought. The suicides are the grubby shrubs of this wood. The suicides cannot even determine when they will talk; they can communicate only when one of their twigs or branches is broken because they use the resulting hole as a mouth*

*until the blood congeals — the blood oozes from the wound the way that sap oozes from a broken twig or branch.*

*The punishment of the suicides is appropriate because by killing themselves, the suicides gave up the privilege of self-determination. As shrubs, the suicides have no free will because plants have no free will. This is appropriate because in life the suicides rejected free will by committing suicide.*

*Because the suicides gave up their privilege of self-determination, they no longer have self-determination in the Inferno. Minos throws their souls into Circle 7, and the souls sprout wherever they fall. As grubby shrubs, the suicides cannot move around, and they cannot even speak unless someone breaks off a twig or branch.*

*The suicides have no free will because they rejected the chance to use free will to solve their problems. The suicides rejected their bodies, so they will not be reunited with their bodies.*

*In life, the suicides mutilated themselves. Now, as shrubs, they can no longer mutilate themselves.*

Just then, Virgil and Dante heard the sound of a hunt when dogs chase their prey. Two naked souls came running, crashing amidst the shrubs and breaking many branches, causing the souls who were the shrubs to cry out in pain.

One of the naked souls said, “I wish that death would come quickly.”

The other naked soul replied, “Lano, you did not run so quickly when you were in battle.”

*I know who these sinners are, Virgil thought. They are Lano of the wealthy Maconi family and Giacomo da Sant’ Andrea. They are Profligates who violently wasted their wealth so they are here in the Circle that punishes the violent. Giacomo da Sant’ Andrea once deliberately set on fire several houses that he owned just because he wanted to. Lano of Siena violently wasted his wealth, and then he deliberately sought death in a 1287 battle; he could have escaped by retreating, but stayed to fight so that he would die. That is a kind of suicide.*

*The spendthrifts who are punished in Circle 4 merely wasted their wealth, while the profligates here in Circle 7 violently wasted their wealth and then courted death.*

Tired, Giacomo da Sant’ Andrea hid himself among the shrubs, while Lano continued running. The black dogs that had been pursuing the two profligates found Giacomo da Sant’ Andrea and tore him to pieces, and then they carried away the pieces in their mouths.

While tearing apart Giacomo da Sant’ Andrea, the black dogs also broke many branches of the shrub, and Virgil brought Dante close so that he could hear the shrub complain: “Giacomo da Sant’ Andrea, why did you hide in me? You have brought me much pain because you brought to me the black dogs that tore my branches and took my leaves from me.”

Virgil asked the shrub, “Who are you?”

The shrub answered, “I am a Florentine who committed suicide by hanging myself in my home. The first patron of Florence was Mars, the Roman god of war. But Florence exchanged this patron for John the Baptist, whose image is stamped on the gold coins of Florence. Because of this, Mars swears that endless sorrow will come to Florence.”

## Chapter 14: The Desert with Falling Flames (Inferno)

Because of Dante's love of Florence, he gathered up the leaves that had been torn from the bush that was the soul of the anonymous Florentine, and he left them by the bush.

Dante and Virgil continued walking, and they reached the third part of Circle 7. Already they had seen the river of boiling blood and the wood of the suicides. Now they came to a desert of burning sand. Nothing grew here, and nothing could ever grow here. Nothing was in this infertile desert but burning-hot sand and the flakes of fire that rained continuously down on the suffering sinners.

The sinners were of three kinds. Some sinners lay on their backs, facing upward. Other sinners were hunched over looking at something hanging from their necks. Yet other sinners were continuously running.

The greatest number of sinners belonged to the groups who were continuously running, but the loudest sinners were those who lay on their backs because they were most exposed to the falling flakes of flame and so they suffered the most.

The pain felt here came from two places: above and below. The flames fell from above, but the sand below was so hot that it burned all the sinners where they touched it.

Almost everywhere sinners were constantly moving their hands to put out the flames that fell on them. First on one side and then on the other side, flames fell. First on one side and then on the other side, hands moved to put out the flames. The dance of the hands was almost universal. Just one sinner did not deign to put out the flames.

Dante asked Virgil, "Who is the sinner who ignores the flames? Although he could move his hands to put them out, he does not."

The sinner heard Dante and replied for Virgil: "I am the same here in Hell as I was while I was alive. Jupiter killed me because I blasphemed. I was one of the seven who attacked Thebes, and I challenged any of the gods, including Jupiter, to attempt to withstand me. Jupiter heard my boast and my challenge, and he killed me with a thunderbolt."

Virgil then said to the sinner, "Capaneus, yes, you blasphemed against your god, and so you are punished here. Your sullenness and pride make the pain you feel even worse because they stop you from brushing the flames away from your body."

Virgil turned to Dante and said, "As Capaneus has said, he was one of the seven kings who attacked Thebes. His blasphemy has sentenced him here, and here he is still blaspheming."

Virgil thought, *The blasphemers, sodomites, and greedy moneylenders are punished in this scorching desert. All of these sinners have committed sins in which they are violent against God or God's gifts. All of these sinners have committed sins in which they either take something that should be fertile and make it infertile or take something that should be infertile and make it fertile. These sinners are on a sandy, infertile desert on which fire rains down and on which nothing can grow.*

*The blasphemers ought to have loved God, but they cursed God instead. The love of God ought to be fertile and result in good things, but the blasphemers cursed something that ought to be regarded as valuable. Now they lie in the burning, infertile desert and face upward, looking toward that which they cursed. Of course, when they open their mouths to curse God, flakes of fire fall into their mouths.*

*In contrast, the greedy moneylenders took something that ought to be infertile and made it fertile. The Bible, which Dante has studied, is against lending money at interest to relatives or*



*to poor people, but the greedy moneylenders lent money at interest when they ought not to. The greedy moneylenders are hunched over, looking at the moneybags that hang from their neck.*

*Finally, the sodomites took something that ought to be fertile and made it infertile. Instead of having sex of a kind that results in children, they had sex of a kind that can never result in children. For this sin, they run continuously in groups with other sodomites.*

*All of these groups are violent against God. God is not a physical person (except in the case of the Incarnation), so someone may ask, How can a sinner be violent against God?*

*Blasphemers are violent against God directly. They curse God directly. The greedy moneylenders and the sodomites are violent against God indirectly. The greedy moneylenders take advantage of the poor, although God has several commandments saying to take care of the poor, not harm them. The sodomites are against God in that they are going against the commandment to “Be fruitful and multiply.”*

Virgil said to Dante, “Now let us continue our journey. The wood lines the desert. Stay in the wood and do not set foot on the burning sand.”

They walked on until they reached a stream of reddish water. This was a branch from the river of boiling blood. Its bed and banks were made of stone, and it crossed the burning, infertile desert.

“This stream is our way across the burning desert,” Virgil said to Dante. “Above it, the falling flakes of flame are put out. This stream is the most remarkable sight you have yet seen in Hell.”

Intrigued by Virgil, Dante asked him to explain more about the stream.

“In the Mediterranean is an island called Crete,” Virgil said, “and on that island is the place where Rhea hid Jupiter, her son, from his father, Saturn, a monster who usually devoured his children. Whenever the young Jupiter cried, Rhea ordered her servants to shout loudly to conceal Jupiter’s presence from his cannibalistic father.

“A statue of an old man is located on Crete. The Old Man of Crete is made of many kinds of materials, which grow less in quality descending from the head to the feet. The Old Man’s head is made of gold, his arms and shoulders and chest are made of silver, the rest of his torso is made of brass, and his legs and one foot are made of iron. His other foot — the right one — is made of baked clay.”

Virgil thought, *And so it is with the ages of man. At first there was a golden age, which was followed by a silver age, which was followed by other ages that became successively more degraded.*

Virgil continued, “The Old Man of Crete shows his back to the Egyptian seaport Damietta, symbol of the pagan world. The Old Man of Crete faces Rome, home of the Pope and symbol of the Christian world.

“Except for the golden head, the statue is flawed. The eyes of the statue drip tears. The tears flow to the ground and become the streams and rivers and pools of the Inferno. These are those streams and rivers and pools:

“The Acheron, over which Charon ferries the souls of the dead.

“The Styx, a marsh in which the angry and the sullen and the slothful are punished.

“The Phlegethon, a name that means fiery.

“The Cocytus, which you will later see for yourself.”

Dante asked, “You did not mention the Lethe, and when will I see the Phlegethon?”

Virgil replied, “You have already seen the Phlegethon, which was the river of boiling blood in which the physically violent were punished.

“You will see the Lethe later, but not in Hell. It is in a place where those who have purged themselves of sin gather to wash.

“Now it is time to move on. Stay by me, and stay by the stream. Above the stream the flakes of falling flames are put out.”

## Chapter 15: Brunetto Latini (Inferno)

As Dante and Virgil continued walking, Dante observed the burning desert. He saw that the stone bank of the river was like a wall built in a country below sea level to keep sea water out of a field so that it could be used to grow crops. In that case, the walls make the field fertile rather than infertile. Here in the burning desert, of course, the wall is unable to make the burning desert fertile.

Virgil and Dante had left the wood of the suicides far behind, and now one of the groups of running sinners were coming towards them.

*These are some of the sodomites, Virgil thought. They are men who sought sex with other men. They took something that ought to be fertile and made it infertile.*

The men looked at Dante the way that some men will look at other men at night, and one of the sodomites recognized Dante and touched the hem of his clothing and shouted, "This is a marvel!"

Dante looked closely at the burned features of the sodomite, recognized him as a man he had known and still respected, and said, "Is this really you here, Sir?"

*This is Brunetto Latini, Virgil thought. This sodomite was famous for his writings, including the Trésor, which recounted much encyclopedic knowledge of his day. After the Battle of Montaperti in 1260, he was exiled from Florence. In addition to being a scholar, he was a Guelf.*

*You have something to learn here, Dante. You do not have homosexual feelings, yet you have something to learn from Brunetto Latini. He was a scholar, but he was very concerned with becoming famous through his writing. You, Dante, need to be more concerned with telling the truth in your writing than with becoming famous through your writing.*

*You, Dante, are in the Inferno to learn things that will keep you out of the Inferno. What you need to learn here is to not take something that should be fertile and make it infertile. This, of course, is what the sodomites do. No amount of homosexual intercourse will result in the birth of a baby from that union.*

*Souls in the Inferno know the future, and so I know that you will later be engaged in what should be a fertile act: the writing of The Divine Comedy. To make that work fertile, you must tell the truth in it. What could make the act of writing The Divine Comedy infertile? If you write in order to become famous instead of writing in order to say the truth, The Divine Comedy will not be the fertile work of art that it could and should be.*

Brunetto said to Dante, "If it is OK with you, I would like to talk to you for a while, while I let the rest of my group run on ahead."

Dante replied, "I would like that. Please stay a while and talk to me, as long as my companion here does not mind."

"I will, then," Brunetto said, "but I must keep on running beside you. Any of my group who stops for even a moment is condemned to lie on the burning sand for a hundred years, and he is unable to brush the burning flakes of fire from his body during that time."

Dante continued walking, but he kept his head low to show respect to his friend. Of course, he did not dare to step onto the burning sand.

"You are still alive, so why are you here?" Brunetto asked. "You obviously have an impressive destiny. Who is your guide?"

"In the living world, I lost my way," Dante said. "I have been trying to find my way to the right path, and yesterday this soul appeared to serve as my guide. This path through Hell is

actually the right path to lead me to the path I ought to be on.”

*Way to go, Dante, Virgil thought. You no longer think that your great genius is responsible for your being here, although Brunetto seems to think that. Instead, you realize that you so messed up your life that this journey is necessary to save your soul.*

“Dante, you are gifted,” Brunetto said. “You are going to be famous. Your name will be in lights. I saw that clearly when I was alive, and if I had not died when I did, I would have continued to encourage you.

“But not everyone feels about you the way that I do. Some people are your enemies. You will do good deeds, but those people will not recognize them. They will make your life hard. Do not allow them to keep you from your destiny and from the fame that ought to be yours.”

“I wish that you were still alive,” Dante replied. “When you were alive, you taught me how people can make themselves eternal.”

*Be careful, Dante, Virgil thought. You say that Brunetto taught you how people can make themselves eternal. That is a reference to becoming famous on Earth through writing.*

*Yet Brunetto is in Hell for all eternity. Brunetto did not teach you about the right kind of “eternal.” Brunetto was all about gaining eternal fame on Earth, not eternal life in Heaven.*

*If you, Dante, were to concentrate on becoming famous rather than telling the truth in The Divine Comedy, you may end up like Brunetto, with fame that is not long lasting on Earth and with punishment that is eternal in the Inferno.*

*If you, Dante, were to concentrate on becoming famous rather than telling the truth in The Divine Comedy, you might not put Popes in Hell, but instead flatter them so that you could be their guests and drop their names to other people.*

*If you, Dante, were to concentrate on becoming famous rather than telling the truth in The Divine Comedy, you might not put any of your friends in your Inferno, but instead you might put only your enemies in your Inferno.*

Dante continued talking to Brunetto, “I will write down your prophecy about the enemies who will want to hurt me. A Heavenly lady will be able to make clearer to me all that you have said. I have heard other prophecies that she can also interpret.”

Virgil, pleased that Dante had listened carefully to what had been said to him, repeated a proverb to Dante, “He listens well who notes well what he hears.”

Dante then asked Brunetto about some of the other sinners with him.

Brunetto replied that many clerics and many men of letters were in his group. By name he mentioned Francesco d’Accorso, a lawyer from Florence who also had taught law at the University of Bologna, and Andrea de’ Mozzi, who from 1287 to 1295 had been the Bishop of Florence.

Then Brunetto said, “I would like to stay and talk with you longer, but I cannot. The dust rising from the desert over there shows that a new group of sinners is arriving, and I must not mingle with them.

“I do ask of you one thing: Remember my *Trésor*. On it my fame rests.”

Then Brunetto, a naked sinner, raced away the way a naked runner at Verona would compete in a race. He ran quickly, as if he would take the first prize.

*I hope that you, Dante, have learned what you ought to have learned, Virgil thought. Brunetto truly has a keen interest in fame. However, compromising your artistic vision for fame is a sin. If you don’t tell the truth in your art, your art will not live on and it will not positively affect other people.*

*Ironically, if you do tell the truth in your art, it can live on and positively affect other people, and your fame will be greater than if you had compromised your artistic vision. You, Dante, may be remembered as one of the greatest poets who ever lived. At best, Brunetto will*

*be a footnote in future scholarly volumes. If you achieve your destiny, Dante, and if you resist writing simply in order to be famous, anyone who reads the Trésor hundreds of years from now will read it only in the hope that he or she will learn more about you, Dante.*

*Books should be fertile; books written only to make the writer famous are infertile.*

## Chapter 16: The Violent Against Nature (Continued) (Inferno)

Now Dante and Virgil could hear a waterfall in the distance, indicating that they were approaching the boundary of this Circle and would have to soon find a way down to the next Circle: Circle 8.

At this point three sodomites saw Dante and broke away from their group and started running toward him, shouting, “By your clothing, you seem to come from our city: polluted Florence! Stop and speak with us for a while.”

Dante looked at them and saw their wounds from the falling flakes of flame. Some wounds were old, and many wounds were new. Clearly, these souls had suffered and were suffering.

Virgil heard the shout and looked at the three sinners coming toward Dante and him. He told Dante, “I recognize these sinners, and they are worthy of your respect. If not for the burning plain, *you* should be running toward *them*.”

The three sodomites arrived, and they formed a circle and kept running to avoid the punishment of lying on the sand for 100 years, unable to brush away the flames from their body. In the circle they moved the way that a professional wrestler, oiled and naked, will move as he looks over his opponent to see which grip will be best before the real wrestling action begins. As they ran in the circle, each sinner kept his eyes on Dante.

“If our punishment makes you less willing to speak to us,” one sinner said, “perhaps our great fame on Earth will lead you to speak with us. We would like to know who you are, and how you — a living man — are able to walk through Hell.

“The sinner in front of me is Guido Guerra, a warrior and adviser. In 1260, the Florentine Guelfs attacked Siena at Montaperti. Before the battle, Guido Guerra advised the Florentine Guelfs not to attack Siena.

“The sinner behind me is Tegghiaio Aldobrandi, who also advised the Florentine Guelfs not to attack Siena at Montaperti. He knew that many mercenaries had joined the Siennese forces and therefore were very likely to be victorious in the battle.

“As all Florentines now know, they should have accepted these men’s advice. The Siennese won the Battle of Montaperti and routed the Guelfs. Farinata, who is punished among the heretics, was one of the generals of the Siennese and their allied forces.

“I am Jacopo Rusticucci, and I was wealthy. My wife was unpleasant, and I sent her home to her father. She was reluctant to do what I wanted her to do, and I blame my sodomy on her.”

Dante knew the biographies of these sinners, and he respected them. Guilty they were of sodomy, but they had been good patriots who loved Florence and wanted the best for her, just like Dante. He would have joined them, but the burning sand prevented him from going to them.

Dante said to the sinners, “I feel grief for the punishment you are suffering. As you think, I am from Florence, your city, and I have heard much about you and about your love for her and about your accomplishments.

“I am on a journey to a better place, but first I must walk through Hell, going down to the very center of the Earth and thus to the bottom of the Inferno.”

“Please tell us about Florence,” Jacopo Rusticucci requested. “Are Florentines filled with courtesy and valor, or are these qualities no longer found in the city?”

“We have heard from a newly arrived sinner, Guglielmo Borsiere, that Florence is in bad shape.”

“You have heard truly,” Dante said. “Newly rich people encourage pride and encourage unrestraint and make Florence weep.”

All three sinners said, “Thank you for so clearly answering the question. You are fortunate in being able to speak so clearly and so well. If you are equally fortunate in being able to return to the Land of the Living, keep our memory alive among living men.”

The three sinners then raced to rejoin their group.

Virgil and Dante continued walking, and the sound of the waterfall grew much louder, making it difficult for them to hear what the other spoke. They had reached the pit again and needed to go down to the next Circle.

Dante wore a cord around his waist to serve as a belt, much as the Franciscans did. He had thought earlier to use it to catch the leopard that was keeping him in the dark wood of error and keeping him from ascending to the light — his self-confidence was too abundant and too foolish then.

Virgil requested that cord, and Dante untied it and handed it to him. Virgil then threw it into the abyss.

Dante thought, *We will see something strange soon. The cord is a signal.*

Virgil has many powers. One power is to always know what time it is by the location of the heavenly bodies such as the Sun and the Moon and the planets even though the Inferno is always dark. Another is great strength. And yet another is to know what Dante is thinking.

Virgil said to Dante, “As you think, soon you will see something strange — something that will respond to my signal.” Almost immediately, Dante saw a figure rising from below through the air. The figure appeared to be swimming in the air.

## Chapter 17: Geryon (Inferno)

“Behold the monster that makes the world stink!” Virgil said to Dante as he motioned for the monster to land.

And the monster — the embodiment of fraud — did land.

Dante and Virgil saw the guard of the Circles dedicated to punishing fraud: Geryon, a creature with a face like that of an honest man, a body made of a combination of parts of beasts, and a stinging tail like that of a scorpion.

*Geryon has three parts, Virgil noted. Like other triune guards, Geryon is a perversion of the Holy Trinity.*

*Geryon is an appropriate guard of Circle 8 because he embodies fraud. His honest-looking face encourages people to trust him, while he hides his tail that will sting his victim. Geryon usually stings the sinners who ride on his back, but he won't do that to Dante and me. When Geryon first gets sinners to trust him and then he stings them with his scorpion's tail, he commits fraud.*

*Look at Geryon. He is displaying his honest-looking face, but he is trying to keep his stinging tail out of sight; it is hanging down the cliff leading to the next Circle. He is trying to commit fraud even as I look at him.*

*Geryon provides transportation to the next Circle. Minos flings sinners down into Hell, but at least some sinners must travel further down to the Circle where they will be punished. Just as Phlegyas the ferryman takes sinners across the Styx, so Geryon flies sinners from Circle 7 to Circle 8.*

Dante was surprised by the way the monster looked. His face made you want to trust him, but the rest of him was animalistic. He had clawed paws, not hands. He had hairy legs instead of arms. His back, his belly, and his flanks seemed to be painted with exotic designs like those of some snakes. And he had a stinging tail like that of a scorpion, although he was attempting to keep it out of sight.

“Now we need to go to the evil beast,” Virgil said to Dante. They did, being careful to stay off the burning sand. Dante looked around and saw some sinners close to the edge of the burning sand.

Virgil noticed Dante looking at the sinners and told him, “Go and see them. That will complete your knowledge of the torments in this Circle. But don't stay long. I will be here convincing the evil beast — whose name is Geryon — to take us down to Circle 8.”

Dante walked toward the sinners, who were in pain because of the flakes of flame falling from the sky onto them and because of the burning sand on which they crouched. Their hands moved constantly, brushing off flames and trying to provide some protection from the burning sand. They resembled dogs trying unsuccessfully to get relief from fleas as they constantly scratched here and scratched there.

Because when they were alive, the greedy moneylenders took something that ought to be infertile and made it fertile, now that they are dead, they are in this burning plain with fire raining down on them. Here they are bent over, just like living greedy moneylenders who bend over their tables and count their money. Hanging from the necks of these sinners in Hell are moneybags, which they gaze at greedily just as they did while they were living.

Dante looked carefully at the faces of several sinners, but he recognized no one, although he knew that the sinners were greedy moneylenders because of the moneybags that were hanging from their necks. These sinners' love of money had kept them from accomplishing



something great in the Land of the Living. Because they were undistinguished in the Land of the Living, they cannot be distinguished in the Land of the Dead.

However, although Dante could not recognize any individual greedy moneylenders, he did recognize the families that the greedy moneylenders came from by looking the designs — the coats of arms — on their moneybags. He identified a member of the Gianfigliuzzi family of Florence because the sinner had a yellow purse that was decorated with a blue lion. He identified a member of the Ubriachi family of Florence because the sinner had a red purse that was decorated with a goose. And he identified a member of the Scrovegni family of Padua because the sinner had a purse that was decorated with a blue sow.

The sinner who was a member of the Scrovegni family told Dante, “What are you looking at! Get away from me! What are you doing here!”

“But since you are alive, I will tell you that soon my neighbor Vitaliano will arrive here in this Circle of Hell and sit on my left. We will then have one more Paduan among all these Florentines.”

The Paduan then stuck his tongue out at Dante, who returned to Virgil lest he anger his guide by staying too long.

Virgil, who was already sitting on the back of Geryon, told Dante, “Now is the time for courage and strength. This is our transportation to the next Circle. Sit in front of me so that I will be between you and this monster’s stinging scorpion’s tail.”

Dante was afraid, but he obeyed Virgil and mounted Geryon’s back. He thought about asking Virgil to hold on to him, and Virgil, reading Dante’s mind, did just that.

Virgil then ordered the monster, “Geryon, take flight, and fly gently. Remember, on your back is a living person.”

Geryon launched himself in flight and descended.

Dante was afraid. He thought, *I am more afraid than Phaëthon was when he took flight. Phaëthon was Apollo’s son, but he was born to a mortal woman, and so he was a mortal. One day, he journeyed to see his father, who wanted to give him a gift — a gift consisting of anything he wanted. Phaëthon decided that he wanted to drive his father’s chariot. Apollo was the Sun-god, and he drove the chariot that warmed and lit the Earth. However, Apollo knew that only a god could handle the horses that drove the chariot, and he begged his son to choose another gift. However, Phaëthon was determined to drive the chariot. Since Apollo had sworn an inviolable oath by the River Styx, he had to let Phaëthon drive the chariot.*

*As Apollo had foreknown, Phaëthon could not control the horses, and the chariot drove wildly over the sky, coming too close to the Earth sometimes and going too far away from the Earth sometimes. Eventually, the chariot came so close to the Earth that the Earth was about to catch fire. Fortunately for the people living on the Earth, Jupiter killed Phaëthon with a thunderbolt and Apollo was able to drive the chariot again, and so everything went back to normal.*

*I am even more afraid than Icarus, Daedalus’ son, was when he fell out of the sky. Icarus was the son of Daedalus. Daedalus built the wooden cow that Pasiphaë crept into when she fell in love with a bull and wanted the bull to make love to her. After Pasiphaë gave birth to the Minotaur, Daedalus built the labyrinth that housed the Minotaur.*

*To make sure that no one could ever learn the secret of how to get out of the labyrinth, the King of Crete imprisoned Daedalus and Icarus, his son. Daedalus fashioned wings made out of wax and feathers so that he and his son could fly away from the island where they were imprisoned. Daedalus warned his son not to fly too high, for if he did the Sun would melt the wax, the feathers would fall out of the wings, and he would fall into the sea and drown.*

*That is exactly what happened. Icarus became excited because he was flying, he flew too high, the wax of his wings melted, and he drowned.*

Dante and Virgil could hear the roaring of the waterfall as they descended. Dante looked out at the terrain of Circle 8 as they descended, but leaning outward frightened him so much that he quickly stopped doing it.

Geryon was angry at Dante and Virgil because he had expected to be able to torment some newly arrived sinners when he answered the signal of the cord that had been used by Dante as a belt.

When Geryon descended in spirals from Circle 7 to Circle 8, he was like a falcon that was angry at its master. When Geryon landed, he made sure to land in such a way that Virgil and Dante were almost up against the jagged cliff.

And as soon as Virgil and Dante got off his back, Geryon took off like an arrow shot from a bowstring, getting away from Dante and Virgil as quickly as possible.

## Chapter 18: Panders and Seducers; Flatterers (Inferno)

At this point, Dante had seen seven of the nine Circles of the Inferno, as well as the Vestibule of Hell, where the uncommitted were punished. He had seen the first Circle of Hell: Limbo, the residence of the virtuous pagans and the unbaptized. He had seen the four Circles (2-5) devoted to punishing the sinners who were guilty of incontinence in lust, gluttony, hoarding money and wasting money, and anger. He had seen Circle 6, which is devoted to punishing the sinners who are guilty of heresy. And he had seen Circle 7, which punishes the violent in three different areas: 1) The river of boiling blood punishes the physically violent, 2) The grubby wood punishes the suicides, and it punishes those who had violently wasted their wealth and then courted death, and 3) The burning desert punishes those who were directly violent against God through blasphemy, those who were indirectly violent against God by doing violence to Nature, which had been created by God, through sodomy, and those who were indirectly violent against God by doing violence through rejecting God's laws regarding lending money at interest.

Now only two Circles remained. Circle 8 punishes those sinners who are guilty of simple fraud. Fraud involves the willful use of misrepresentation to deprive another person of his or her rights. For example, someone can claim to be able to foretell the future and charge people money to be told the future. Simple fraud is fraud, but it is not committed against those to whom one has a special obligation of trust.

Circle 9 punishes the worst sinners of all: those who are guilty of complex fraud. Complex fraud is fraud committed against those to whom one has a special obligation of trust. Sinners who commit complex fraud are traitors of various kinds: e.g., traitors to kin/family, traitors to government, traitors to guests, or traitors to God.

As Dante and Virgil descended from Circle 7 to Circle 8 on the back of Geryon, Dante had an aerial view of Circle 8. He saw that it was divided into 10 ditches or valleys or pockets that are known as the Malebolge, a plural word that means "evil pockets" or "evil pouches." They may be called that because the sinners here regard everything as being for sale. They wish to pocket money.

Each Malebolgia punishes a different kind of sinner who committed simple fraud, and some Malebolge punish two kinds of sinners whose sins are related.

Dante remembered what Virgil had told him earlier about Circle 8:

"Ten kinds of sinners engage in simple fraud:

"One, Seducers and Panders,

"Two, Flatterers,

"Three, Simonists,

"Four, Fortune-Tellers and Sorcerers,

"Five, Grafters — those who give or accept bribes,

"Six, Hypocrites,

"Seven, Thieves,

"Eight, Evil Deceivers/Those Who Misuse Great Gifts,

"Nine, Schismatics — those who cause divisions (in families, in politics, in religion, etc.),  
and

"Ten, Falsifiers, including Counterfeiters."

As Dante looked around as Geryon descended in circles, he noticed that bridges crossed over the Malebolge like the spokes of a wheel; however, he could see that at least one bridge

over the sixth evil pocket was broken — he did not have time to look at all of the bridges.

After Dante and Virgil had gotten off Geryon's back and Geryon had sped away, they walked to see the sinners in the first evil pocket. Here Dante saw his first horned devils of the Inferno. They were cruelly whipping the naked sinners as they walked, and they rejoiced in their work.

Dante saw a face that seemed familiar, so he looked closely at him. The sinner saw him and lowered his face in an attempt to keep from being recognized, but Dante recognized him anyway.

Virgil thought, *The sinners deep in the Inferno have committed worse sins than those who are high in the Inferno. For this reason, many of them don't want to be remembered on Earth. And, of course, misrepresentation is a part of fraud. These sinners may be trying to keep whatever good reputation they have on Earth.*

Dante said to the sinner, "I know you. You are Venedico Caccianemico. Why are you being punished in this evil pocket?"

Venedico Caccianemico knew that he had been recognized and that Dante would soon know his story even if he said nothing, so he answered Dante's question: "I used my own sister to advance myself. I let the Marquis of Este sleep with my sister, who was named Ghisolabella. As you can now tell, I am a pander.

"I am from the city of Bologna, and many more people from my city are here."

A devil whipped Venedico Caccianemico's back and told him, "Keep walking! No women are here for pimps like you to sell."

Dante and Virgil moved on and saw a second group of sinners walking in the opposite direction that the first group was walking. The first group of sinners consisted of panders or pimps; the second group of sinners consisted of seducers. The two sins are related in that both involve unethical sex, and so both kinds of sinners are punished in the first Malebolge.

Virgil told Dante, "Look at the imposing sinner coming toward us. He suffers pain, but he does not cry. He is Jason, of Jason and the Argonauts fame. He set out in the *Argo*, the first ship, to find the Golden Fleece, and he achieved his objective. He is a seducer. As a seducer he would sleep with women and then abandon them when he found it convenient to do so. He slept with Hypsipyle, and then he abandoned her when she was pregnant. She had twins. He married and had children with Medea, but then he abandoned her when someone he thought was better came along: Creusa, the daughter of Creon, the King of Corinth. Medea killed the children she had had with Jason in response.

"We have seen enough here. These sinners caused pain to others, and now they feel pain. Let us move on."

On the bridge crossing the second evil pocket, Dante and Virgil looked down at the sinners in the pocket, from which was arising a nauseating stench, and there they saw the flatterers. While they were alive, out of their mouths had come metaphorical crap: flattery. Now that they were dead in Hell, they were covered with literal crap: human excrement.

Dante saw a sinner's head that was so covered with crap that he was unable to tell if the sinner were a priest or a layman.

The sinner shouted at Dante, "Why do you stare at me more than at these other sinners?"

Dante knew the man then, and he replied, "I know you. You are Alessio Interminei from Lucca, and while you were alive you were known for your flattery."

Alessio Interminei replied, "Because of my continual flatteries while I was alive, I am stuck in this evil pocket."

Virgil then said to Dante, "Look at this woman here. She is scratching herself with her shitty fingernails — please forgive my use of this kind of language, for it is quite appropriate

in Hell. This woman is Thaïs the whore, who flattered her lover when he asked whether he deserved her thanks after he gave her a gift. She told him, 'You incredibly deserve my thanks.'  
"We have seen enough here. Let us move on."

## Chapter 19: The Simonists (Inferno)

*Simon Magus, you are among the worst sinners who have ever existed, as are your followers, Dante the Poet thought. You were the first to try to engage in the sin of simony, the buying and selling of church offices and spiritual benefits for money. I have read about you in Acts 8. Peter and John were using one of the gifts of God: the laying on of hands to convey the Holy Spirit. You, Simon Magus, were impressed by this and wanted to pay Peter and John money to teach you how to do that. Of course, Peter and John were insulted because the laying on of hands to convey the Holy Spirit is a free gift of God and is not for sale. They asked you to repent your sin.*

*Your followers also try to buy things that are not for sale. Someone who wants to become a bishop can do so by paying money to dishonest and corrupt people with power. Such people ought not to become bishops.*

*Why would someone want to buy a church office? They would look at it as an investment. They would be paying money to gain power and perhaps to gain more money. However, are these the people who should be in church offices? Do we want a Pope who has bought his way into that position? The answer is no. We prefer someone who deserves the position through his own merit. We prefer a meritocracy to a plutocracy.*

*The trouble with simony is that the people who deserve church offices because of their merit don't get them. Either they don't have the money to buy the church office, or they do have the money but won't buy the church office because they know that simony is wrong.*

*Dante the Pilgrim and Virgil had reached the third pocket, where the simonists are punished. Dante would rejoice when he found out how the simonists are punished in the third pocket of Circle 8.*

*Standing on the bridge above the third pocket, Dante looked down and saw a number of holes in the rock. The holes resembled the holes where priests would stand in a baptistery as they baptized people.*

*Dante remembered, I once smashed a baptistery, not as an action against the Church, but because a child was drowning in it. Rumors arose, however, that I was being sacrilegious.*

*Of course, Virgil knew what Dante was thinking — he had that power. Virgil thought, Anyone seeing Dante smash the baptistery would of course think that he was being sacrilegious, but of course he was saving a life, an action that his religion definitely approves of. Similarly, when a prophet criticizes some immoral practices of his religion, he may be seen as being sacrilegious, but of course he is not. The prophet is trying to make the practices of his religion better by criticizing immoral practices such as simony. If Dante tells the truth when he writes The Divine Comedy, he will criticize the bad practices of the Church as a way to make the Church reform itself and become better.*

*Dante saw legs sticking out of the holes in the rock. Flames were dancing on the sinners' feet; some of the flames were redder and hotter than other flames. The sinners in those holes were worse than the other sinners.*

*Dante asked Virgil, "Which sinner is that whose feet are burned by a hotter flame than the feet of the other sinners?"*

*Virgil replied, "The way down is steep, but I am strong and surefooted, so if you wish, I will carry you down there so that you may ask the sinner who he is and why he is here."*

*Dante was agreeable, and when they had reached the sinner, Dante asked, "Wretched soul, what are you? If you can speak, speak, if you are able."*

The soul mistook Dante for the soul of a sinner who would die three years later and be punished here: “Are you here already, Pope Boniface VIII? According to the Book of Fate, you are not supposed to die until 1303. Have you grown tired of engaging in simony and of tearing apart the Church?”

Dante was surprised by what the sinner had said, so he remained quiet, but Virgil advised him, “Tell the sinner that he is mistaken, that you are not who he thinks you are.”

Dante did as Virgil advised, and the sinner said, “What do you want? If you want to know my name, I am the son of the she-bear; that is, I am a member of the Orsini family. When I became Pope, I did not truly take a new name and leave my family behind to serve a new, greater family, even though people called me Pope Nicholas III. Instead, I kept the name of Orsini, and I used my position to advance the interests of my Orsini relatives. When I was alive, I was greedy to pocket wealth, and now that I am dead, I myself am pocketed.

“Under me are many other simonists. Soon, Pope Boniface VIII will arrive here and he will push me deeper in this hole just as my arrival here pushed other simonists deeper in this hole. Later, another simonist, Pope Clement V, will arrive and push Pope Boniface VIII and me and the other simonists here in this hole deeper.”

Dante was angry. He knew how bad is the sin of simony. He said sarcastically to Pope Nicholas III, “Exactly how much money did Peter have to pay to Jesus to get the keys to the gates of Heaven? I believe that he had to pay no money, but simply follow Jesus. How much money did Matthias have to pay to Peter and the other apostles to take Judas’ place? I believe that he had to pay no money, but simply to do God’s will.

“You deserve your punishment, for your sin is so great. You supported the side that paid the most money, so enjoy the reward you gained.

“Your sin of simony brings grief to the Church and to the world. It hurts the good, and it makes the bad happy.

“Your god is made of gold and silver coins. You are like an idolater, except that an idolater worships one idol, while you worship hundreds of idols.”

Then to himself, but loud enough for others to hear, Dante said, “Constantine, you meant well, but your gift of money and wealth to the Church helped make it corrupt!”

*Constantine was the first Christian Roman emperor, Virgil thought. When he moved from Rome to the city of Constantinople, he supposedly gave much power and material possessions to the Pope. The medieval belief was that Constantine deliberately moved East in order to reward Pope Sylvester with power and possessions because Pope Sylvester had cured him of leprosy. Dante believes that this Donation of Constantinople corrupted many Popes and the Church.*

*As a soul in the Inferno, I know the future. Actually, the so-called Donation of Constantine is a forgery, but this will be proved long after Dante’s day; not until the 15th century will the so-called Donation of Constantine be proved to be a forgery.*

Pope Nicholas III’s feet kicked harder than ever, perhaps out of anger or perhaps because he knew that Dante’s criticism was justified.

*Assassins are punished by being buried alive, Dante thought. I have seen assassins try to put off dying a few more moments by calling to a priest to come back so that they can confess one more sin. Anyone seeing us here could think that I am a priest and this sinner is an assassin. And this sinner really is an assassin. By engaging in simony, this sinner is an assassin of the Church.*

*This punishment is a parody of a number of things. It is a parody of baptism. Baptism is done with water, not with fire. And it is a parody of the Pentecost, in which fire came down*

*from above and sat on the heads of the followers of Jesus and they were able to speak in tongues.*

*In addition, the way the sinners are stuck headfirst in the hole is a reminder of how Simon Magus died. In the Acts of Peter, I have read about Simon Magus' death. Simon became a magician, and he learned to fly. Magus, of course, means magician. Simon was flying and criticizing the one true God, so Saint Peter prayed for Simon to fall, and he fell. The way these sinners are stuck headfirst in the hole resembles an image of Simon Magus falling and hitting the ground headfirst.*

*I can certainly understand why you sinners are upside down here. You sinners are upside down because you placed things upside down in the living world — you placed material things before spiritual things, thus upsetting their proper order.*

Dante noticed that Virgil was smiling.

*Dante, this is a job well done, Virgil thought. Your opinion of the sin of simony is exactly right. You started this journey naïve, but you are wising up.*

Virgil picked Dante up and carried him up out of the pocket. When he had carried Dante down into the ditch, he had carried Dante at his side. Now, because he was pleased with Dante, he hugged him to his chest.

Dante and Virgil walked to the next pocket.



## Chapter 20: The Soothsayers and Fortune Tellers (Inferno)

Dante and Virgil now were on the bridge above the fourth bolgia. Looking down, Dante saw that the sinners were crying as they walked around the Circle; the floor of the Circle was wet with tears. Dante also saw that the sinners were twisted in a grotesque way; their heads were twisted so that the face was above the back, not above the chest. As the sinners cried, their tears ran down their backs and into the cleft of their buttocks.

Dante cried, too — something that Virgil did not like.

*Dante is a backslider, Virgil thought. He realized that simony is a great sin indeed, but now he pities how the sinners are being punished in the fourth bolgia.*

“Dante, you are a fool,” Virgil said. “The Inferno is not a place for pity. Every soul here deserves to be here, and every soul here is punished in a very appropriate way.

“The sinners in this fourth bolgia are the soothsayers and the fortune tellers. They tried to look too far ahead in the future, and now they are punished by not being able to look ahead at all. Now they travel by walking backward because they can see only backward, not forward.

“Look around you. Here is a sinner who was one of the Seven Against Thebes. The two sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices, decided to share the rule of Thebes after their father abdicated the throne. Each brother was supposed to rule for a year and then allow the other brother to take the throne for a year; however, after ruling for a year, Eteocles refused to step down from the throne and allow Polynices to rule for a year. Therefore, Polynices raised an army and marched against Thebes and his brother.

“Amphiaraus was one of the seven generals of the army marching against Thebes and Eteocles. He foresaw that he would die if he fought against Thebes, so he attempted to hide himself so that he would not have to fight. However, his wife revealed his hiding place, so he had to go on the military expedition. During the attack on Thebes, the Earth opened up and he fell into the chasm, dying as he had foreseen. He appeared before Minos, who never errs. Minos judged him and sent him here.

“Now look at Tiresias, the most famous prophet of Thebes. You have read about him in Book Three of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Tiresias was famous enough to be consulted by Odysseus in the Underworld in Homer’s *Odyssey*.

“Tiresias lived life as both a man and a woman. He once saw two snakes having sex, and he hit them with his staff. As his punishment, Hera turned him into a woman. Tiresias married and gave birth to Manto, his daughter, who was also a prophet. After seven years as a woman, he again saw two snakes having sex, and he again hit them with his staff and changed sexes, this time turning back into a man. Because Tiresias had lived life as both a man and a woman, when Zeus and Hera quarreled over who enjoyed sex more — the man or the woman — they turned to Tiresias to settle the argument. Tiresias said that women enjoyed sex more, and Hera struck him blind.

“Because Tiresias tried to see too far into the future, he is punished here.

“Now look at Tiresias’ daughter, Manto, whose long hair now covers her breasts instead of her back, while her hairy parts are now in back and not in front. Manto was a soothsayer at Thebes. After Tiresias died, she went to Italy and founded Mantua, the city where I, Virgil, was born.

“Listen carefully, and I will you the true story of how my city, Mantua, was founded. Truth is important, and I don’t want you to believe any inaccurate stories of how Mantua was founded.

“Manto saw land lying surrounded mostly by a marsh. She moved there and died there. After she died, men arrived and build a town there because it was well protected by the marsh. They named their town after Manto.”

*Learn from this story, Virgil thought. The theme of my story is truth. The story of the founding of Mantua is controversial, with more than one version. I am here telling the true story. Truth, of course, is something that people engaging in fraud wish to hide.*

*You, Dante, must say the truth in your writing. If you tell the true story of the founding of Mantua in your Divine Comedy, you will be letting your readers know that you care about truth. You will be establishing your credibility. Because your readers will know that you care about the truth of the founding of Mantua, they will know that you are careful to report the truth about the afterlife.*

“Virgil,” Dante said, “you always tell me the truth. Now can you tell me about some other sinners here?”

Virgil replied, “Eurypylus is punished here in this part of the Inferno. You know about him from reading my *Aeneid* — my epic poem that you know almost by heart. Eurypylus was a Greek warrior who was sent to the Oracle of Delphi in order to inquire why the gods were angry at the Greeks.

“Also punished here is Michael Scot, a mathematician and scholar who was born in Scotland. He was a magician who was able to serve his guests food magically brought from France and Spain and other countries.

“But we have seen enough. Let us continue our journey.”

## Chapter 21: The Grafters (Inferno)

Arriving at the fifth pocket, Dante noticed a strange darkness. A dark pitch or tar was boiling in the pocket the way that dark pitch boiled when the Venetians repaired their ships during the winter when they could not sail. Here boiling bubbles popped in the pitch.

Always on the lookout, Virgil said to Dante, "Watch out!" He stood by Dante, who looked up and saw a frightening black devil coming along the ridge. The devil had wings and moved quickly, and he was carrying the soul of a sinner.

The devil shouted, "Hey, Malebranche, here's another sinner, one of the elders of Santa Zita. Plenty more grafters are coming to be punished here. Stick him under the boiling pitch. These are the people who accept bribes to change decisions."

*Graft is a bribe, Dante thought. When I was exiled from Florence, I was unjustly accused of being a grafter. A politician who takes money to pass legislation favorable to a certain corporation is guilty of graft. A judge who takes money to rule a person innocent instead of guilty is guilty of graft. What simony is to the religious world, graft is to the secular world.*

And Virgil thought, *Malebranche is a good name for these black devils. Malebranche means Evil Claws.*

The black devil flung the sinner into the boiling pitch, and the sinner rose to the surface and floated on his back, with his hands outstretched as if he were being crucified. The black devil took off quickly to bring another sinner to be punished here.

The other devils saw the floating sinner and instantly jabbed him with a hundred pitchfork prongs, saying, "No floating here. Don't imitate a person on a cross. All you sinners stay below the surface of the sticky pitch so you can bake. We have grappling hooks, and if we catch you raising yourself out of the hot pitch, we will torment you."

*This is another contrapasso, Virgil thought. The grafters were sticky fingered, and so now they are sticky from the pitch in this part of the Inferno. The grafters used their political and judicial offices to take bribes and make money. As these people manipulated and tormented other people during their lives, so the demons manipulate and torment the grafters.*

Virgil also thought, *These black devils can be dangerous. I have been here before, so I know that I must be careful to protect Dante.*

As the black devils used their pitchforks to push the sinner down into the boiling tar like a cook's assistant uses a fork to push the meat down into the boiling broth so it will cook better, Virgil said to Dante, "It's best if the black devils don't yet see you. Hide yourself behind a rock. The black devils will see me, but whatever they say to me, don't worry. I have been here before, and I know how to act and what to say."

Virgil crossed the bridge, and he looked as bold and as brave as he could. The black devils saw him, and they came out from under the bridge to accost him.

Virgil shouted at them, "Behave yourselves! Let me talk to your leader before you start jabbing me with your pitchforks. After I talk to your leader, you can decide whether you still want to jab me."

The black devils all cried out, "Let Malacoda talk to him."

The black devil known as Malacoda stepped forward and said, "What good will talking to me do you?"

Virgil replied, "Do you think that I would have come so far in my journey through the Inferno if it were not the will of God? I am on a mission from God, and I have God's protection. Now that you know that, you must let me and a companion pass."

Malacoda's face fell, and he allowed his pitchfork to fall, too. He told the other black devils, "Don't harm this man."

Virgil then said to Dante, "You can come out of hiding now. We will be OK."

Dante came forward, making sure to stay close to Virgil, but to him the black devils looked threatening. He could hear them muttering to each other, saying things like, "Should I stick this pitchfork in the living person's rump?" Most of the other black devils answered, "Go ahead!"

But Malacoda, the black devil in charge of the fifth pocket, said, "Keep your hands and pitchforks off these people!"

Then he said to Virgil, "The bridge across the sixth pocket is broken here, but just ahead you will find a bridge that is still sound and that you can use to cross the pocket. The bridge was destroyed 1,066 years and one day and five hours ago."

Virgil thought, *The bridge was destroyed by the earthquake that occurred during the Harrowing of Hell. I remember when the Mighty Warrior rescued the deserving souls and took them out of Limbo.*

Malacoda continued, "I am sending some devils that way to make sure that the sinners stay deep in the boiling pitch and do not raise their backs out of the boiling bubbles to find relief from pain. You may travel with them."

Then Malacoda said to the devils, "Step forward, Alichino, Calcabrina, Cagnazzo, Libicocco, Draghignazzo, Farfarello, and Rubicante. Barbariccia will be the leader of all of you. Walk along the pocket and make sure that the sinners stay deep in the boiling pitch. Take these two to the unbroken bridge that crosses the sixth bolgia."

Dante was worried about having a pack of devils as an escort. He said to Virgil, "I don't like this. Let's travel by ourselves with no escort. Look at the devils. They mean us harm! They grind their teeth and wink at each other. We are in danger here!"

But Virgil replied, "We are safe. It is the sinners who are in danger of being tormented by the devils."

Like a military troop, the black devils saluted their leader, Malacoda, but they saluted by putting their tongue between their lips and making a farting sound.

Malacoda returned the salute by using the hole in his butt as a bugle and farting.

Malacoda *is indeed a suitable name for this black devil*, Virgil thought. Malacoda means Evil Tail.

## Chapter 22: Ciampolo of Navarre and Deceived Demons (Inferno)

Dante thought, *I have seen military officers and battles and retreats. I have seen military scouts and raiding parties and tournaments. But I have never seen cavalry or infantry or ships being sent on a mission with such bugling as that of Malacoda!*

Dante and Virgil, accompanied by the black devils, continued walking on the bank along the boiling pitch. In Hell, you have to expect to see devils.

As Dante walked, he kept an eye on the sinners in the boiling pitch to see what they did. Dolphins often swim in the sea, occasionally rising to the surface and exposing their backs. Likewise, the sinners often raised their backs out of the boiling pitch momentarily to ease their pain. But quickly, like the back of a dolphin, their backs disappeared into the boiling pitch again. The sinners did not want to be captured and tormented by the Malebranche.

The sinners often, like frogs, had part of their bodies out of the boiling pitch, but when Barbariccia appeared, quickly the sinners put their entire bodies into the boiling pitch.

But one sinner was slower than the others, and Graffiacane speared him and raised him out of the boiling pitch. Dripping, the sinner looked like an otter.

The black devils were happy to have a sinner to torment. They said, “Rubicante, slice the sinner’s skin off with your claws.”

Dante asked Virgil, “Can you find out the name of this poor sinner who is being tormented by the black devils?”

Virgil spoke to the sinner, who replied, “I come from Navarre. My father was a spendthrift who killed himself when he ran out of money to spend. I worked for King Thibault, but I became a grafter, and now you see that I am punished here.”

The punishment continued out of the boiling pitch. The two-tusked Ciriatto used one tusk to rip open the sinner’s skin. The sinner was like a mouse that is being tormented by cats.

But Barbariccia, whom Malacoda had put in charge of the other devils, said, “Don’t touch him — he’s mine!”

Then he told Virgil, “Soon this sinner will be torn to pieces, so if you have any questions for him, ask them now.”

Virgil asked the sinner, “Are any Italians in the boiling pitch with you?”

The sinner replied, “Yes, there are. Just before I was captured by these devils, I was beside an Italian — I wish that I were with him now! I would not be tormented with the hooks and claws of these devils!”

Another of the black devils, Libicocco, said, “Let’s start the torment!” He then used his pitchfork to tear off a piece of the sinner’s arm. Another black devil, Draghignazzo, tore off a piece of the sinner’s leg, but Barbariccia glared at the black devils, and they ceased their torture.

As the sinner looked over his new wounds, Virgil asked him, “Who was the Italian you were with before you were captured?”

The sinner replied, “Gomita, the friar from Gallura, who accepted bribes to let the enemies of his lord go free. He was no petty grafter, for his grafts were huge. He spends his time talking with Michele Zanche of Logodora — but look at how the black devils grind their teeth. I would tell you more, but I am afraid of the black devils and what they are going to do to me.”

Barbariccia glared at Farfarello, who was grinding his teeth, and shouted, “Stay away from the sinner!”

The sinner continued, "I can help you to talk to Tuscans and Lombards if you wish; however, for me to do that, the Malebranche must back away a little. Unless they do, the sinners in the boiling pitch won't raise their backs out of the boiling pitch, and unless the sinners do that, they can't be caught. I will help the Malebranche to capture seven Italian sinners so you can talk to them. All I have to do is whistle — that is how we signal each other that no Malebranche are around and so it is safe to raise our backs out of the boiling pitch."

Cagnazzo disbelieved the sinner: "This is a trick. Once we back away from him, he will escape us by jumping back into the boiling pitch!"

The sinner, who had not forgotten the tricks he had used to commit fraud while he was alive, said, "I certainly know tricks — especially tricks that will get my friends in trouble!"

Alichin said, "I am willing to capture seven Italian sinners. And if you try to jump, my wings will enable me to get to you quickly. We Malebranche will back away and hide."

The Malebranche did back away and hide, and the first black devil to do so was Cagnazzo, who had not believed and did not believe the sinner. Cagnazzo thought, *This sinner is playing a trick on us. He is going to jump. If he succeeds in jumping, then the other devils and I will have an opportunity to pick a fight with Alichin, who will be responsible if this sinner gets away.*

The sinner had a good sense of timing, and he jumped at exactly the best time. Alichin swooped at the sinner, trying to grab him before he hit the boiling pitch, but he failed, just as an eagle fails when he swoops at a duck, but the duck dives beneath the surface of the water.

Calcabrina took off after Alichin, hoping that the sinner would escape so that he would have an excuse to fight Alichin. As soon as the sinner dived beneath the boiling pitch, Calcabrina began to fight Alichin, who fought back, with the result that the two devils fell into the boiling pitch, befouling their wings with tar and rendering them useless for flying until they could be cleaned.

Barbariccia and four other devils set off to rescue Calcabrina and Alichin, who were being cooked in the boiling pitch. Barbariccia and the four other devils reached out with pitchforks to lift the two fallen devils from the pitch.

No fools, Dante and Virgil took the opportunity to sneak away from the black devils.

## Chapter 23: The Hypocrites (Inferno)

As they continued their journey, Dante thought, *I remember one of the fables of Aesop: A mouse wishes to cross a pool of water, and he asks a frog to help him across the pool of water. The frog agrees to help the mouse, but halfway across the pool of water the frog attempts to drown the mouse. A hawk sees the frog and mouse, captures both of them, eats the frog, and allows the mouse to go free. Moral: The guilty are punished, and the innocent go free.*

*The beginning and the moral of this fable apply to what has happened here. The black devils tried to trick us, but we are now free and two of the devils are in the boiling pitch.*

*But we are not out of danger yet.*

Dante said to Virgil, “I fear danger. We need to hide right away. As soon as the devils fish their brothers out of the boiling pitch, they will come after us for revenge. I think I can hear them now.”

Virgil replied, “I can read your thoughts. As fast as a mirror reflects your image, your thoughts are mirrored in my mind. My thoughts are the same as yours. I am looking for a place where we can slide into the next pocket.”

Dante then saw the devils coming after them with their wings spread wide and flapping for more speed. Virgil also knew that the devils were coming toward them fast. He grabbed Dante the way that a mother will grab her son and rescue him from a fire — not even waiting to put something on over her underclothing. The flames are too close, and her son needs to be rescued.

Still holding Dante, Virgil slid down the bank into the next bolgia. They slid down quickly — quicker than water flows down a conduit. All the time Virgil held Dante against his chest, making sure that Dante was not hurt during the slide.

They reached the bottom of the bolgia and then looked up and saw ten black devils, but they had no need to fear the black devils: When God made the black devils the guards of the fifth pocket, He made it impossible for them to leave that pocket.

Now, in the sixth pocket, Dante and Virgil saw, slowly moving, step by step, sinners wearing gaudy clothing — clothing that weighed them down. The sinners were wearing cloaks with the hoods pulled down over their faces. These cloaks resembled the fancy cloaks that the Benedictine monks wear at Cluny. But these cloaks were gold on the outside and iron on the inside — both are heavy metals, although gold is much more valuable than iron. Weighed down by their heavy cloaks, the sinners walk slowly but everlastingly in the sixth pocket.

*This is another contrapasso, Virgil thought. These are the hypocrites, who made a show of holding beliefs that they did not actually hold. The hypocrites appeared golden on the outside although on the inside they were made of base metal, so for eternity they appropriately wear heavy cloaks that are gold on the outside but lead on the inside.*

Dante asked Virgil, “Look around, please, and see if anyone is here whom I have heard of.”

Overhearing him, a sinner with a Tuscan accent called, “Don’t move so quickly, and perhaps I can fulfill your request.”

Virgil told Dante, “Stop and wait for the sinner, and then walk with him at his pace.”

Two sinners came slowly toward Dante, and then one sinner said to the other, “Look at this man and the way his throat moves — he seems to be alive. But if both of these men here are dead, why aren’t they wearing the cloak of the hypocrites?”

Then the two sinners asked Dante, “Who are you?” Dante answered, “I was born and raised in Florence, but who are you, who cry with grief?”

“We are hypocrites,” said one of the sinners, “and these cloaks that are gold on the outside and iron on the inside — as we were in life — weigh us down and make our joints creak.

“I am the Guelf Catalano and my companion is the Ghibelline Loderingo. We are the Jovial Friars who were brought into Florence to help keep the peace, but instead we took sides and increased the violence of Florence. You can see that we were hypocrites: We pretended to be peacekeepers but actually we fomented violence.”

Dante was going to say more, but suddenly he stopped because he saw something surprising on the ground: a figure who was crucified with three stakes.

Friar Catalano saw what Dante was looking at, and he explained, “The figure crucified on the ground is Caiaphas, who allowed Jesus to be killed even though he believed Him to be innocent. Now all the hypocrites must step on him as they make the round of this Circle. Also crucified in this way are his father-in-law, Annas, who delivered Jesus to him, and all the other Jews who advised that Jesus die.”

Dante noticed that Virgil was staring, amazed, at Caiaphas. Virgil had never seen this form of punishment in the Inferno before. When he had traveled to the bottom of the Inferno before, Jesus had not yet been crucified.

Virgil then asked one of the Jovial Friars, “Can you tell us, please, how we can leave this pocket without having to call on the black devils who guard the fifth pocket?”

The Jovial Friar replied, “Nearby is a fallen bridge, the ruins of which you may climb up. All of the pockets in this Circle have bridges that cross them, except this one, which has had every bridge smashed.”

Virgil was silent for a moment, and then he said, “The black devil named Malacoda lied to me. He said that a bridge across this bolgia is still intact.”

The Jovial Friar replied, “I have heard of the devil’s many talents, one of which is telling lies.”

Virgil quickly walked away, his face contorted with anger.

Dante followed his cherished guide.



## Chapter 24: The Thieves, Including Vanni Fucci (Inferno)

When spring is coming but cold days remain, a peasant will sometimes get up early in the morning, look out at the fields, and see what appears to be snow on the ground. Nothing for his sheep to eat! Disappointed, the peasant hits his thighs with his hands. But later, the peasant looks again, and he sees grass. What had appeared to be snow was merely frost. The peasant's brow unfurrows, and he is happy again as he drives his sheep to the grass to eat.

At first Virgil's brow was furrowed as he thought about how he had been tricked by the black devil who had told him that a bridge remained unbroken across the sixth pocket, but as time went on he began to think about how he and Dante had escaped the black devils, and his brow unfurrowed, and he was his usual self again.

Dante and Virgil came to the broken remains of the bridge, and Virgil looked carefully at the ruins, deciding how best to climb them. He then began to climb them, helping Dante to go from rock to rock, and sometimes telling him, "Grab that rock next, but test it to make sure that it will bear your weight."

The climb upward was tough, even though Dante had the help of Virgil and even though Virgil, who was a soul without a body, weighed nothing. This was not a climb for anyone who wore the cloak of the hypocrites! Also fortunately, the bank that they were now climbing was lower than the bank that they had slid down.

Dante thought, *I can't speak for Virgil, but if the bank that we are climbing were as high as the bank that we slid down, I would have given up and stopped climbing.*

They had reached the top, and Dante, severely winded, had to rest and sit down.

"Don't be lazy," Virgil said to him, "Sloth does not result in fame. Sitting on a cushion or lying in bed will not make you famous. Unless you win fame, you will be forgotten. Some kinds of fame are worthwhile and long lasting. If you are slothful, you will be like smoke in the wind or foam upon the water. Stand up, and conquer your laziness! We have another climb — steeper than this! — ahead of us, and we have more sinners to see!"

Dante stood up, pretended to be less winded than he was, and said, "I am ready now. Lead on."

They continued their journey, and they reached and began to cross the next bridge. Dante heard noises, although he could see nothing when he looked down in the pocket, which was shrouded in darkness.

Dante said to Virgil, "Can we go to a point where I see into this bolgia? I can hear sounds, but I cannot see anything."

"Yes, of course," Virgil replied. "Your request is fitting; knowing the punishments in each bolgia is part of your necessary education here."

After they crossed the bridge over this, the seventh bolgia, on the other bank they climbed down to a place where they were able to look down and see into the bolgia. There they saw massive numbers of snakes and lizards and other reptiles, and they saw terrified sinners.

Although the sands of Libya are the home to many reptiles, those sands cannot compare to the seventh bolgia. Many sinners ran in this bolgia among the snakes and lizards. They were terrified and naked. Nowhere was a hiding-place or heliotrope, a stone with the power to cure snakebites and to make its possessor invisible — something that the sinners here wished to be.

Snakes tied the sinners' hands. Snakes wound themselves around the sinners' bodies.

And then a snake struck and bit a sinner, who immediately was consumed by fire and turned to ashes, which then reconstituted themselves into the sinner again. The sinner was

dazed, like a person who has suffered and come out of an epileptic fit. The Phoenix will burn into ashes and then be reborn, and so was this sinner.

Virgil asked the sinner, “Who are you? What is your story?”

The sinner replied, “My name is Vanni Fucci, and I have not been in the Inferno very long. I come from Pistoia.”

Dante then asked Virgil, “Ask him what is his sin that has put him here. From what I know of him, he was a very angry man and I am surprised that he is not punished in a higher Circle.”

The sinner overheard Dante and looked at him, and then said, “I am sorry that you know that I am here. I grieve more for that than I do for my death. But I am here because I am a thief. In 1293, I stole the treasure of San Jacopo. This treasure was located in the Duomo — the cathedral church — of San Zeno. One of the people falsely accused of the theft spent a year in prison. I, however, avoided paying the penalty for my theft by leaving the area.”

*Like other sinners here, Vanni Fucci has committed more than one kind of sin, Virgil thought. He could have been punished in a different Circle, but Minos is a just judge who never errs. Minos sent this sinner to this Circle, and this is where the sinner most deserves to be.*

“I don’t want you to feel happy because you have seen me here, so I will make a prophecy for you. Pistoia will lose its Black Guelfs, Florence shall have a change of government, battles and arguments will take place, and the White Guelfs will grieve.

“I have told you this so that you will be unhappy.”

## Chapter 25: The Transformations of Thieves (Inferno)

After Vanni Fucci had made his prophecy, he formed his hands to make obscene gestures, and then he raised them in the air and shouted, “These are for you, God!”

Dante thought, *Every snake here is my friend because they punish sinners such as Vanni Fucci.*

Good, Virgil thought. *Dante is feeling righteous indignation. He realizes that Vanni Fucci ought to be punished severely.*

A snake immediately coiled itself around Vanni Fucci’s neck and stopped him from saying anything more. Another snake bound his arms together in front.

*Vanni Fucci’s hometown, Pistoia, might as well destroy itself,* Dante thought. *Its founders were criminals — the remains of Catiline’s army, which tried to end the Roman republic before its time. But its descendants have done more damage than its founders ever did. No sinner I have seen in the Inferno is haughtier than Vanni Fucci — not even Capaneus the blasphemer.*

Unable to speak now, Vanni Fucci fled, and a Centaur appeared. On his back were an enormous number of snakes and a fire-breathing dragon.

Virgil said to Dante, “This Centaur is named Cacus. He is not with the other Centaurs who guard the river of boiling blood because he is a thief. He stole Hercules’ cattle and dragged them by the tails into his cave so that their hoof prints would lead in the other direction, away from the cave. One of the cattle lowed, Hercules heard the sound, and he came running to the cave. Cacus barred the doorway, but Hercules tore off the top of the mountain and hurled down boulders to kill Cacus.”

Cacus galloped off to find and punish Vanni Fucci, and Dante saw three sinners whom he had not noticed before. They had seen Dante and Virgil first, and they asked, “Who are you?”

Before Dante and Virgil could answer, one of the sinners asked, “Where is Cianfa?”

Dante remained silent, and he motioned for Virgil to also remain silent.

Then they saw something incredible. A six-legged reptile jumped onto a sinner, and the reptile bit both of the sinner’s cheeks. The reptile’s front legs grabbed the sinner’s arms, the reptile’s middle legs grabbed the sinner’s stomach, and the reptile’s rear legs grabbed the sinner’s legs. Then the two beings transformed into one being.

The two beings melted and flowed together, and a watching sinner shouted, “Agnèl, you are changing! You are not what you were!”

Transformed into one reptile, the two beings who were now one being walked away.

A small four-legged reptile then bit one of the remaining two thieves. The thief and the four-legged reptile stared at each other, and then they transformed in a way that neither Lucan nor Ovid had ever written about. They wrote about single transformations — one thing turning into another — but what Dante and Virgil now saw was a double transformation: The four-legged reptile transformed into a human thief, and the human thief transformed into a four-legged reptile. The four-legged reptile had stolen the human thief’s form.

*This is another contrapasso,* Virgil thought. *In the living world, the thieves stole things that belonged to other people, and in this bolgia the only thing the naked thieves have — their identity — is stolen by other thieves. The snakes and legged reptiles here are thieves, and the only way for a snake or legged reptile to regain a human form is to steal it from another thief.*

*When a snake or legged reptile bites or wraps itself around a thief, one of three things can happen:*

*One, the thief can be consumed by fire and reduced to ashes, then be refashioned into his own form again (much like the mythical bird known as the Phoenix is consumed by fire, then is reconstituted as a young bird again),*

*Two, the thief and the snake or legged reptile can unite into one body, or*

*Three, the thief can become a snake or legged reptile, while the snake or legged reptile becomes a thief with a human form.*

*Thieves create a lot of uncertainty. You may think that you have something, but you discover that someone has stolen that thing. In a neighborhood where thieves constantly prey, you can never be sure that something you own will stay in your possession. Similarly, the thieves are never sure what will happen when a snake or legged reptile bites a thief.*

*In addition, the thieves used their limbs to steal from other people and to run away, and now they often become an armless, legless snake.*

*After regaining his human form, the thief who had been a four-legged reptile said, "Let Buoso have my old form and run on four legs for a while."*

*I recognize two of the thieves, Dante thought. One is Puccio Sciencato. Another is Francesco Cavalcanti, aka Guercio. The citizens of Gaville murdered him, and his relatives avenged his death by decimating — killing every 10th man — the population of Gaville.*

## Chapter 26: Evil Advisers; Ulysses/Diomedes (Inferno)

*Florence, your name is well known in the Inferno, Dante thought. Among the thieves I found five of your most important citizens — and I know that trouble is coming for you.*

Now Dante and Virgil climbed up from the vantage point from which they had been able to see into the bolgia of the thieves. Virgil went first, so that he could help pull Dante up the rough spots. In many places, they had to climb while using their hands as well as their feet.

And now they arrived at the eighth bolgia, a place where Dante learned to use his great talents in the service of good, not evil.

Looking into the eighth bolgia, Dante and Virgil saw many, many lights. They looked as numerous as fireflies on a hot summer evening. The lights were flames.

They looked at the flames, which traveled along the bolgia. Dante could not see what was inside the flames, but because he was in the Inferno, he knew that inside the flames were sinners. Similarly, when Elisha witnessed Elijah traveling to Heaven in a fiery chariot, he could see the shining of the chariot in the distance, but not who was in it.

Dante leaned over the bridge so that he could see into the bolgia, and Virgil explained, “Inside the flames are sinners. Burning is part of their punishment.”

Dante replied, “I had guessed that already, but I am glad to hear you confirm what I guessed.

“Can you tell who is in the flame whose tip on top is split in two, just like the flame of the pyre on which Eteocles and Polynices, his brother, were burned?”

*Eteocles and Polynices were two brothers who agreed to take turns ruling the city of Thebes, Virgil thought. One brother was supposed to rule for a year, then the other brother would rule for a year, and so on. Eteocles ruled for the first year, but then he refused to give up the throne so that his brother could rule for a year. Angry, Polynices gathered an army together and marched against Thebes, creating the story of the Seven Against Thebes. The two brothers killed each other in combat, and when their corpses were cremated together, the flame split in two over their corpses because even in death they were still angry at each other.*

“Inside are the souls of Ulysses and Diomedes, two Greek soldiers of the Trojan War,” Virgil replied. “Ulysses is also known as Odysseus, which is his Greek name, and Homer wrote in his *Odyssey* about Ulysses’ journeys and homecoming after the end of the Trojan War.

“The two warriors are entombed in the flame together because they are angry at each other. Just like Francesca da Rimini and Paolo are together in eternity as part of their punishment, so are Ulysses and Diomedes punished together in eternity.

“Inside the flame Ulysses and Diomedes grieve for three things. The first thing they grieve for is the trick of the Trojan Horse that led to the destruction of Troy and the founding of the Roman people.”

*I wrote about the trick of the Trojan Horse and the founding of the Roman people in my Aeneid, Virgil thought. Other epic poets such as Homer also wrote about the Trojan War. Homer’s Iliad tells the story of events that occur before the Trojan Horse, and Homer’s Odyssey tells the story of events that occur after the Trojan Horse.*

*Ulysses came up with the idea of the Trojan Horse. The Trojan War had been fought for 10 years, and the forces of Agamemnon and the other Greeks had not been able to conquer Troy by might, and so Ulysses had the idea of using trickery to conquer Troy. The Greeks built a huge wooden horse and left it outside Troy, then they seemed to sail away in their ships and return home. However, the Trojan Horse was hollow and filled with Greek soldiers, including*

*Ulysses and Diomedes, and the ships sailed behind an island so that the Trojans could not see them. A lying Greek named Sinon stayed behind and pretended that he had escaped from Ulysses, who had wanted to kill him. Sinon told the Trojans that if the Trojans were to take the Trojan Horse inside the walls of Troy, then Troy would never fall. Amid great rejoicing, the Trojans took the Trojan Horse inside the walls of Troy. That night, the Greek warriors came out of the Trojan Horse, went to the gates of Troy, killed the Trojan guards, and opened the gates of Troy. Agamemnon and his troops were outside the gates, as they had returned from hiding behind the island. The Greeks then conquered Troy, killing many, many Trojans, including Trojan women and children.*

*After Troy fell, Aeneas led the Trojan survivors to Italy, where the Trojan men married Italian women. Their descendants became the Romans.*

“The second thing that they mourn is another trick — the trick that caused Deïdamia to weep over Achilles,” Virgil continued.

*Both Ulysses and Diomedes were instrumental in making Deïdamia grieve, Virgil thought. Achilles was the major warrior for the Greeks in the Trojan War, and his mother, the immortal goddess Thetis, knew that he would die at Troy; therefore, she disguised him as a girl and took him to the court of King Lycomedes, where he pretended to be one of the king’s daughters. There, he seduced Deïdamia, who bore him a son. Ulysses and Diomedes came to the court of King Lycomedes looking for Achilles, and Ulysses was able to learn his identity through a trick. Ulysses, bringing gifts for the king’s daughters, brought a lance and shield with him — Achilles, dressed as a girl, was very interested in those weapons, thus revealing his sex.*

*Here Ulysses used his great intellect, but its use had bad consequences: One, Achilles killed many, many Trojans; two, Achilles died; and three, Deïdamia mourned him. This is an example of great but misdirected intellect.*

“The third thing that they lament is the theft of the Palladium,” Virgil said.

*The Palladium was a statue of the goddess Pallas Athena, aka Minerva, Virgil thought. As long as it remained in Troy, Troy would never fall. Ulysses and Diomedes snuck into Troy one night and carried off the Palladium. Here Ulysses and Diomedes used great daring and probably great intellect, and here once again bad consequences followed. As long as the Palladium stayed in Troy, Troy would not fall. By stealing the Palladium, Ulysses and Diomedes helped cause Troy to fall.*

“Can they speak from within the flame?” Dante asked. “If they can, I would like to know their story.”

“You should hear their story,” Virgil replied, “But let me do the talking. You and I both are descendants of the Trojans, and for that reason they may not want to speak to us. However, since I am an epic poet and have told part of their stories in my *Aeneid*, that may be enough for one of them to talk to me.”

When the flame whose tip was divided in two came near the bridge on which Dante and Virgil were standing, Virgil said, “You — the two souls entombed in one flame — if I have deserved any praise from you while I was living, when I wrote my *Aeneid*, let one of you tell his story. What is your sin, and how did you die?”

The two tips of the flames were of unequal size. The larger of the tips began to move quicker, like a tongue that is talking, and words came out of the flame: “I am Ulysses, and when Troy fell I journeyed on the seas, and I spent a year with the goddess Circe, who turned my men into swine until I made her turn them back into men.

“I made my way back to Ithaca, but I did not stay there long, even though I had been away for 20 years. I spent 10 years at Troy, and it took an additional 10 years for me to return home to Ithaca. Not the duty I owed to my son, not the duty I owed to my father, not the duty I owed

to my loving wife, Penelope, could keep me there. I wanted to seek out more adventures and more knowledge.”

*Ulysses lacked the Roman virtue of pietas, Virgil thought. Pietas is giving respect where respect is owed: to one’s country, to one’s father, to one’s wife, and to one’s son. Ulysses had been away from Ithaca for 20 years, but quickly he grew bored and wanted to set out for adventures, leaving behind his father (Laertes), his wife (Penelope), and his son (Telemachus). These are people who suffered while Ulysses was away from his kingdom of Ithaca, and Ulysses ought to have stayed on Ithaca to take care of his family and his people. Instead, he placed his thirst for adventure ahead of his family and his kingdom. Pietas is a virtue that Aeneas, the hero of my Aeneid, had in abundance.*

“I wanted adventure,” Ulysses continued, “and I wanted knowledge and experience — I wanted knowledge and experience of all human vices and of all human virtues.”

*Part of what you wanted is good, Virgil thought. To want knowledge and experience of all human virtues is a very good thing. But part of what you wanted is very bad. You wanted knowledge and experience of all human vices. That is forbidden knowledge. No one should have the knowledge and experience of being a drug addict, a rapist, a murderer.*

“I set sail with a small group of men — not many — who were loyal to me,” Ulysses continued. “We sailed the Mediterranean, and we came to the Pillars of Hercules. I wanted to sail beyond them.”

*The Pillars of Hercules are also known as the Strait of Gibraltar, Virgil thought. Hercules split a mountain in two to form the Pillars of Hercules. This was a warning to pagan sailors not to go any further. Of course, what lies outside the Pillars of Hercules is the Atlantic Ocean, an ocean that was very dangerous for ancient ships to sail on. Any ancient ship that sailed west into the Atlantic Ocean would probably run out of food long before reaching land, and everyone on board would perish. By going beyond the limits set for ancient sailors, Ulysses was seeking forbidden knowledge.*

“I was old and tired, and my men were old and tired,” Ulysses continued, “but I wanted to sail into the Atlantic Ocean. I told my men, ‘Brothers, we have had many adventures together. Let us have another great adventure. Do not deny yourselves anything. Experience everything. We are Greeks, and we were born to pursue knowledge and experience.’”

*You scammed your men, Virgil thought. They should have returned to Ithaca, but you convinced them to sail out into the Atlantic Ocean for bad reasons.*

“My men cheered, and we set sail into the Atlantic Ocean,” Ulysses continued. “Our voyage was mad, but we went. We made our way to the southern hemisphere, and we saw a mountain slope the likes of which I had never seen before. At first, we were happy to see the mountain, but a storm arose from the mountain. The wind crashed into our ship four times, and the fourth time the wind hit our ship, we sank. Above us, the sea grew calm.”

*I know which mountain you saw, Virgil thought. It was the Mountain of Purgatory, and a pagan must have special permission from God to be on that mountain.*

*Dante, I hope that you are learning from Ulysses’ story. Here we have a man of great abilities, but he did not use his gifts in the correct way. Instead of using his gifts for good, he used them for evil — to seek knowledge and experience of all human vices. You, Dante, have great abilities. Do not misuse them, or you will end up in the Inferno forever.*

## Chapter 27: Guido da Montefeltro (Inferno)

The flame punishing the souls of Ulysses and Diomedes moved away, and another flame came toward Dante and Virgil, both of whom directed their attention toward this flame because of the roaring sounds that came from its tip.

*These roaring sounds remind me of another roar, Virgil thought. Phalaris was a cruel ruler of the city Agrigentum in Sicily. He commissioned Perillus to construct a hollow bull of metal to be used as an instrument of torture. The victim would be placed inside the bull, and then the bull would be heated. As the victim roasted, the victim screamed. Phalaris ordered that the bull be constructed in such a way that the screams of the victims would sound like the bellowing of a bull.*

*After Perillus used his great abilities to construct the bull — something that he ought not to have done — Phalaris made him the first victim to be placed in the bull and roasted. This is poetic justice, and contrapasso is very much concerned with poetic justice. Additional poetic justice occurred when Phalaris was overthrown and also became a victim of the bull.*

*In this story, we see a person being punished for the misuse of great abilities, and of course, the sinners in this bolgia are being punished for that sin.*

*I know the story of Guido da Montefeltro, who is like Perillus. He sinned at the request of another person, and he pays for that sin.*

The sinner inside the flame had recognized Virgil's dialect and now spoke to him, "It has taken me a while to reach you. Please wait a while and speak to me. If you are a newcomer to Hell, can you tell me news of whether the inhabitants of Romagna are at war? I come from that region."

Virgil told Dante, "You speak to this sinner — he is Italian."

Dante said to the sinner in the flame, "The leaders of Romagna always have war in their hearts, but their country is not presently at war, although Romagna has a troubled past.

"But who are you and what is your story? I did you a favor by answering your question, so do me a favor and answer my question. I can make your fame long-lasting in the Land of the Living."

"If I thought that you would ever leave the Inferno, I would not answer your question," the sinner in the flame answered, "but since I have heard that no one ever leaves here, I will answer your question.

"I am Guido da Montefeltro. I had two careers: First I was a soldier, and then I was a monk. I blame Pope Boniface VIII for my being in Hell. While I was alive, I was wily like a fox. I was shrewd and had great abilities. I was a warrior, but I was also known for trickery. I became world-famous."

*Guido is overstating his fame, Virgil thought. He was important regionally, but he was hardly famous throughout the world.*

"When I grew old, I became concerned about the afterlife," Guido continued. "I confessed my sins, and I became a Franciscan monk — it could have worked!"

*It could have worked, you think, Virgil thought, but obviously it didn't. You are in the Inferno. God does not make mistakes, so you are where you belong. You tried to scam God by becoming a Franciscan monk, but obviously it didn't work. Repentant sinners don't end up in the Inferno, so obviously you did not sincerely repent your sins.*

"Pope Boniface VIII chose to make war on a family of Christians instead of making war on the Jews or the Muslims," Guido continued. "Pope Boniface VIII became Pope when Pope



Celestine V resigned, but the Colonna family did not believe that the resignation of Pope Celestine V was valid; therefore, the Colonna family opposed Pope Boniface VIII. Pope Boniface VIII ran into a problem. He was fighting the Colonna family, and the Colonna family was barricaded inside Palestrina, a fortified city at the top of a mountain in Italy. Because of the location of the fortified city, it was going to be very, very difficult to take.

“Pope Boniface VIII came to me to give him advice about how to conquer the Colonna family. I stayed silent — Benedictine monks ought to be concerned with peace, not war. They should not give advice about how to conquer Christians.

“Pope Boniface VIII then said to me, ‘Don’t worry about the fate of your soul. I am the Pope, and I have two keys. These keys will unlock the gates of Heaven. I tell you now that the sin you will commit by answering my question is forgiven.’”

*Dante, pay attention, Virgil thought. Guido da Montefeltro was a scammer while he was alive, but in his story he is now being scammed by Pope Boniface VIII, who is still alive, but who will be damned to Hell when he dies. We know that he will be punished with the other Simonists in the third pocket of Circle 8. Pope Nicholas III, a sinner there, told us that.*

“I was impressed by Pope Boniface VIII’s reasoning,” Guido continued. “I said to him, ‘Father, since you have assured me that my sin is forgiven, this is how you may conquer the Colonna family: Make a promise to them, but do not keep your promise.’”

*Guido knew that he was sinning by offering this advice, Virgil thought. His advice to Pope Boniface VIII was to make promises, and then not keep your promises — tell the Colonna family that you want to be friends and that you will give them what they want, and then when they come out of the fortified city, destroy the city so that the Colonna family no longer has this stronghold. In other words, arrange a truce, and then break the truce as soon as it is advantageous for you.*

*In fact, Pope Boniface VIII followed this advice. When the Colonna family left the fortified city, the Pope had it destroyed.*

“When I died, Saint Francis came to escort my soul away from Hell,” Guido continued, “but one of the black Cherubim also came to get my soul. The fallen angel cried, ‘Don’t touch this soul! He is mine! Unrepentant sinners go to Hell! He must go down into the Inferno because he did not repent sincerely. A sin cannot be forgiven unless the sinner is repentant, and one cannot repent a sin at the same time that the sinner is committing it! The “repentance” is cancelled out by the deed! Examine my logic for flaws, and you will see that my logic has no flaws.’

“The fallen angel took me to Minos, who wrapped his tail around himself eight times and sent to this place of fire. And here I will stay forever.”

*Guido spent his life scamming others, yet he did not recognize the scam when Pope Boniface VIII scammed him. He has lost the good of intellect, Virgil thought. In addition, Guido tried to scam God with a fake repentance. Obviously, that scam failed.*

*Ulysses also lost the good of intellect. He should have known that he should have stayed home with his family now that he was old and tired. He should have also realized that it is better not to experience and not to know some things. However, he went on a final voyage and got his men and himself killed.*

*Dante, we have spent a lot of time in this bolgia because you have something important to learn here. Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro are very intelligent people. Both felt a temptation to misuse their intelligence and their powers of persuasion. Both scammed other people.*

*As a very intelligent man, you, Dante, may feel the temptation to misuse your intelligence and your powers of persuasion. Here in the Inferno you need to learn not to do that. If you,*

*Dante, misuse your great abilities, you can end up in the Inferno just like Ulysses, Diomedes, and Guido da Montefeltro.*

The flame moved on, and Dante and Virgil continued their journey, moving on to the ninth bolgia, where the sowers of discord are punished.

## Chapter 28: The Schismatics (Inferno)

And now Dante and Virgil saw a scene of bloodshed. Imagine the results of many bloody battles with a great number of casualties displaying the horrifying wounds of war: limbs cut off and torsos slit up the middle, and much blood flowing.

One such bloody battle was the Battle of Cannae. During the Second Punic War, the Carthaginian general Hannibal crossed the Alps — with war elephants! — and invaded Italy. He had much early success in the war, although the Romans eventually won. One of Hannibal's greatest successes was at the Battle of Cannae. So many Roman soldiers were killed that the Roman historian Livy related that the Carthaginian soldiers gathered three bushels of gold rings from the fingers of the dead Roman soldiers.

Such blood and carnage as could be seen at Cannae — and other battles — could be seen in the ninth bolgia of Circle 8 of the Inferno. Here the schismatics — the sowers of discord — were punished.

*A schism is a break, Virgil thought. It is especially a break within a church, as in the future will occur between Catholics and Protestants, or as is the case now between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, or between Islam and Christianity. However, a schism can also occur in politics, as when rival, hate-filled political parties are formed, or within families, as when a son and a father hate each other. In the ninth bolgia, the sowers of religious discord, of political discord, and of familial discord are punished.*

Dante and Virgil saw a sinner whose body was split open from his chin to his anus. His guts had spilled out, and Dante and Virgil could see his heart and his stomach and his intestines.

The sinner looked at Dante, opened up his chest, and said, “Look at how I am punished! I am Mahomet, aka Muhammad, and in front of me is Ali, who weeps. He is split from his chin to the top of the head. The sinners you see here are the schismatics. We walk this Circle, and a devil wielding a sword wounds us. By the time we have completed a round of the Circle, we are healed and the devil wounds us again. Because we caused divisions when we were alive, the devil causes divisions in us now that we are dead.”

*Muhammad and Ali, the founders of Islam, caused a schism within the Christian Church by having Islam break away from Christianity, Dante thought. Because of this, these two schismatics are punished by being slit with a sword wielded by a devil.*

Muhammad then asked Dante, “But who are you, and what is your story?”

Virgil answered for Dante, “He is not dead yet, and he has not been sentenced to this bolgia for sins committed in the Land of the Living. I am dead, and I am his guide. My purpose is to educate him by escorting him throughout the Inferno.”

Over 100 sinners in the ninth pocket stopped to look at Dante when they heard that he was still alive.

Muhammad said to Dante, “Since you are still alive, when you return to the Land of the Living, tell Fra Dolcino to stock up on food, or else he will lose his struggle and join me here in the Inferno.”

*Fra Dolcino is a heretic who in 1307 will be burned at the stake, Virgil thought. Pope Clement V will oppose him, and Fra Dolcino will hide out in some hills near Novaro. He and his followers will run out of food, and the forces of the Pope will be able to capture him and burn him at the stake.*

Another sinner with an ear and his nose cut off, and with his throat cut, said to Dante, “I have seen you when I was alive, unless I am deceived by your resemblance to someone else. If you return to the Land of the Living, remember Pier da Medicina, and tell Messer Guido and Angiolello that they will drown when they are tied in a sack and thrown into the water near Cattolica. A tyrant will murder them.”

Dante replied, “If you want me to carry your message back to the Land of the Living, tell me who is the sinner beside you.”

Pier da Medicina grabbed the jaws of the sinner beside him and opened them, revealing that the sinner’s tongue had been cut out. “This sinner is Curio, whose tongue is cut out each time he completes a journey around the Circle. Curio urged Julius Caesar — who is in Limbo — to cross the Rubicon River, thus starting civil war among the Romans. When Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon River, he said, ‘Thus the die is cast,’ meaning that there was no turning back now, as he had disobeyed the orders of the Roman Senate.”

Another sinner then showed Dante that his hands had been cut off. He raised the stumps of his blood-dripping arms in the air and said, “I am Mosca, who started the split of Florentines into rival Ghibelline and Guelf factions. Buondelmonte de’ Buondelmonti was engaged to be married to the daughter of Lambertuccio degli Amidei, but when a better offer came along — Aldruda, a member of the Donati family, offered him her daughter to be his bride — he took it. Although Aldruda offered to pay the expenses of the broken engagement, this was a major insult to my family, the family of the jilted bride, and I advised that Buondelmonte de’ Buondelmonti be killed. After he was killed, the two factions of the Guelfs and the Ghibellines began.”

“May all of your family be punished for the evil you have created,” Dante, a victim of the schism between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines, said.

*Good work, Dante, Virgil thought. The main thing for you to learn here in this pocket is to recognize the evil of extreme factionalism, and in your reply to Mosca you have shown that you have learned that.*

Dante saw one more thing, a thing so incredible that he wondered whether anyone would believe it. He saw a man whose head had been cut off — the body was carrying the head like a lantern.

The sinner held up his severed head, and the severed head said, “I am Bertran de Born, and in the 12th century I urged Prince Henry of England to rebel against his father, who was King Henry II. Thus, I urged the son of a family to rebel against its head, and so my head is cut off each time I complete a journey around the Circle. My punishment is the perfect *contrapasso*.”

## Chapter 29: The Falsifiers (Alchemists) (Inferno)

Dante kept looking at the sinners in the ninth bolgia, and Virgil said to him, “Why do you keep staring at these sinners more than you looked at other sinners? This Circle is 22 miles around, and you will not be able to see all the sinners here.”

Dante and Virgil moved toward the tenth bolgia, and Dante explained, “I was looking for someone in particular. A member of my family is most likely in that bolgia.”

“Think no longer of that member of your family,” Virgil replied. “You have other things to think of, and to see. I saw the man you are speaking of. His name is Geri del Bello, and I heard his name called out. You did not see him because you were busy looking at Bertran de Born, but Geri saw you and he was angry.”

“I know why he was angry,” Dante replied. “He was murdered at the hands of the Sacchetti family, and his murder has not been avenged. Geri del Bello wants me to murder a member of the Sacchetti family to avenge his death.”

*Yes, Virgil thought, and if you avenge the death of Geri del Bello by killing a member of the Sacchetti family, then a member of the Sacchetti family will kill either you or a member of your family in retaliation, and the blood feud will continue. In addition, you will most likely end up in the Inferno when you die. I certainly hope that this trip through the Inferno is teaching you to avoid extreme factionalism.*

Now Dante and Virgil reached the bridge over the last of the Malebolge. They looked down, and they saw many sinners who had been afflicted with illness. Imagine all the sick of all the hospitals in a sickness-infested country crammed into one ditch, and you can imagine what Dante and Virgil were seeing.

*I have been here before, and I know what kind of sinners are being punished here, and why, Virgil thought. In the tenth and final bolgia are punished those who are falsifiers of various kinds. These sinners are punished with various illnesses. This is as it should be, for sin is a kind of illness or disease.*

*The alchemists have leprosy (the alchemists tried to change lead into gold, and now their skin turns from healthy to diseased). The evil impersonators are insane (the evil impersonators made other people confused about who the evil impersonators were; now the evil impersonators, who are insane, are confused about who they are). The counterfeiters — who made what they had bigger than it should be — have dropsy, aka edema (which makes part of their body swell up and be bigger than it should be). The liars — whose testimony stank — are feverous and stink.*

*All of these sinners are falsifiers. The alchemists are falsifiers of things. The evil impersonators are falsifiers of persons. The counterfeiters are falsifiers of money. The liars are falsifiers of words.*

Dante marveled at the numbers of the sinners who were afflicted with illness. Some sinners were lying against or on other sinners. Some sinners crawled on their hands and knees. Many sinners did not have the strength to stand up.

Dante saw two sinners, each leaning against the other’s back. They were scratching themselves, trying to kill a never-ending itch. Their skin was covered with scabs, and as they scratched the scabs collected under their fingernails. No curry-comb was ever applied to a horse faster by a stable boy eager for bed than the sinners applied their fingernails to their bodies.

Virgil asked the two sinners, “Are any of the sinners here Italian?”

“Both of us are,” answered one of the sinners. “But who are you?”

“I am the guide of this living man,” Virgil replied. “My purpose is to show him all the Circles of the Inferno.”

Both sinners turned to look at Dante, and Virgil said to Dante, “Ask them whatever you wish.”

“So that I may keep your memory from fading away in the Land of the Living,” Dante said, “tell me who you are and where you are from.”

One of the sinners said, “I am Griffolino da Arezzo, and I told a bishop’s son that I could teach him to fly, so that then he could fly through the window of any woman. The bishop’s son, whose name was Alberto da Siena, paid me well to teach him how to fly, but of course I could not deliver on my promise; therefore, Alberto reported me to the authorities as a magician, and I was burned at the stake. Of course, this makes me guilty of fraud, but I am punished in the tenth bolgia of Circle 8 of the Inferno for another kind of fraud — that of being an alchemist. Minos sent me here, and Minos cannot err.”

*Alchemy is a bastard form of chemistry, Virgil thought. Alchemy is the study of how to turn base metals into gold; for example, an alchemist would love to turn iron, which is cheap, into gold, which is expensive. Alchemists, of course, are guilty of fraud. They get money from other people whom they trick.*

“No people are as silly as the Sienese,” Dante said to Virgil.

Capocchio, who had been burned at the stake for alchemy, was the second of the two sinners. Dante had known him when he was alive and they both were students, and then as now Capocchio delighted in mocking the silly Sienese.

Capocchio said to Dante, “Remember the Spendthrifts’ Brigade — a club of wealthy Sienese who deliberately wasted their fortunes. One member of the Spendthrifts’ Brigade was Niccolo de’ Salimbeni. He introduced the use of very expensive cloves to Siena, and he used to set a bed of cloves on fire and roast pheasants over them.

“Dante, if you look closely at me, you will recognize me.”

## Chapter 30: The Falsifiers (Evil Impersonators, Counterfeiters, and Liars) (Inferno)

The ancient world knew what insanity was.

Juno, the wife of Jupiter, was often jealous, for her husband often gave her good reason to be often jealous. His affairs with other goddesses and with mortal women were many.

When Jupiter had sex with Semele, she bore him the god whose name is Dionysus, aka Bacchus. Hera pretended to become friends with Semele, and she expressed doubt that the father of Semele's child was actually Jupiter. Semele insisted that Jupiter reveal himself to her in his divine form, something that mortals are unable to look upon and live. Her request was insane, and she died, but Jupiter rescued the fetus that was inside her, and he sewed the fetus into his own thigh until the baby was ready to be born. This is why Dionysus is known as "twice-born."

Juno also made insane King Athamas, the husband of Ino, Semele's sister. Ino, the Queen of Thebes, had made Juno angry by raising Dionysus, who was Ino's nephew and Jupiter's son. After Juno drove King Athamas insane, he saw his wife coming toward him with two sons — each of her arms held a son. He thought that she was a lioness and his two sons were lion cubs, and he wanted to kill them. He grabbed one son, whose name was Learchus, and dashed his brain out against a rock. His wife drowned herself and her other son.

Another example of insanity from the ancient world was that of the aged Hecuba, Queen of Troy. For many years, she was happily married to Priam, King of Troy, but Troy was fated to fall, and at the end of her long life, she suffered much misfortune. She saw the great Greek warrior Achilles kill her son Hector, the main defender of Troy. During the fall of Troy, she saw Achilles' son, Neoptolemus, kill her husband, Priam, at the altar of Jupiter. After Troy fell, Hector's son, Astyanax, was thrown from the high walls of Troy and killed. Hecuba and the other women and children of Troy were made slaves. One of her daughters, Polyxena, was sacrificed on the grave of Achilles, and one of her sons, Polydorus, who had been sent away from Troy to Thrace so that the royal bloodline would continue even if Troy were to fall, was murdered for the treasure he had. Hecuba saw the unburied corpse of this son in Thrace. Because the corpse was unburied, her son's soul could not enter the Land of the Dead. To be unable to enter the Land of the Dead is a horrible fate for a soul. All of this suffering took away Hecuba's reason, and she became insane.

Two sinners whom Dante saw in the tenth bolgia of Circle 8 were insane. They were so driven to do acts of horror to the other sinners that no stories of insanity from the ancient world could match what these two sinners in the Inferno did. One insane sinner used his teeth to grab Capocchio by the neck and carry him off.

Griffolino d'Arezzo said, "The insane sinner who grabbed Capocchio by the neck and carried him off was named Gianni Schicchi. He has rabies, and he bites all of us."

*Gianni Schicchi is an evil impersonator, Virgil thought. He had acting ability and he could imitate well the voices of other people, so Simone Donati, the son of a wealthy Florentine patriarch named Buoso Donati, hired him after the patriarch died because he was afraid that the patriarch had left much wealth outside of the family and he wanted Gianni Schicchi to dictate a new will that would leave the wealth to the family. Gianni Schicchi did dictate a new will, but he stated (while pretending to be the dying patriarch) that he wanted a lot of the wealth, including a very valuable mare, to go to Gianni Schicchi.*

"Who is the other insane sinner?" Dante asked Griffolino d'Arezzo.

“She is named Myrrha, and she is another evil impersonator. She fell in love with her own father, pretended to be someone else, and slept with him.

“While they were alive, the evil impersonators made people confused about who they were; now that they are dead, the evil impersonators are insane and are themselves confused about who they are.”

Dante then looked at the other sinners in the bolgia. He saw a sinner so afflicted with dropsy, which makes parts of the body swell up, that had his arms and legs been cut off, he would have resembled a lute, a musical instrument that is shaped like a pear. The sinner’s belly was enormous, in comparison with which his face was tiny. His mouth was open, in the manner of a person with a raging thirst and parched lips.

“You there,” the sinner said, “you who are not being punished here — why, I do not know — look at me and know that my name is Master Adamo. In life, I was rich and I had everything I wanted. In death, I would love to have even one drop of water. In my mind I picture the streams of water in my homeland, and this tortures me even more than my dropsy does.

“In life, I was a counterfeiter. Gold florins are supposed to be made with 24 carats of gold, but the gold florins I made had 21 carats of gold and three carats of a less valuable metal. I would love to see my employers down here in this bolgia with me. If it were possible for me to drag my body even one inch in 100 years, I would have already started on a journey around this Circle to find the one employer who is already supposed to be here and to find the others who will join him. I would have already started on this journey even though this Circle is 11 miles in length and a half-mile, at least, in width.

“As a counterfeiter, I made coins appear to be more valuable than they really were. Now my body is bigger than it should be.”

“Who are the two sinners next to you?” Dante asked Master Adamo.

“They were here already when I arrived,” Master Adamo replied. “One is Potiphar’s wife, who tried to seduce Joseph, who resisted her advances. She then bore false witness against him and said that he had tried to seduce her.

“The other sinner is Sinon, the lying Greek. His lies convinced the Trojans to take the Trojan Horse inside the city of Troy. He convinced the Trojans that if the Trojan Horse were taken inside the city, then Troy would never fall. Of course, he lied. The Trojan Horse was filled with Greek warriors who came out of the horse during the night. They went to the gates of the city, killed the guards, and then opened the gates to let in Agamemnon, leader of the Greek army, and his soldiers. Troy fell that night.

“These liars literally stink so bad in the Inferno because their lies metaphorically stank so bad in the Land of the Living.”

Sinon was one of the sinners in the Inferno who did not want his name to be remembered in the Land of the Living. He struck Master Adamo in the belly, which made a sound like a drum being struck. But dropsy had not affected Master Adamo’s arms, and he struck Sinon — hard.

The two started wrangling in argument.

Master Adamo said to Sinon, “I may have dropsy, but I still have an arm that is ready to hit you.”

Sinon replied, “But your arm was not ready when you were burned at the stake, although it was very ready to engage in counterfeiting.”

Master Adamo said, “You are telling the truth now, but you did not tell the truth at Troy.”

Sinon replied, “While I was alive, my words were false, and while you were alive, your coins were false. I am in Hell for a few false words, but you are in Hell for many, many false



coins.”

Master Adamo said, “Remember the Trojan Horse, and may all the world remember the Trojan Horse and the part you played in its story.”

Sinon said, “May your punishment continue eternally. May your thirst always be agonizing, and may your body always be swollen.”

Master Adamo said, “As much as I suffer, you also suffer. I burn with thirst, and you burn with fever.”

Dante kept listening to this vulgar debate, and Virgil was growing bored. Already they had seen enough here. Nothing more was to be learned here, and Dante had much, much more to learn.

“Keep listening to this debate, and I will grow angry,” Virgil said to Dante.

Ashamed, Dante turned to Virgil. He was too ashamed to speak, but Virgil knew his thoughts and his repentance.

“You have repented your interest in this useless wrangling between sinners, so let us move on,” Virgil said. “We have more to see and more to do. Interest in such petty wrangling as this is useless and silly.”

## Chapter 31: Towering Giants (Inferno)

Virgil had at first made Dante feel ashamed, but his next words eased Dante's pain, just as Achilles' lance, which he had received from his father, was reputed to injure — and to heal the injury it had caused.

They continued their journey in a place that was not fully day and yet not fully night. Dante was unable to see very far ahead, but he did hear the blast of a horn — a horn that was much louder than thunder. He looked in the direction from which the horn-blast had come, and he remembered the horn of Roland.

*Roland was one of the paladins of Charlemagne, Dante thought. While Roland was leading the rearguard, he and his men were attacked in a pass. Roland was proud and he did not blow his horn for help until it was too late. He and all of his men were killed.*

The sound of the horn that Dante heard now was more ominous than that of the horn of Roland.

Looking ahead, Dante saw what appeared to be towers. He asked Virgil, "What city is this that lies ahead?"

Virgil replied, "You cannot see clearly in this dimness and at this distance. When we reach that place, you will see that you are mistaken that it is a city. But so you are prepared for what you will see, I will tell you that you are seeing giants. They stand in the well that goes from Circle 8 to Circle 9. You are seeing only the top half of their bodies; the rest is in the well, hidden from our sight."

As they approached closer, it was as if a fog had lifted and Dante could now see clearly. A mountain fortress has towers, and here in the Inferno were towering giants, the enemy of Jupiter. Just as the fallen angels had rebelled against their Christian God, so these giants had rebelled against their pagan god. Just as the fallen angels had failed to defeat their Christian God, so the giants had failed to defeat their pagan god.

Jupiter had conquered the giants with his thunderbolts, and now, when the giants heard thunder, they feared.

Dante had approached close enough that he could see clearly the face and features of one of the giants. He could see the head, shoulders, chest, much of the stomach, and the two huge arms of the giant, a member of a race that is now extinct in the Land of the Living.

The giants combined the faculty of intellect with enormous strength and an evil will. No mere mortal man can defeat a being with such a combination of features. Better by far to face criminals who are stupid and weak rather than intelligent and strong.

In Rome is a sculpture of a pine cone that stands over seven feet tall. The face of the giant was just that size. The rest of him was in proportion to the giant's face.

The giant shouted, "*Raphel may amech zabi almi!*"

Contemptuous, Virgil shouted at the giant, "You are a blathering idiot who can shout only nonsense syllables. If you need to make a sound, blow on your horn. It is tied around your neck, and if you weren't so stupid, you could easily find it."

Virgil then said to Dante, "This giant is Nimrod, who was so proud that he thought that he could build a tower that would reach Heaven. To stop the tower from being built, God created many languages instead of the one language that human beings had spoken until that time. Because the workers were now speaking different languages, they were unable to coordinate their actions and so the Tower of Babel was not built. Because of Nimrod's pride, God changed the speech of human beings, and now human beings no longer share the same language.

“We have no need to stay here. He cannot understand our words, just as we cannot understand his nonsense syllables.”

Dante and Virgil continued walking, and they came to another giant, who was bigger and fiercer than Nimrod. This giant’s arms were bound; one arm was bound in back, and the other arm was bound in front.

“This giant is named Ephialtes,” Virgil said to Dante. “He was so proud that he thought that he could overcome Jupiter and the other gods, and so he is chained here. He and his brother — Otus, a twin — attempted to put one mountain on top of another mountain in order to reach the gods and make war on them. The pagan god Apollo killed both brothers.”

“If I may, I would like to see Briareus, another giant who challenged Jupiter,” Dante said.

“Soon, you will see the giant Antaeus,” Virgil said. “Antaeus will be able to help us get down into the final Circle of Hell. He is unchained because when his fellow giants challenged Jupiter, he did not join the fight. Because of that, he is worthy of some respect, although he sinned in other ways.

“Briareus is further away, and we will not be able to see him.”

*Antaeus, the son of Mother Earth and the sea-god Neptune, was strong as long as he touched his Mother Earth, but he became weak when he was lifted into the air, Virgil thought. He used to challenge passersby, kill them, and collect their skulls hoping to eventually have enough to make a temple to Neptune, his father.*

*Antaeus fought Hercules. After hurling Antaeus to the ground a number of times, Hercules discovered his secret and lifted him into the air and strangled him.*

Ephialtes shook himself, and the earth trembled. Dante felt that he had never come so close to death as he had then.

They reached Antaeus, and Virgil said to him, “You are a great hunter, and you once killed a thousand lions in the valley of Zama, where the Roman general Scipio Africanus defeated the Carthaginian general Hannibal and won the Second Punic War against Carthage.

“You are also strong. Many think that if you had fought alongside the other giants in their war against Jupiter, then the giants would have won.

“Please, if you will, put us down onto Cocytus, the frozen lake of Circle 9. Please don’t make us ask one of the other giants, such as Tityus or Typhon, for help. This living man here can give you what you want: fame in the Land of the Living.”

Antaeus was willing to help them. He stretched out his hands, and they held Virgil, who told Dante to come to him. Virgil then held Dante as the giant lifted them both.

Dante wished that another way of entering Circle 9 existed, but Antaeus put Virgil and Dante safely down into Circle 9, where are punished the worst sinners who ever existed, including especially Lucifer and Judas.

Antaeus then straightened up, and he was as tall as the mast of a huge ship.

## Chapter 32: Caina and Antenora (Inferno)

*Here we are at the bottom of the Inferno, Virgil thought. This is where the worst of the worst are punished. The ninth Circle is divided into four rings. Each ring punishes one kind of traitor: traitors against kin/family, traitors against government, traitors against guests, and traitors against benefactors, including God. The traitors are punished by being frozen in ice — being a traitor is a sin committed in cold blood. These are people who have lost all warmth for God and for their fellow human beings. The traitors actively betrayed others, so now they are condemned to perpetual immobility.*

*In the first ring, Caina, which is named after Cain, who slew Abel, are punished those who were treacherous against kin/family. They are frozen in ice up to their necks. Their heads are looking down, and so they are able to cry.*

*In the second ring, Antenora, which is named after a Trojan who betrayed his city, are punished those who were treacherous against their countries or political parties. They are frozen in ice up to their necks. Their heads are looking up, and so their tear ducts freeze, and they are unable to cry.*

*In the third ring, Tolomea, which is named after Ptolemy, a captain of Jericho who murdered his father-in-law and his father-in-law's two sons after inviting them to a feast, are punished those who were treacherous against guests. In this ring, some traitors are completely buried under the ice.*

*The very bottom of the Inferno is reserved for the very worst sinners of all. In this fourth and final ring of the ninth and final Circle of the Inferno, Judecca, which is named after the apostle Judas, who betrayed Christ, are punished those who were treacherous against their benefactors, and especially God. Lucifer, the angel who led the rebellion against God, is punished here.*

*A river has been flowing throughout Hell. At various places it has different names. Here it is called Cocytus, which means "Lamentation," and it is a frozen lake. The traitors are frozen in the lake.*

Dante looked around, and he wondered whether he would ever be able to find words harsh and grating enough to describe what he saw. To do that, he would need the help of the Muses, who helped Amphion to build the wall around the city of Thebes. They helped him to play the lyre so well that while the music played stones moved on their own and built the wall by themselves.

While Dante was looking at the wall of the well that Antaeus had lowered Virgil and him into, he heard a voice warning him, "Be careful where you walk! Don't kick any of us in the head!"

Dante turned around and saw a frozen lake. In Austria the Danube never freezes as solidly and in Russia the Don never freezes as solidly as did that lake. Like frogs sticking their noses out of water, sinners had their heads sticking out of the ice. The rest of their body was frozen in the ice. Their heads were hanging down so that their tears fell to the ice. This was a luxury because their tears did not freeze their tear ducts shut, and so they were able to continue crying.

Dante looked around, and he saw two sinners frozen together very tightly and very closely. He asked, "Tell me, who are you?"

The two looked at him, and their tears fell and froze, locking them together even more tightly. But their heads were still free, and like goats they butted their heads together, both

causing and receiving pain.

Another sinner, nearby, had no ears. They had frozen in the cold, and then they had been broken off by the wind sweeping through this Circle. This sinner said, “Why are you looking at us? If you want to know who these two sinners are, they are Napoleone and Alessandro. They were brothers and rivals in two different political factions: Alessandro was a Guelf, while Napoleone was a Ghibelline. They murdered each other — not because of politics, but over their inheritance.

“These two belong here in Ring #1 of Circle 9, which is called Caina and which punishes those who were traitors to kin and family. No one deserves to be here more. Not even Mordred deserves to be here more.

“Mordred was the nephew of King Arthur of Camelot, but he was a traitor to the King, his uncle. In their final battle, nearly everyone was dead. King Arthur charged at Mordred and killed him, but Mordred mortally wounded King Arthur. When King Arthur stabbed Mordred with a spear, the hole created in Mordred was so big that the Sun shone through it, putting a hole in his shadow. Merlin the magician caused King Arthur to fall into a trance and then Merlin hid him in a cave.

“Mordred’s greed for power — along with Sir Lancelot’s adulterous relationship with King Arthur’s Queen — helped to destroy a civilization. King Arthur had instituted a great civilization, but after the civil war started that was caused by Sir Lancelot’s adulterous relationship with King Arthur’s Queen and by Sir Mordred’s greed for power, England’s civilization was destroyed and England slipped back into a Dark Age.

“My name is Camicion de’ Pazzi, and I murdered a relative named Ubertino. I tell you my name so that I may name Carlin, whose guilt will make my own guilt seem less. Carlin is Carlino de’ Pazzi, who, in July of 1302, will surrender a castle to the Black Guelfs of Florence after accepting a bribe, even though his job is to defend the castle for the White Guelfs of Florence. Carlin will be a traitor to country and so will be punished in Antenora, a lower place in Hell than the place that punishes me.”

Dante looked around, and he saw over 1,000 sinners frozen in the ice. After he returned to the Land of the Living, he was never able to look at a frozen pond without shuddering.

As Dante and Virgil continued their journey, Dante kicked — hard — one of the heads protruding out of the frozen lake. Perhaps the kick was accidental, but perhaps not.

“Why did you kick me?” the sinner screamed. “Have you come to take revenge on me for what I did at the Battle of Montaperti?”

Dante said to Virgil, “Please wait a little while. I want to talk to this sinner so that I may understand something.”

Then Dante said to the sinner, “Who are you to be shouting at other people?”

The sinner replied, “And who are you to be walking through Antenora, Ring #2 of Circle 9, which punishes those who were traitors to their countries or political parties? Who are you to kick sinners in the face? No living man could kick as hard as you!”

“I am still a living man,” Dante said. “Speak to me if you want to be remembered in the Land of the Living.”

“I definitely do NOT want to be remembered in the Land of the Living,” the sinner replied. “Better by far for my name to be quickly forgotten.”

Dante grabbed the sinner’s hair and threatened, “Tell me your name, or I will not leave even one hair on your head.”

“Tear all my hair out,” the sinner replied. “I will never tell you my name.”

Dante did exactly as he had threatened, tearing out handfuls of the sinner’s hair while the sinner yelped.

A nearby sinner said, "What's wrong, Bocca? Usually, I hear your chattering teeth; it's even worse to hear your yelping."

"I know your name now, traitor," Dante said. "I will make sure that your name continues to be known in the Land of the Living and that everybody knows your sin."

*Indeed I will, Dante thought. This sinner is Bocca, and he was a traitor to his city. In 1260, at the Battle of Montaperti, in which Farinata, the heretic punished in Circle 6, was one of the generals of the troops fighting against Florence, Farinata's troops were outnumbered. However, Farinata had a secret trick. He had Bocca on his side. Bocca supposedly was on the side of the Guelfs in the battle, but during the fighting he cut off the hand of the man bearing the Florentine standard. The standard fell, and this led to confusion among the Guelfs, who thought that their generals had been captured. This confusion led to the Ghibellines defeating the Guelfs.*

"Get out of here!" Bocca yelled. "But since you are going to tell the world about me, be sure that you tell the world about the sinner who revealed my name to you. He is the traitor Buoso da Duera, and he accepted a bribe from Charles of Anjou, who marched against Naples in 1265. Although he was supposed to lead troops against Charles of Anjou, he allowed him and his troops to pass by without having to fight.

"Other famous traitors are punished here, too. Ganelon, who betrayed Roland and forced him to sound his horn — too late — is here."

Dante and Virgil continued on their journey, and they came to two figures frozen in the ice. One sinner's head was above the other sinner's head, and this sinner was eating the other sinner's head, sinking his teeth into the neck and scalp and chewing.

Dante said to the sinner who was cannibalizing the other sinner, "Tell me your story. Why are you doing this? What is the reason? If you tell me, I can make the reason known in the Land of the Living."

## Chapter 33: Tolomea (Ugolino and Ruggieri) (Inferno)

*I know the story of these two sinners, Virgil thought. They are Ugolino and Ruggieri. Ugolino is Ugolino della Gherardesca, the Count of Donortico, and he is a Ghibelline. Ruggieri is Archbishop Ruggieri degli Ubaldini, and he is a Guelf. Their story took place in Pisa, a Ghibelline city that is surrounded by Guelf cities. Often, the Guelf cities tried to take control over things such as castles in Pisan territory.*

*The Archbishop of Pisa, Ruggieri, a Ghibelline, decided that it would be a good idea to hire a Guelf as city manager, aka podesta. Since the city manager would be a Guelf, he would be able to make better deals with the Guelfs; after all, they would be from the same party. Therefore, Ugolino was hired to be podesta of Pisa.*

*Immediately, Ugolino and Ruggieri began jockeying for power. Ugolino betrayed Pisa by giving good deals to Guelf cities, even giving them castles. Ruggieri was worried because now he had to share power with Ugolino. They worked against each other.*

*Ruggieri locked Ugolino and his progeny in a tower and starved them to death.*

*Ugolino and Ruggieri are actually in two different rings in Circle 9. Ugolino betrayed Pisa by giving good deals and good castles to Pisa's Guelf enemies; therefore, he is a traitor to country and is punished in Ring #2: Antenora. Ruggieri betrayed Ugolino by locking him and his progeny in a tower and starving them to death; therefore, he is a traitor to guests or associates and is punished in Ring #3: Tolomea.*

The sinner who was cannibalizing the head of the other sinner wiped his bloody mouth on the other sinner and then said, "You want me to tell a story that will cause me grief, but I am willing to tell it so that this sinner's deeds will be known and remembered.

"Know that I am Count Ugolino, and the head I am biting belongs to Archbishop Ruggieri. You probably know much of my story already — but not the heartbreaking details.

"I trusted Archbishop Ruggieri, and because I trusted him, my children and I ended up in prison. Listen, and you shall learn why I make his head my never-ending meal!

"In the tower where we were imprisoned was a window that consisted of a narrow slit. Through it I saw the moon wax and wane many times until one night I had a dream that revealed our evil future.

"I dreamed that Archbishop Ruggieri was a hunter, and he was hunting a father wolf and his wolf cubs. The hunting dogs found the weary father wolf and his wolf cubs and ripped them to pieces.

"When I woke up, I heard my children, still asleep, crying out in their dreams for food.

"If you do not cry at what I am telling you, do you ever cry?"

"My children awoke, and I heard nails being pounded into the door through which our food was pushed. I knew then that we would die of starvation. I did not weep, for inside I was stone.

"My children wept, and Anselmuccio said to me, 'What is wrong, father?'

"I did not cry. We were not fed. As days passed by without food, in anguish I bit my hands.

"My children thought that I was biting my hands because of hunger, and they said, 'Feed upon us, father. You gave us our flesh; now take our flesh from us!'

"On the fourth day without food, my Gaddo fell to the floor, crying, 'Help me, father!' Then he died.

"My other three children died in the following days, and for two days I called their names. Then I learned which is more powerful: grief or hunger."

*And then you ate the flesh of your children, Virgil thought. But like other sinners in the Inferno, you have told a self-serving story. Both you and Archbishop Ruggieri are unrepentant sinners, as we know from the fact that both of you are in the Inferno. Both of you betrayed the other. Both of you did some pretty nasty things to each other. You have told us the nasty things that Archbishop Ruggieri did to you, but you have left out the nasty things that you did to Archbishop Ruggieri.*

*“Also, you have been misleading in your story. You make it sound as if the four members of your family were all very young sons of yours. Actually, you were imprisoned with two sons and two grandsons. Three were adults; only one was a minor of 15 years old. Still, they were innocent, while you were guilty. Extreme factionalism results in the death of innocents.*

*Your punishment in the Inferno is fitting. This punishment reenacts your final act on Earth: eating the flesh of your children and grandchildren. You are condemned to reenact this forever.*

*Ruggieri, of course, placed you in a position where you were so hungry that you starved to death, so it is fitting that he is the object of your cannibalism here.*

*You, Ugolino, are getting what you want here: You want to eat Ruggieri’s flesh, and you are doing exactly that.*

*And Ugolino, you asked Dante, “If you do not cry at what I am telling you, do you ever cry?” But then you said that you did not cry. Why not? You are an evil man. You have been involved in devious political manipulations and betrayals. At this point, your heart has turned to stone. In the future, the King James Version translation of Ezekiel 36:26 will say, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”*

*You, Ugolino, have not done the things that would earn you a heart of flesh. You have done, however, the kind of things that have earned you a heart of stone.*

*You two sinners have engaged in extreme factionalism. You two sinners have gotten innocents killed. You two sinners have not had the proper relationship between church and state government.*

Having finished speaking, Ugolino returned to his meal, and Dante and Virgil walked on. Dante mourned the death of the innocents, but he did not mourn the punishment of Ugolino and Ruggieri, who were two very evil sinners.

Dante noticed the wind now, and he asked Virgil what was its cause. Virgil replied, “You will soon see for yourself what is causing this wind.”

In Ring #3, which is named Tolomea, the faces looked up rather than down. The icy tears of the sinners froze their tear ducts, denying them the luxury of crying more tears.

A sinner frozen in the ice saw Dante and Virgil and thought that they were sinners destined for the final ring of the final Circle of the Inferno. The sinner called out, “Oh, wicked souls who are so evil that you have been sentenced to that part of the Inferno that punishes the very worst sinners, break the frozen tears off my eyes so that I may cry some more until the new tears freeze.”

“Tell me your name, and I will either do what you request or go beneath this ice,” Dante replied.

*You, Dante, are torturing this sinner, Virgil thought, and this sinner deserves to be tortured. You, Dante, may know that you will go beneath this ice because you know that we are going downward. Once we reach the very center of the Earth, we must climb upward to the other side of the world, and to do that we must go underneath this ice.*

The sinner replied, “I am Friar Alberigo, and I betrayed my guests. I invited a close relative named Manfred and Manfred’s son to supper, and then I had them murdered. I called for fruit



to be served, and 'Bring in the fruit' was the prearranged signal for my men to murder my guests. However, I am being punished worse than I deserve."

*No, you are being punished exactly as much as you deserve, Virgil thought. God does not make mistakes. You are not actually dead yet, for your body will die in 1307, and the year now is 1300. But since you are here before you are dead, you deserve to be here.*

"I am surprised to hear your name," Dante said. "I thought that you were still alive."

"This section of Tolomea is special," Friar Alberigo replied. "Some sinners here were so evil that their souls came here before their body died. In the Land of the Living, a demon is inside my body, doing with it I don't know what.

"Other sinners here are in the same fix. Another sinner who has sinned so badly that his soul ended up in the Inferno while a demon inhabits his body until the body's death is Ser Branca D'Oria. A third sinner in the same situation is a close kinsman of Ser Branca who helped him commit his crime: Ser Branca invited his father-in-law, Michel Zanche, to dine with him, and then murdered him."

"That can't be right," Dante said. "Branca D'Oria is still alive, eating and drinking and sleeping."

"It is as I have told you," Friar Alberigo replied. "The soul of Branca D'Oria is here, while a demon inhabits his body in the Land of the Living.

"But do as you promised and break the frozen tears from my face so that I may cry some more."

Dante ignored the request. Friar Alberigo was a sinner. He did not deserve even to cry.

Dante thought, *How sinful men can be. They can be so sinful that their souls are already in Hell although their bodies seem to be alive on Earth.*

## Chapter 34: The Ultimate Evil

Virgil said to Dante, “*Vexilla regis prodeunt Inferni*,” which means, “The banners of the king of the Inferno advance.”

Dante looked, and he saw what seemed to be a huge windmill in the distance. Coming from it were gusts of wind. When he would get closer, he would see that this was not a windmill, but instead the worst sinner of all time: Lucifer, the angel who rebelled against God. Creating the wind were the flapping bat-like wings of Lucifer. The more he flapped his wings in his attempt to escape from the ice, the harder the wind from his wings froze the ice, making his escape even more impossible.

Dante looked down, and he saw that now the sinners were completely encased in the ice in grotesque positions. Some lay flat. Some stood erect. Some were frozen in the ice standing on their heads. Some were frozen bent in the middle, with their heads near their feet.

Dante and Virgil kept walking, and Virgil said, “This is the worst sinner of all time. His name is Dis. His name is Lucifer. His name is Satan. Looking at him up close will take all the courage you have.”

Dante looked, and he saw that Lucifer was frozen in the ice up to the midpoint of his chest. Lucifer was once the most beautiful of all of the angels, but Dante saw that Lucifer was now the foulest of all beings. Lucifer had one head, but he had three faces — a perversion of the Holy Trinity. The face in the middle was red, the color of anger. The face on the right was white blended with yellow, the color of impotence. The face on the left was black, the color of ignorance.

Beneath each face were two wings like those of bats. Lucifer continually flapped his three sets of wings, keeping three winds howling in Circle 9 and keeping the lake frozen solid. Each face had two eyes, which continually cried. Each face had a mouth, and each mouth chewed on a sinner. Here were the three worst human sinners of all time.

“The sinner is the middle, whose feet are sticking out of Lucifer’s mouth, is the worst human sinner of all time: Judas, who betrayed the Son of God,” Virgil said. “The other two sinners, whose top halves are sticking out of Lucifer’s other mouths, are Cassius and Brutus.”

*Cassius and Brutus are the second and third worst human sinners of all time, Virgil thought. God supported the formation of the Roman Empire and so the Roman Empire was divinely willed. The Roman Empire was known for its rule of law, and for its peace — the Pax Romana. By opposing the formation of the Roman Empire through their assassination of Julius Caesar, Brutus and Cassius were traitors to God. Thus, Brutus and Cassius were traitors to their benefactors, both spiritual and temporal. Also, by assassinating Julius Caesar, they ensured that more power struggles would come into existence and more people would be killed before the Roman Empire came into existence.*

Virgil then said to Dante, “You have now seen all of the Inferno, so it is time for us to leave. Hold on to my neck, and I will carry you.”

As Virgil had asked him to, Dante held on to his neck, and Virgil climbed down Lucifer’s body, holding on the hair on Lucifer’s side and thigh. When he reached the midpoint of Lucifer’s body, where the thigh begins, Virgil turned and suddenly and surprisingly Dante felt that now they were moving upward. He thought at first that Virgil was climbing back toward Lucifer’s head but then he saw Lucifer’s legs rising upward. The sight reminded him of the simonists’ legs sticking out of the flaming holes that they had landed in.

Panting from the effort, Virgil said to Dante, “This is the only way that we can get to where we now need to go. A moment ago it was night; now it is day.”

They reached a cavern and rested. Dante asked Virgil to explain what had happened.

Virgil said, “We reached the center of the Earth when we reached Lucifer’s midpoint. We went from one side of the Earth to the other side and so night became day, and so instead of climbing down we began to climb up.”

*Many of the sinners in the Inferno believe themselves to be the center of the universe, Virgil thought. Well, what is at the center of the universe? I know. It is Lucifer’s crotch. The exact center of the universe is that place where food is not food anymore.*

“Now we are in the Southern Hemisphere, which is completely covered by water except for the Mountain of Purgatory,” Virgil continued. “When Lucifer was thrown out of Heaven, he fell to Earth directly opposite Jerusalem. All of the land rushed away from him in fear, some of it creating the Mountain of Purgatory, where we are going next, and some of it fleeing to the Northern Hemisphere.

“We now must climb upward. There is a passage in the rock through which a stream flows. The stream is Lethe, from which saved souls drink after they have climbed the Mountain of Purgatory. Drinking from Lethe causes the saved souls to stop hurting from sin, although they remember that they have sinned and are grateful that God has forgiven them for their sins. The Inferno draws evil and sin and hurt to itself, so the stream — and the hurt of the sin — flows here.”

Dante and Virgil climbed upward, and they reached the surface of the earth again. The climb took a long time, and when they reached the surface, Dante saw that it was now night in the Southern Hemisphere. It was just before Easter Sunday, April 10, 1300. Dante looked up and saw the stars.

## PURGATORY

## Chapter 1: The Island of Purgatory and Cato the Guard (Purgatory)

Dante the Poet thought, *Now my talent for poetry must be put to a new test. I have left behind me the Inferno, where unrepentant sinners are punished. Now my subject is Purgatory, where repentant sinners are purged of their sins so that they may ascend to Paradise. Muses, let my poetry be worthy of this subject! Let Calliope, the Muse of Epic Poetry and the leader of the other Muses, assist me! Let Calliope keep me from pride! Pride would keep me from telling this part of my tale correctly. Once, the proud daughters of King Pierus, whom he had named after you Muses, challenged you Muses to a contest of song. They had unwisely sung a song about the proud giants known as the Titans rebelling against their rightful ruler, Jupiter, King of the gods. You, Calliope, sang a song that utterly defeated the proud daughters of King Pierus, and then you changed them into magpies. They were proud challengers, but I am a humble suppliant. Pride is the worst and the foundation of all sins. Please, Calliope, sing for my benefit so that I may properly write about the Mountain of Purgatory!*

Dante the Pilgrim looked around him at the base of the Mountain of Purgatory. He and his guide, Virgil, had entered the Inferno on Good Friday of the year 1300. Now, on Easter Sunday, 10 April 1300, dawn was nearing. The Inferno is always in darkness, but here on the Mountain of Purgatory are both day and night. The air of the Inferno always stank, but here the air is always pleasing. Sinners of the Inferno never saw Venus, the planet of love, but here Dante looked up at the sky and saw the bright and beautiful planet.

Dante the Pilgrim then looked to his right, and he saw four stars.

Dante the Poet thought, *These are the stars that the first man, Adam, saw clearly, and no man since him has ever seen so clearly. These four stars, which can be clearly seen from the Forest of Eden, are Prudence, Temperance, Justice, and Fortitude. They are the four cardinal virtues. A person who has Prudence is able to judge which of a number of actions is the correct action to pursue. A person who has Temperance is able to practice self-control when self-control is needed. A person who has Justice is able to correctly balance his or her own self-interest with the needs of others, and a person who has Courage is able to conquer fear so that he or she can do the right thing. Virtuous pagans such as Virgil have the cardinal virtues.*

Dante looked away from the four stars, and he saw an old man of dignity who commanded respect. Any stranger looking at him felt like a good son looking at a good father. The old man was alone. His beard was long, and it was streaked with white among the black. His hair was long, and on each side of his head his hair flowed down to his chest. His face was brightly lit with rays from the four stars. In fact, so brightly lit was it that a viewer could almost say that the Sun — given to us by God — was shining on the old man's face.

The old man saw Dante and Virgil and asked, "Who are you? You have escaped from the Inferno by climbing along the passage through which a stream flows from the Forest of Eden at the top of the Mountain of Purgatory into Cocytus in the Inferno. Who is your guide? Who provided you with light to escape from the forever-dark pit of Hell? Have the laws of God changed? Has God decided that some of the damned may come to the Mountain of Purgatory?"

Dante thought, *This is interesting. Can God change His laws? Why not? Once we had an Old Testament and now we have a New Testament. God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good. God is not limited. Could God decree that a virtuous pagan enter Paradise? Why not? God is all-powerful. God is not limited by Humankind's interpretation of the Bible. If God were to allow virtuous pagans into Paradise, it would be a triumph for Omnipotent Love.*

Virgil had recognized the old man. Virgil grabbed Dante's arm, and motioned for him to kneel and show respect to the old man. Dante quickly obeyed.

Virgil thought, *This man is Cato the Younger. He is also known as Cato the Stoic and as Cato of Utica. In his life, he was renowned for possessing Prudence, Temperance, Justice, and Courage in abundance. He was morally upright. He understood law. He valued freedom. He declined to take bribes. He detested the corruption of his age. When war broke out between Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great, Cato sided with Pompey because he believed that Julius Caesar was the greater enemy of freedom. When Julius Caesar decisively defeated Pompey at Utica, Cato committed suicide there rather than submit to a person whom he considered to be a foe of freedom. Such a suicide is much different from that of Pier della Vigne, who committed suicide out of self-pity and the hope of getting people to feel sorry for him. Pier della Vigne is and deserves to be in the Inferno. Cato's suicide was a vote in favor of freedom. Cato is a suicide, a pagan, and an opponent to Julius Caesar, but he is virtuous.*

Virgil spoke to Cato, "I am not here to help myself. I am here on a mission given to me from a lady in Paradise. She asked me to be a guide for this man. You have requested that we explain what we are doing here, and I will obey your request. This man is still alive; he has not yet died. To avoid being condemned to the Inferno after he dies, he needs help, and so a lady in Paradise asked me to help him. This is the only way that he can avoid eternal damnation. I have guided him through the Inferno with all its damned souls, and now I need to show him all those who are on the Mountain of Purgatory to get him ready to enter Paradise. It is the will of Heaven that we proceed. Please welcome this man. He is searching for freedom, and you value freedom so highly. You committed suicide at Utica because you loved freedom so much. There you cast off your body — a body with which you will be reunited on the Great Day that is the Day of Judgment. Neither this man nor I have broken Heaven's laws by coming here. This man is still alive, and Minos has never judged me and found me guilty. I come from Limbo, where the virtuous pagans, including Marcia, your wife, resides. Marcia loves you and still wishes to be your wife. Out of your love of her, please allow us to climb the seven ledges of the Mountain of Purgatory. I will tell her of your kindness to us, if you will allow me to mention your name in Limbo."

Cato said, "While I was alive, I would do anything for Marcia. But now I am doing the Will of a Greater Power, and she can no longer command me. But since a Heavenly lady wishes you to be here and to climb the mountain, that is all that is necessary. You may climb the mountain. You need not flatter me. Take this man and tie a humble reed around his waist. Also clean his face. The tears of Hell are on his face, and it is not fitting that he see angels. Go down to where the waves break upon the shore. Reeds are growing in soft sand. Most plants cannot survive there; the waves would break their stalks. But the humble reed bows before the waves and so survives. When you are ready to climb the mountain, do not come back here. The daylight will show you where to go."

Cato left them.

Dante rose from his knees, and he looked at Virgil.

Virgil said to him, "Follow me. I see where the reeds grow."

Daylight was more pronounced, and Dante could see the waves. Dante and Virgil walked to the shore. They were like two men who had wandered from a path and were eager to find the path again.

They reached a place that was still shaded, and so the dew remained. Virgil put his hands in the dewy grass, and Dante turned his face to him. Virgil cleaned from Dante's face the traces of the tears that he had shed when he had pitied some sinners in the Inferno — a pity that had angered Virgil and that Dante had learned was undeserved. Once again, Dante had a clean face with no trace of Hell left on it.

Then Virgil pulled a reed to tie around Dante's waist. Immediately, another reed grew to take its place.

*This is a place of miracles, Dante thought. It is also a place of growth. Good things happen here.*

## Chapter 2: New Souls Arrive in Purgatory (Purgatory)

Dawn arrived, and Dante and Virgil looked around them, wondering in which direction they should go. Then Dante saw far out at sea on the horizon a light like that of Mars as it glows through fog.

Dante the Poet thought, *That is a light that I would like to see again!*

The light moved quickly. Dante the Pilgrim looked at Virgil and then looked out at sea again. The light was brighter and much closer than before. Two spots of whiteness appeared beside the light, and then a spot of whiteness appeared under the light, and Virgil, recognizing now what he was seeing, told Dante, “Fall to your knees! Look! The angel of the Lord is coming! Fold your hands! You will see more angels like him!”

Dante looked, and now he saw that the two spots of whiteness on either side of the light were the wings of the angel and the spot of brightness under the light was the body of the angel.

Virgil said, “See how the angel scorns to use any human-made means of acceleration! The angel does not need oars or sails! Only the movement of the angel’s wings powers the boat! See how the angel has the wings pointed toward Heaven! The wings have feathers that do not molt as do the feathers of birds on earth!”

The angel came closer and closer to the Island of Purgatory, and as he came closer and closer, he shone brighter and brighter until Dante could no longer look at him and had to bow his head.

The angel steered straight to the shore on his swift and light boat, on which over 100 souls were on board. All the souls were singing “*In Exitu Israel de Aegypto*” — “When Israel Came Out of Egypt.” This song is Psalm 114, of which these souls, who were leaving exile to go to Paradise, sang every verse:

“When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language;

“Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion.

“The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back.

“The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs.

“What ailed you, O sea, that you fled? You, Jordan, that you were driven back?

“You, mountains, that you skipped like rams; and you, little hills, like lambs?

“Tremble, you earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob;

“Who turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters.”

Dante thought, *This is a place of song, unlike the Inferno. And this is a place where people come to end their exile from God, also unlike the Inferno.*

The angel made the sign of the cross, allowed the souls to disembark from the boat, and then left as quickly as he had come.

The newly arrived souls curiously examined their surroundings; after all, they were strangers to this place. Full morning had arrived, and one of the newly arrived souls shouted to Dante and Virgil, “Do you know where is the road that leads up the mountain? If you do, please show it to us.”

Virgil replied, “We are not yet familiar with this place. We are like you, newly arrived, but we came here by way of a journey that will make climbing up the mountain seem easy.”

Dante thought, *This is a place where one can ask for help, and no doubt, usually get it. We asked Cato for help, and he willingly gave it to us. If Virgil and I had the knowledge that would answer these souls’ questions, we would willingly share our knowledge with them. In the*

*Inferno, souls seldom ask for help, and seldom do they get help. And when they do get help or pity, it is from a naïve visitor such as me.*

Then the newly arrived souls noticed something odd about Dante: He breathed! He was still alive! The souls crowded around Dante, curious about him and forgetting the reason they were on the Island of Purgatory: to climb the Mountain of Purgatory so that they could see God.

One soul in particular was happy to see Dante. This soul came toward Dante with arms outstretched as if he wanted to hug him. Dante did not recognize this soul, but willing to be gracious in such a place, he came toward the soul and attempted three times to embrace him, but each time he failed.

Virgil thought, *This is like the scene in Homer's Odyssey in which Odysseus visits the Underworld and sees his mother. Three times he tries to embrace her, but he fails each time. His living body is unable to touch her soul. This is also like two scenes in my Aeneid. In fleeing Troy, Aeneas' wife, Creusa, dies. Aeneas returns to the city to find and rescue her, but he sees her shade. Three times he tries to embrace her, but each time he fails. Later, Aeneas is in the Underworld, where he sees the shade of his late father, Anchises. Three times he tries to embrace him, but each time he fails.*

Dante was surprised, but the soul smiled and suggested that he not try again to embrace him.

Now Dante knew the identity of the soul by the richness of his voice. This was the soul of his friend Casella, who had died months ago and who was a singer, a musician, and a poet. Dante begged him to stay and talk.

Casella replied, "We were friends when I was alive, and we are still friends although I am dead. Of course, I will stay and talk to you. But why are you, a living man, here now?"

Dante said, "I am making this journey as a living man now in hopes that I will be worthy to come back here after I am dead rather than being condemned to the Inferno. But you died months ago. Why has it taken you so long to arrive here?"

Casella replied, "I have no complaint. The angel often declined to take me on board his boat, for God, who is always just, guides the angel's will. But three months ago, Pope Boniface VIII granted a plenary indulgence because 1300 is the great Jubilee Year, a time of joy, of pardon, of remission of the punishment of sin. We saved souls have been forgiven our sins, but we still must go through Purgatory so that we become purged of all sin. God does not always allow those who have died to come quickly to the Mountain of Purgatory. If we kept God waiting until we became Christians late in life, God keeps us waiting at the mouth of the Tiber River, where the saved souls assemble. By granting a plenary indulgence, Pope Boniface VIII allowed those of us who kept God waiting by becoming Christians late in life the chance to come quicker to the Mountain of Purgatory than we otherwise would. Because of the plenary indulgence, all any of us have to do is to ask the angel to take us here, and the angel will do it. Even now, the angel is heading back to the Tiber to pick up another load of saved souls."

Dante thought, *Pope Boniface VIII is doomed to the Inferno, but even he can do a good deed sometimes. God can accomplish much even through the deeds of evil men. And what about you, Casella? For three months, all you had to do was ask the angel to bring you here and he would have done it, but only now are you arriving here. Did you do a good deed by allowing others to arrive here first? Or did you feel not worthy yet to come here?*

Dante asked, "If no law forbids it, I would like to hear a love song, one of those that brought me happiness on Earth. Please sing one, and help me to rid myself of some of the exhaustion I have suffered as a result of my journey."



Casella was willing, and he began singing, “*Amor Che Ne la Mente Mi Ragiona,*” or “Love, that Within My Mind Discourses with Me.”

Dante thought, *I wrote the poem that Casella is singing. Casella set it to music.*

Dante, Virgil, and all the newly arrived souls listened to the line with great enjoyment, but their enjoyment was quickly interrupted.

Cato, the Just Old Man, appeared and shouted, “WHAT ARE YOU DOING? YOU NEED TO CONCENTRATE ON YOUR SOULS, NOT ON SILLY LOVE SONGS! KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE! RUN TO THE MOUNTAIN! LOOK FOR THE PLACE AND THE TIME TO BEGIN CLIMBING!”

You may have seen a flock of pigeons feeding in a field and strutting, showing off their fine feathers. But they are suddenly interrupted and instantly fly away.

Like the pigeons, the newly arrived souls instantly fled — and so did Dante and Virgil.

Dante thought, *So this is the job of Cato — to make sure that the saved souls stay focused on the job of purging their sins. Obviously, these souls are not yet perfected, just as Virgil and I are not. Obviously, they — as well as Virgil and I — can be distracted from the job they and we ought to be doing.*

### Chapter 3: Prepurgatory — The Excommunicated (Purgatory)

The recently arrived souls raced ahead, but Dante stayed close to Virgil, who slowed down and felt remorse.

Virgil thought, *My job is to be Dante's guide and to make sure that he sees what is necessary to save his soul, but here I have failed. I should have known that secular love songs are not permitted here because the purpose of Purgatory is to prepare souls to enter Paradise.*

Striding beside Virgil, who had resumed his normal pace, and heading west, Dante looked up at the mountain in front of him. But as he raised his eyes, he noticed his shadow. He also noticed that only one shadow — his own — was ahead of him. Afraid that Virgil might have abandoned him, he looked quickly beside him.

Virgil noticed and said, "Why are you worried? Did you think that I am not still your guide? Are you surprised that I have no shadow? Your body blocks the Sun's rays, but my body lies in the tomb in Naples to which it was taken by the order of Caesar Augustus after my body had been buried in Brindisi, where I died. Because I have no body, I do not cast a shadow. But although I have no body, I can still feel pain and feel cold and feel heat, all by the order of God, whose Will cannot be totally known by us humans. None of us outside of Paradise will ever be able to understand the Trinity: Three Persons in One Being. Be satisfied with knowing the Fact of some things without knowing the Why. If we humans knew everything, Mary need not have given birth to Jesus. You have visited Limbo. There people such as Plato and Aristotle and others reside who would like to know the Why but never will. Such souls know that they will never reach Paradise and acquire such understanding. Because of this, they suffer endless pain."

Virgil was silent and unhappy.

Dante thought, *Virgil is thinking that he is one of those who reside in Limbo and will never reach Paradise.*

Dante and Virgil reached the foot of the mountain. Looking at its side, they saw that it was so steep and so sheer that they had no chance of climbing it. Any of the mountains in any of the other parts of the Earth would be an easy climb compared to this.

Virgil asked himself and Dante, "How can we find a place at which we can begin to scale this mountain?"

Virgil's head bent low as he thought, and Dante's head raised high as he looked at the mountain. A crowd of souls came toward them from their left — a crowd of souls moving so slowly that they seemed not to be moving.

Dante said to Virgil, "Look over there! Some people are coming who should be able to help us find a way up this mountain — if you have not already thought of a way."

Virgil looked, and relieved, he said, "Let us go to meet them because they are moving so slowly, and you, you continue to hope that they can help us."

Dante and Virgil walked a thousand steps toward the group of souls and were as far away from them as a person who is talented with a slingshot could throw a stone. Then the group of souls halted and stared at them.

Virgil said, "Saved souls, you ended your lives well, with the promise of eventually residing in Paradise. Please tell us in which place the mountain is not so steep that it cannot be climbed. We are eager to climb it, and we regret the time that we spend waiting."

One of the saved souls moved forward, and then another, and then another, until the entire group was moving forward, slowly. Dante thought, *They look like a group of sheep that lack a*

*shepherd. Sheep move like that. One or two move, and then the others follow them. The sheep move so slowly because they have no shepherd to keep them moving.*

But the saved souls in front saw Dante's shadow. They stopped and backed up. The saved souls in the back also backed up, although they did not know the reason for backing up.

Virgil said, "I know what is bothering you. This man casts a shadow because he is still living. But do not be afraid. This man would not be here if it were not the will of Heaven. His purpose for being here is to climb the mountain."

The saved souls replied, "Go ahead of us in the direction in which we are heading. You will find the place from which you may climb the mountain."

One of the saved souls in front said, "As you walk forward in pursuit of your goal — I don't want to keep you from accomplishing your purpose — look backward at me and see if you recognize me."

Dante looked back and looked closely at the saved soul, who was blond and looked like a patrician, although a sword had cut through one of his eyebrows.

Although Dante looked closely at the saved soul, he had to confess that he did not recognize him.

The saved soul then showed Dante a gash above his breast — a second mortal wound. The saved soul smiled and said, "I am Manfred. My grandmother is the Empress Constance. I humbly request that when you are again in the Land of the Living, go and see my daughter, whose sons are the King of Aragon and the King of Sicily. No doubt, rumors are that I was sentenced to spend eternity in the Inferno because I was excommunicated. Tell my daughter that as I lay dying with these two mortal wounds, I was saved. I asked forgiveness for my sins from God. My sins were horrible, but God's forgiveness is infinite. All who believe that their sins are incapable of being forgiven by God are guilty of the sin of pride."

Dante thought, *Why is Manfred smiling as he says these words? He may simply be amused that I do not recognize him. Manfred was famous. I have heard of him although I did not recognize him, Manfred is humble; he did not get angry when I failed to recognize him. Manfred was killed in the Battle of Benevento in 1266, the battle that led to the return of the Guelfs to Florence — I was one year old at the time. Or Manfred could be smiling because I will be able to give the good news of his salvation to his daughter. He is happy that I can give good news to his daughter and make her happy. His daughter will know that he is a saved soul and is not suffering the torments of Hell. Or perhaps Manfred is smiling because he is aware that I am likely to think that he does not belong here in Purgatory. He may be thinking, I bet you didn't think I was saved, did you? After all, I know that he was excommunicated. But it does not take years of penance to get God's mercy. All it takes is a moment, and Manfred repented his sins in the very last moment of his life.*

Manfred continued, "Because I was excommunicated from the Church, my bones were dug up by the Pastor of Cosenza who was following the orders of Pope Clement IV. The Pastor of Cosenza then cast my bones outside Church territory. Now the wind and the rain buffet my bones. But even though I was excommunicated, that will not keep me from Paradise. Repentance and salvation can occur in the very last moment of life."

Dante thought, *Manfred is right. Excommunication is being expelled formally from a religious body. Excommunication is not the same thing as damnation. God decides where we will go in the afterlife, not the Church. I see that Manfred is not angry about how his body was treated on Earth. Many sinners in the Inferno were angry. Manfred is happy that he was saved.*

*Excommunication does mean being without a shepherd. Manfred and other excommunicated souls did not have a shepherd to guide them because they were separated from the Church.*

Manfred continued, “But those who are excommunicated, although they repent at the end of life, must stay at the foot of the mountain for thirty times as long as they were excommunicated. However, prayers by the living for the dead can shorten that time. Please tell my daughter that. I hope that she will pray for me and others.”

Dante thought, *Manfred is a saved soul, but his father, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, is in the Inferno — he is in the tomb with Farinata. Members of the same family can end up in different places in the afterlife.*

## Chapter 4: Purgatory — The Spiritually Lazy (Purgatory)

Dante was so interested in what Manfred had to say that he had lost track of time. Suddenly aware that much time had passed, he thought, *A human being has only one soul, although it may have more than one part. If he or she had two or more souls, one soul would be able to pay particular attention to what Manfred had to say while another soul would be able to pay particular attention to the passage of time. He is wrong who teaches that human beings have more than one soul. The Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas was correct when he stated that a human being has one unified soul with three parts.*

The souls with whom Dante and Virgil were traveling called out, “Here is the way up the mountain that you have been searching for.” Dante and Virgil began climbing, while the souls continued their journey.

The gap was narrow, and it was steep, and climbing it required the use of both hands and both feet. Think of San Leo and Noli. Those towns are on steep hills that you can climb with your feet only, but this mountain cannot be climbed so easily.

Dante and Virgil climbed up the narrow passageway. They rested briefly, and Dante asked, “Where do we now go?” Virgil replied, “Straight up, as we have been going. We must not be distracted. We must find an experienced person to guide us for a while.”

They climbed, but Dante grew exhausted. He pleaded to Virgil, “Listen to me, please. I must stop. I cannot keep up with you.”

Virgil replied, “Keep climbing until we reach the open area that we can see from here. Then you can rest.”

They climbed and reached the open area and rested. They looked down at the area that they had traveled. Seeing the distance that a traveler had already traveled can put heart in a tired traveler.

Dante looked at the shore, which was far below him, and then he looked up at the Sun, but it was not where he expected it to be. Virgil, who knew Dante’s thoughts and his questions, said, “The Sun is not where you expected it to be because you are in the Southern Hemisphere. You are no longer in Italy, which is in the Northern Hemisphere. Think of a person high in the Northern Hemisphere looking at the equator. That person will see the Sun travel from left to right. Now imagine a person low in the Southern Hemisphere looking at the equator. That person will see the Sun travel from right to left.”

Dante said, “I understand, but can you tell me now how much more climbing we have to do? We have done much steep and difficult climbing, but still the peak of the mountain is so high that I cannot see it.”

Virgil replied, “This mountain is different from other mountains. This mountain is the most difficult of all mountains to climb, but it is hardest at the beginning of the climb. The higher one climbs, the easier the climbing becomes. When climbing the mountain becomes as easy as floating in a boat down a river, then you have reached the end of your journey.”

Dante thought, *Resisting sin is like climbing this mountain. Turning away from sin is very difficult at first, but it becomes easier as one’s will grows stronger. As one’s will is strengthened and perfected, it becomes much easier to resist sin. In other words, the higher one climbs up the mountain, the more one purges his or her sin. The more sin one purges, the easier it is to climb up the mountain.*

Dante and Virgil then heard a voice: “Before you ... reach the top ... of this mountain ... you will feel ... like resting.”

Dante and Virgil turned in the direction from which the voice had come. They saw a boulder that they had not looked closely at, and they saw some souls resting in its shade.

All of the souls looked tired — or lazy. One soul was sitting with his arms wrapped around his knees and his head drooping between his legs.

Dante said to Virgil, “Look at this soul! No man on Earth could look more like a lazy man, not even if his middle name were ‘Lazy.’”

The lazy soul barely lifted his head and looked at Dante and said, “If ... unlike me ... you are filled ... with energy ... run up ... this mountain.”

Dante recognized the soul by his voice. Still exhausted from his climb, Dante staggered toward him.

The lazy soul teased Dante: “Do you now know ... why the Sun ... travels from your right ... to your left?”

Dante half-smiled and said to the soul whom he now recognized to be a friend, one who in the Land of the Living made parts for musical instruments when he could rouse himself from laziness, “Belacqua, now I need not worry about what happened to you after your death! You are a saved soul, and you will see Paradise! But why are you sitting here? Are you waiting for a guide? Or are you as lazy here as you were in the Land of the Living?”

Dante thought, *The unrepentant slothful are punished in the Inferno, and I was afraid that my friend Belacqua would be punished there. But any sin can be forgiven if it is sincerely repented.*

Belacqua replied, “Climbing will not do me ... any good ... just yet. ... The angel ... will not allow me to pass ... from Purgatory ... into Purgatory Proper ... until as many years ... pass here ... as passed ... until I repented ... at the very end ... of my life. ... I kept God waiting ... and now ... as is proper ... God keeps me ... waiting. ... However ... God is merciful ... and if ... people pray for me ... I may go ... to Purgatory Proper ... and start climbing ... the Mountain of Purgatory ... sooner ... as long as ... the prayers come ... from a good heart. ... The prayers ... of evil people ... such as hypocrites ... are not heard ... in Heaven.”

Dante thought, *I see what is going on in Purgatory. Here are the souls who are waiting to climb the Mountain of Purgatory. They made God wait — by waiting to repent — and so God is making them wait to climb the mountain. Virgil and I have already seen the excommunicated and the slothful. Perhaps we will see other kinds of late-repentant souls.*

Virgil said to Dante, “It is already noon,” and then Virgil started climbing the mountain again.

## Chapter 5: Prepurgatory — Those Who Repented While Meeting Violent, Sudden Deaths (Purgatory)

Dante had turned to follow Virgil, when one of the spiritually lazy souls said, “Look! He is casting a shadow! He seems to be still alive!”

Dante turned around and saw the souls staring at him and his shadow.

Virgil turned around and asked Dante, “What has distracted your attention now? Focus on your real reason for being here. Do not care if the souls here whisper about you. Follow me and let me lead you upward. Be like a stone tower that resists the winds. Don’t be like a man whose attention is easily distracted from what is important.”

Virgil thought, *I can see why Cato is needed here. Too often, souls here — even myself earlier — allow themselves to be distracted. Cato is needed to remind these souls to keep their eyes on the prize.*

Dante, shamed and blushing, said, “I am coming now.”

Another group of souls was coming and chanting the *Miserere*, a Psalm asking for the forgiveness of sins. Some souls sang one part, and the other souls sang another part, alternating parts until all the lines of the Psalm had been sung. The first lines they sang were these:

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness: according to the multitude of Your tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

“Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

“For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.”

Dante thought, *Music is a part of at least Prepurgatory. It may also be a part of Purgatory Proper and maybe even beyond. Music is not a part of the Inferno. Music and the Psalms are an important part of the life of monks. Preparing for Purgatory can be started while one is still alive on Earth. The monks do that.*

This group of souls also noticed that Dante was casting a shadow, and two of this group of souls came running toward Dante. These souls asked, “Who are you? Please tell us your stories.”

Virgil replied, “You may return and tell the other souls that this man beside me is still alive. I know that they must be surprised because he is casting a shadow. These souls may profit from becoming acquainted with him.”

The two souls ran back to the other souls, and all the souls came running up to Dante and Virgil.

Virgil said, “Many souls are coming toward us. Each will want a favor from you. Listen to them, but keep walking as you listen.”

The souls asked Dante, “You, who are still alive, please look at us and see if you recognize any of us. If you do, please bring back news of that person to those still living. Please stop and listen to us. All of us met a violent death, and all of us repented in our last moments of life. When we died, we were at peace with God. We left life longing to see God.”

Dante replied, “I clearly see your faces, but I do not recognize any of you saved souls. But if I can do something to help you, please tell me, and I will help you.”

One of the souls said, “We know that you will keep your word unless you are prevented by some powerful reason. I will make my plea first. If you ever go to the town of Fano, please tell the souls there to pray for me so I may sooner begin my journey through Purgatory Proper. I came from Fano, but I died away from home, in a region where I thought I would be safe. Azzo of Este had me killed. I was taken by surprise, and if I had fled toward Mira I would still

be alive. Instead, I fled into a swamp and the reeds slowed me down and tripped me and I was slaughtered and watched the blood flow out of my body and form a pool.”

Dante thought, *I have heard of this person. This is Jacopo del Cassero, who opposed Azzo VIII, who was both powerful and without pity. In 1298, Jacopo was traveling to Milan, but Azzo sent assassins to ambush him at the town of Oriago. As Jacopo said, he died a violent death.*

A second soul said, “I hope that your journey up the mountain will be successful, and I hope that you will help me. I am Buonconte, and I am from Montefeltro. No one — not even my wife, Giovanna, cares for me. I am ashamed.”

Dante thought, *Apparently, no one — not even his wife, Giovanna — is saying prayers for his soul.*

Dante asked, “No one ever found the place where you were buried. What happened to your body?”

Buonconte of Montefeltro replied, “In 1289 I led my forces — the Ghibellines of Arezzo — against the Guelfs of Florence. In this battle — the Battle of Campaldino — I was defeated and mortally wounded. I made my way to the river Archiano. My throat was an open wound. I went blind from loss of blood. I murmured one word — ‘Mary’ — and I shed a tear of true repentance. Then I died.

“Because I had repented at the very last moment of life, an angel from Paradise and a fiend from the Inferno showed up. The angel took my soul, and the fiend said, ‘You are stealing what I thought would be mine. But although you have charge of Buonconte’s immortal soul because of a single word and a single tear, I am taking charge of what remains of his mortal part: his corpse.’ The fiend called up a storm, great torrents of water fell from the stormy sky, and my corpse was swept into the river Arno.”

Dante thought, *The father of Buonconte of Montefeltro is Guido da Montefeltro, whom I saw in the Inferno. Their stories are very different. Guido da Montefeltro thought that he was going to Paradise, and Saint Francis even came for his soul, but a black devil intervened and pointed out that Guido had not truly repented his sins. So at the last moment, his soul was snatched into Hell. Buonconte of Montefeltro, however, called on Mary’s name at the last moment of his life, and at the last moment he truly repented his sins and therefore he will eventually be in Paradise. Guido attempted to scam God with a fake repentance. Pope Boniface VIII scammed Guido into going back to his evil ways. In contrast, Buonconte’s repentance is sincere. He utters one sincere word with his last breath, and that is enough to save him. The devil that comes to collect Buonconte’s soul is angry and abuses his corpse, but the corpse is not important — the soul is. Repentance must be sincere; no one gets away with trying to scam God. It is interesting to note that my political enemies can make it into Paradise. I was a Guelf, and Buonconte was a Ghibelline, an enemy of the Guelfs, but Buonconte will make it into Paradise.*

Then a third soul, a woman, spoke to Dante: “After you have rested from your journey once you are back in the Land of the Living, please remember me. My name is Pia. I was born in Siena; I died in Maremma. My husband, who pledged faith to me when he put a ring on my finger, killed me.”

Dante thought, *This is La Pia, whose jealous husband thought that she had committed adultery and threw her out of a window. I spoke to only one woman — Francesca da Rimini — in the Inferno. La Pia is the first woman I have spoken to on the Mountain of Purgatory. The two souls are very different. La Pia is courteous. She wants me to remember her after I am rested from his journey. La Pia is simply charming. La Pia also sincerely repented her sins. Francesca put herself at the center of the universe, while La Pia wants me to rest first, and*



*then remember her. These souls in Purgatory want me to remember them. One reason, of course, is that souls in Purgatory will benefit from prayers that are said for them. Living people do pray for the souls of deceased loved ones, and if we are pure of heart, our prayers will be heard in Heaven. The souls in Purgatory also want loved ones to know that they — the souls in Purgatory — will make it to Paradise.*

## Chapter 6: Prepurgatory — Sordello (Purgatory)

Think of the ending of a game of dice. The loser stays behind, replaying each throw of the dice in his mind, suddenly aware that he should not have played the game.

The winner walks away with many newfound friends, all congratulating him on his good fortune and all hoping for a portion of that good fortune. Most of the newfound friends block his exit except for the fortunate few to whom he gives a coin. To the others he gives promises and eventually is able to depart.

So Dante was surrounded by souls requesting to be remembered in the Land of the Living so that they would be prayed for and be able to more quickly climb the Mountain of Purgatory, the task that God had set for them.

As Dante was surrounded, souls spoke to him and told him who they are. Although he had not recognized these souls, they were well known enough that he had heard of them.

Dante saw Benincasa of Laterina here. As a judge in the city of Arezzo, Benincasa gave the brother of the notorious bandit Ghino di Tacco the death sentence. Benincasa became a judge in Rome, and to get revenge for his brother's death, Ghino disguised himself and burst into Benincasa's courtroom in Rome, cut off Benincasa's head, and escaped with it.

Dante also saw here Pierre de la Brosse of Turenne, who was accused by Mary of Brabant, the second wife of Philip III of France, of having corresponded with King Alfonso X of Castile, Philip's enemy, with whom he was warring. Mary caused forged correspondence to be created, and in 1278, Pierre was hanged, thus dying of violence like the other saved souls in this group.

Eventually, Dante and Virgil were able to free themselves from this group of souls and continue climbing upward.

Dante, however, was puzzled. He said to Virgil, "I have read, I believe, in your *Aeneid*, that prayers cannot bend the will of Heaven. Aeneas, who came from defeated Troy to Italy to become an important ancestor of the Roman people, went with the Sybil, a prophetess, to the Underworld. On the shore across from the Underworld they saw Palinurus, the pilot of Aeneas' ship, who had drowned. Palinurus' body had not been found and buried, and until it had a funeral, or a hundred years had passed, Chiron the ferryman would not allow him to cross the river and reach the Underworld. Palinurus hoped that Aeneas would pray to his mother, the goddess Venus, for permission to take him across with them to the Underworld. The Sybil who guides Aeneas through the Underworld replied to Palinurus, 'What hopes delude you, wretched soul? Do you think that, thus unburied, you will cross the river and view the Furies and infernal gods, and visit, without burial, the dark abodes? You must wait for your proper time to enter the Underworld. Fate, and the dooming gods, are deaf to prayer.'

"Is it possible that I am misunderstanding the meaning of this passage?"

Virgil replied, "What I wrote there is true, but it does not mean that these souls on the Mountain of Purgatory are wrong when they tell you that prayers will hasten their progress up the Mountain of Purgatory.

"Love can wipe clean the debts that these saved souls owe. The prayers of the pure are heard in Paradise.

"The passage from my *Aeneid* that you quoted refers to a different kind of prayer, a kind of prayer that is not heard in Paradise. The prayers of those who will be damned are not heard in Paradise.

“But soon another will make the meaning of what I say clearer. You know that other: Beatrice, whom you loved and love. You will see her at the top of this mountain. You will see that she is blessed and smiling.”

Dante said, “Let’s pick up the pace. I am eager to see Beatrice. Before, I was tired, but now I am refreshed and eager to travel quickly. Time is passing. It is afternoon now, as I can see by the shadow of this mountain. I am not casting a shadow now. I am in shade.”

Virgil replied, “As long as we have daylight, we will climb, but climbing will take time, and we will not do it in one day. But look, a solitary saved soul is ahead. We can ask him what is the best place to climb upward.”

Dante and Virgil approached the soul, who quietly and warily watched them.

Virgil spoke to him and asked which was the best place to climb upward, but the soul ignored the question and instead asked from which city they had come in the Land of the Living.

Virgil began his answer, “Mantua ....”

The soul did not wait for the rest of the answer. He jumped up and said, “My name is Sordello, and I am from the same city,” and he embraced Virgil.

Dante the Pilgrim reflected, *This kind of friendly, happy embrace did not happen in the Inferno. I saw no loving hugs in the Inferno. This soul is happy to meet a person who is from his city. He regards its citizens as his friends. Such was not the case when I met Farinata in the Inferno. Farinata, who is from my own city, Florence, regarded me only as a person who could give him information and as a person whom he could triumph over by telling me bad news. Farinata revels in destructive factionalism, and I fell into the trap of dueling verbally with him. Farinata pointed out that he had scattered my party twice, and I pointed out that my party had returned to Florence but that Farinata’s family had not. Our arguing with each other was easy to do, since he is a Ghibelline and I am a Guef. Unless I can refrain from the destructive factionalism that destroys cities and countries, I can end up in the Inferno like Farinata.*

Dante the Poet was seized with a cold fury: *Italy, you are the land of bad factionalism. You are divided, not united, and you lack a good political leader. This soul and Virgil know no factionalism but instead rejoice in being citizens of the same city. But in Italy, civil war reigns even inside one city, as well as city against city and region against region. Is any part of Italy truly at peace?*

*Justinian repaired the Roman law, which is one of the wonders of the world, but that does no good because no one is around to enforce it. Why isn’t the Holy Roman Emperor — Albert I of Hapsburg, Germany — around? In part, because Pope Boniface VIII doesn’t want him around. In a much better world, a good Holy Roman Emperor would enforce the secular law and a good Pope would handle religious matters. The two would work together instead of opposing each other. But Albert I of Hapsburg ignores Italy, which has factionalism between such families as the Capulets and the Montagues. Instead of coming to Italy, the Holy Roman Emperor stays north, and peace is there but not in Italy.*

*Law is enormously important in society. It lets people know what they can and cannot do legally. If the laws were not written down, people would find it difficult to know when they were breaking the law. Florence and other places are chaotic because of constantly changing laws. When the Ghibellines kick out the Guelfs, they make new laws. When the Guelfs kick out the Ghibellines, they make new laws. With political power changing hands so quickly and so often, it is very difficult to make plans. In order for people to respect law, it has to stay law for a while. If it changes frequently, people won’t know what is legal and what is illegal.*

*Italy lacks good leaders. It has fools who call themselves leaders.*

*Florence, my own city, you should be but are not exempt from my criticism. Other cities have citizens who think about what needs to be done and how to go about doing it. First they think, and then they do. But the citizens of Florence speak first and never think. They say, but they never do. Other cities have citizens who think twice before running for political office in order to make sure that they are worthy of serving the public and can do the job well. But the citizens of Florence eagerly run for political office without being competent enough to serve the public. And Florence, you are a model of inconsistency. With the bad factionalism in Florence, one political group seizes power, and then a different political group seizes power. Laws passed in October are overturned in November. Citizens who would like to obey the laws cannot because the laws change so frequently. And a citizen who does an action that is legal in October can be accused of breaking the law later because the legal action that they performed in October is illegal in November. They can be accused of breaking the law even when they don't do that action in November and did it only in October. And not only the laws and politicians change. So do the currency and customs.*

*Though your citizens should lie in luxury, it is as if they are lying in a hospital bed.*

## Chapter 7: Prepurgatory — The Negligent Princes (Purgatory)

Sordello and Virgil embraced three or four times.

Dante thought, *I have heard of Sordello. He was a poet of both political and moral poetry, and he was a climber into the bedroom windows of many women. He was passionate about politics as well and denounced political corruption.*

Then Sordello asked, “Who are you? What are your names?”

Virgil replied, “Before the Harrowing of Hell, in which many souls were taken to this mountain, the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus, previously known as Octavian, buried me. I am Virgil. I lost residence in Paradise not for any fault in virtue, but because I lacked Christian faith.”

Sordello was both believing and disbelieving. “This cannot be the truth — but it is the truth!” Sordello again embraced Virgil, but this time he knelt and embraced Virgil’s knees to show respect to him.

Sordello said to Virgil, “You are the glory of the Romans. You showed that the greatest poetry could be written in Latin. You are the greatest of poets. How am I worthy — or lucky — enough to see you? Are you from the Inferno, and if you are, from what part?”

Dante thought, *Sordello has his faults, although he is a saved soul. He was alone when we met him, but this mountain is a place of community. He was happy to learn that Virgil, whose identity he did not then know, is from his own city, but he ought to be friends with people from other places as well. One day, he will be a citizen of Paradise, whose inhabitants come from many cities.*

*Also, Virgil asked him for directions, but Sordello ignored that request, although this is a place where one can ask for help and usually get it. Sordello apparently was hoping to find someone from his own hometown, which is a form of community. Sordello is a hero-worshipper — as am I. When he learned Virgil’s identity, he was so star-struck that he stopped listening to Virgil’s explanation of where he came from — Limbo — and why he is there. We both adore the poetry of Virgil. But Sordello so hero-worships Virgil that he is ignoring me, who is standing next to him. Also, Sordello is so impressed by Virgil that he is forgetting to keep his eyes on the prize. Still, Sordello is a saved soul. One need not be perfect — which is impossible for mortal men and women — to be saved. Note that Sordello was surprised that this is Virgil. Surprises in Prepurgatory are good.*

Virgil replied to Sordello, “Through all the circles of the Inferno, I have come to this mountain. I am here on a mission from a Heavenly lady. I am denied entrance into Paradise not because of any sin I committed but because of a lack of Christian faith. In the Inferno is a place where sighs are heard instead of shrieks. The sadness of the souls there is due to being separated from God. I am there with unbaptized children who still have the sin of Adam. I am there with those who had the four cardinal virtues of Prudence, Temperance, Justice, and Fortitude in abundance, but lacked the three theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity.

“But can you help us? We need to climb higher and find the path to where Purgatory Proper begins. Can you help us find that path?”

Sordello replied, “Souls in Prepurgatory can go where they wish in Prepurgatory, and so I will be your guide as far as I am allowed to climb. But now night is coming, and it is forbidden to climb higher during the night, so let us find a good place to sleep. To the right is a group of souls that I think you would like to see. With your permission, I will take you there.”

Virgil asked, “Why can’t a soul climb higher during the night? Would someone or something stop him physically? Or would the will of the soul be such that the soul cannot climb higher?”

Sordello used a finger to draw a line on the ground of the upward slope and said, “After nightfall, you would not be able to move past this line. The shadows of night sap the soul and make it unable to move higher. During the night, we can move down the slope, but not up the slope.”

Virgil, surprised by what he had heard, said, “Then please take us to the place you mentioned so that we can rest.”

They walked and they came to a valley and looked down into it.

Sordello said, “Now we will go a little further and then rest.”

The valley was beautiful both in color and in scent. The sound coming from the residents of the valley was also beautiful. It was the song *Salve Regina*, or “Hail, Holy Queen,” a song to Mary, mother of Jesus:

“Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy!

“Our life, our sweetness, and our hope!

“To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve,

“To you do we send up our sighs,

“Mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.

“Turn, then, most gracious advocate,

“Your eyes of mercy toward us;

“And after this our exile show unto us the

“Blessed fruit of your womb — Jesus —

“O clement, O loving, O sweet virgin Mary.”

Dante looked down into the valley, and there he saw saved souls.

Sordello said, “Please don’t ask me to take you down into the valley until after the Sun has set. From here, you can easily see the faces of the saved souls.”

Sordello then explained the identities of these saved souls:

“Rudolf of Hapsburg concerned himself with political affairs in Germany and ignored those of Italy. If only he had thought about Italy, he could have united it. Because he ignored Italy, he now looks as if he has left something undone that should have been done. The other rulers are singing, but he is not. Rudolf of Hapsburg was a Negligent Ruler.

“Ottokar II, King of Bohemia, was Rudolf’s enemy, but now he comforts him. While alive, Ottokar II twice rebelled against Rudolf, failing both times. The second time, this valiant warrior died in battle. Ottokar II is a good father who had a bad son: Wenceslaus. Ottokar II was a Negligent Ruler.

“Philip III of France, who has a snub nose, fathered Philip IV, who is also known as Philip the Fair. Philip III is a good father who had a bad son. Philip III was a Negligent Ruler.

“Henry the Fat of Navarre, who looks kind, died by being suffocated with his own fat. Henry the Fat’s daughter married Philip the Fair, aka the Plague of France. Henry the Fat was a Negligent Ruler.

“Peter III of Aragon, who looks sturdy, married Constance, the daughter of Manfred. Peter III was a Negligent Ruler.

“Charles I of Anjou, who has a big nose, defeated Manfred at Benevento in 1266. In life, Peter III and Charles I were enemies, but now they are reconciled. Charles I’s son, Charles II, was not as good as his father. Charles I was a Negligent Ruler.

“Alfonso III of Aragon is the eldest son of Peter III of Aragon. In this case, a good father had a good son. However, Peter III’s other two sons — James II of Aragon and Frederick II of

Sicily — were bad sons. Alfonso III was a Negligent Ruler.

“All too often, a good father has a bad son. Nobility of character is not acquired by birth.

“Henry III of England was strong in faith, but he attended so many masses that he ignored his duties as King of England. Henry III was a Negligent Ruler.

“William VII, also known as Longsword, was the Marquis of Montferrat. He failed to stop a revolt in the city of Alessandria, was taken prisoner, and was kept in an iron cage and displayed to the public until he died. William VII was a Negligent Ruler.”

Dante thought, *Most of the Negligent Rulers were negligent in taking care of their own souls. They kept God waiting, so God is keeping them waiting for a while before he allows them into Purgatory Proper. They were so occupied with Earthly matters that they had no time for Heavenly matters. In addition, they sometimes didn't do very well in taking care of Earthly matters. One ruler — Henry III of England — was noted for his piety. His negligence was toward his kingdom. Kings must take care of their spiritual as well as of their secular matters. A good King can do much good for his people, but of course, a good King must also take care of his own soul. God wants Kings to be good to the people they rule.*

*We also see that bad sons can be born to good fathers, and no doubt good sons can be born to bad fathers. Nobility of character is an acquired, not hereditary, virtue.*

*We also see that no one has to be perfect — an impossibility for mortal men and women — to climb the Mountain of Purgatory and enter Paradise.*

*We also see that enemies are reconciled in Prepuratory. In the Inferno, enemies were not reconciled.*

*During my day in Prepuratory, I have seen many saved souls. The souls of dead sinners who sincerely repented their sins arrive in Prepuratory, where they wait until they are ready to pass through the Gate of Purgatory to Purgatory Proper. A number of groups of people have to wait to climb the Mountain of Purgatory, but waiting is proper for them. These souls — the late repentant — must wait longer than others. The late repentant are these:*

*1) those who died while excommunicated.*

*2) the slothful (who kept putting off spiritual matters).*

*3) those who repented only in their final — sometimes violent — moments of life.*

*4) those who ignored spiritual matters while concentrating on worldly matters, and those who ignored worldly matters while concentrating on spiritual matters (the Negligent Rulers).*

*These souls kept God waiting, and God makes them wait to enter Purgatory Proper. However, I have learned that these souls can enter Purgatory Proper more quickly if good people pray for them.*

## Chapter 8: Purgatory — The Serpent and the Two Angels (Purgatory)

Now was the hour when sailors, on their first day's journey away from home, think of home and loved ones. Now was the hour when a traveler hears the tolling of a far-away bell and thinks of loved ones.

Dante looked at a soul who rose and began singing "*Te Lucis Ante Terminum*" — "Before the End of the Light." The saved soul looked to the East and seemed to be thinking only of God.

The soul sang beautifully, and the other souls joined in the singing as they looked at the stars and sang a prayer asking to be kept safe that night:

"You, before the close of day  
"Creator of the world, we pray  
"That with Your wonted favor,  
"You would be our Guard and Keeper now.  
"From all ill dreams defend our eyes,  
"From nightly fears and fantasies:  
"Tread under foot our ghostly foe,  
"That no pollution we may know.  
"O Father, may what we ask be done  
"Through Jesus Christ Your only Son,  
"Who, with the Holy Ghost and You,  
"Shall live and reign eternally.  
"Amen."

Dante the Poet thought, *Reader, sharpen your eyes and learn. This prayer has been and will be answered.*

Dante the Pilgrim saw descending from Paradise two angels who each carried a blunt sword. The angels' clothing was green, as were their wings. One angel landed on a bank above, and the other angel landed on the bank opposite. Dante could easily see the angels' gold hair, but their faces were so bright that he could not see them.

Sordello said, "Mary has sent the two angels to protect us from the serpent in the valley. The serpent will soon arrive."

Dante was afraid. He did not know from which direction the serpent would come, and he moved closer to his protector, Virgil.

Then Sordello said, "You have seen the angels. We can now descend into the valley."

Sordello thought, *It is important that you see the angels. They show that God is our protector.*

To descend into the valley took only three steps. Dante saw a soul looking at him, attempting to see his face in the fast-arriving darkness.

The soul moved toward Dante, and they recognized each other, rejoiced, and greeted each other.

Dante thought, *This is my friend Nino Visconti, who died in 1296. Although he was active in worldly affairs, he did not let them corrupt his soul.*

After they had greeted each other, Nino said to Dante, "How long has it been since you arrived here in the angel's boat?"



Dante replied, “I came here by a different journey. I traveled through the Inferno. I am still alive, but I hope that by taking this journey, I will come to this mountain after I die.”

Nino was amazed. So was Sordello, who had ignored Dante since learning Virgil’s identity. Because Dante had been in the shadow of the mountain, he had not cast a shadow, and so Sordello had not realized that Dante was still living.

Both Sordello and Nino backed away from Dante, and then Sordello turned to face Virgil as Nino called to a nearby soul, “Corrado, come here! See something marvelous that God has willed!”

Nino said to Dante, “Since you are still living, I beg you to do me a favor. When you are back in the Land of the Living, please tell my daughter, Giovanna, to pray for me so that I may climb this mountain sooner. Her mother has forgotten me. She has remarried. Her new husband is a man who will bring her less honor than marriage to me did.”

Nino’s face was indignant as he thought of his widow’s new marriage.

Dante looked at the sky, and he saw three new stars that had superseded the four stars that he had seen when he first reached the mountain.

Virgil asked, “What are you looking at?”

Dante replied, “At the three bright stars that light up the sky above the South Pole.”

Virgil said, “With the passage of time, and the movement of the cosmos, the four stars you saw earlier have moved out of your sight. These have taken their place.”

Dante the Poet thought, *The four stars I saw earlier represent the four cardinal virtues: Prudence, Temperance, Justice, and Fortitude. These three stars represent the three theological virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity.*

Sordello grabbed Virgil’s arm and said, “The serpent is coming.”

The serpent came leisurely through the valley, even stopping to lick its back as if proudly grooming itself.

The angels flew down toward the serpent, and the serpent took flight. The angels flew back to their posts.

Dante the Poet thought, *God could — of course — destroy the serpent, but He does not. He allows this ritual to be repeated each evening. This ritual bears a message: I will protect you, and I will answer your prayers. The saved souls know that they are in no danger from the serpent — the angels are bearing blunted swords because sharp swords are not needed here. However, the saved souls watch this ritual because God is showing them that He keeps His promises and that He answers prayers. Of course, all these souls want to climb the mountain, and God is letting them know that yes, eventually they can climb the mountain. Also, of course, God is a Protector in addition to a Promise-Keeper.*

Nino had called Corrado over to see Dante.

Dante the Poet thought, *This is Corrado Malaspina. When I am in exile, I will shelter for a while with the Malaspina family, which is known throughout Europe for its generosity.*

Corrado said to Dante the Pilgrim, “I wish you well in your journey up the mountain. If you can tell me recent news of the Magra Valley, please do so. I came from there, and I was well known there. My name is Corrado Malaspina — the younger one.”

Dante replied to Corrado, “I have never visited that region, but all of Europe knows your family, which is famous for its hospitality and its generosity. While other families have failed in virtue, your family has not.”

Corrado replied, “Within seven years, you will know much better the hospitality and generosity of my family.”

Dante the Poet thought, *This is a prophecy that did come true.*

## Chapter 9: Prepurgatory — First Prophetic Dream and Saint Peter's Gate (Purgatory)

In Italy, dawn was arriving and the Sun appearing. On the mountain, night and the Moon had arrived. In the hour before dawn, sometimes dreams are true.

Dante fell asleep, and he dreamed that an eagle with golden feathers was soaring in the sky and was ready to swoop down, just as Jupiter, disguised as an eagle, had swooped down and seized the young Ganymede, the most beautiful mortal alive, to serve as cupbearer to the gods on Mount Olympus.

In his dream, Dante watched the eagle circling in the air, and then the eagle swooped down and seized him, just as the disguised Jupiter had seized Ganymede. The eagle soared with Dante to the sphere of fire, and then both Dante and the eagle seemed to burn, and Dante woke up.

In Paradise, an angel thought, *The medieval conception of the cosmos was that the Earth is at the center of the universe. People believed that over the Earth are a number of crystalline spheres, one of which is a sphere of fire. That is the sphere that Dante the Pilgrim is dreaming of here. The medieval conception of the cosmos was that other spheres held the Sun, the Moon, various planets, and the fixed stars (they are fixed in placement to each other; in contrast, the planets are not fixed in placement to each other). The modern conception of the cosmos is much different; modern scientists think of the cosmos as consisting mostly of empty space and dark matter and dark energy. Medieval thinkers believed that each celestial sphere made contact with the sphere above it and with the sphere below it.*

When Dante woke up, he did not know where he was. When he had fallen asleep, he had been with Virgil, Sordello, Nino Visconti, and Corrado Malaspina. Now he was in a new place. He reflected that he was as confused as the young Achilles must have been when his mother, the goddess Thetis, had taken him while he was asleep away from his tutor, the Centaur Chiron, in Thessaly, to the island Skyros to live, disguised as a young woman, among the women in the palace of King Lycomedes. Thetis' plan failed to keep Achilles out of the Trojan War. Ulysses and Diomed came to the palace and showed jewelry and weapons to the women (and the disguised Achilles) of the palace. The women were interested in the jewelry, Achilles was interested in the weapons, and Ulysses and Diomed carried Achilles off to fight and die in the Trojan War.

Dante was dazed and confused by his surroundings, but Virgil explained what had happened and where he was.

Virgil said, "Do not be afraid. We have made much progress on our journey. Let us keep going. You are now before the gate leading to Purgatory. Look at the cleft in that rock there. That is where the gate to Purgatory is located.

"Before dawn arrived, a lady from Paradise — Saint Lucia — came to us. She said to me, 'I am Lucia. Let me take this sleeping man and speed him on his way.' Sordello and the other saved souls remained behind; they are not ready to climb this high.

"Saint Lucia carried you in her arms here. I followed. With her beautiful eyes, she let me know where the gate to Purgatory is located, and then she left, and you woke up."

Dante felt relieved. He thought, *I am becoming aware of reality and learning truth. Before, I was thinking of Jupiter kidnapping a young boy. Then I thought of something better: a mother trying, but unfortunately failing, to protect her son. Then I learned the reality and the truth,*

*which are best: A Heavenly lady is seeking to save the soul of a sinner and providing impressive aid to make that happen.*

Dante also thought, *While living, Saint Lucia was persecuted and tortured — including being blinded — because she was a Christian. In Paradise, her eyes have been restored to her.*

Dante was ready to climb higher. He and Virgil approached the gate leading to Purgatory. Leading to the gate were three steps; each step was a different color.

Sitting on the highest step was an angel. Dante lifted his eyes to look at the angel, but the angel's face was too bright to look at, so Dante looked down again.

The angel carried an unsheathed sword. It also was too bright to look at.

The angel said to Dante and Virgil, "Stay where you are and answer me. Why are you here, and where is your guide? You must have permission to pass through the gate."

Virgil replied, "A lady from Paradise has given us permission to pass through the gate. She said to me on behalf of this man, 'Behold the gate. Go through it and continue your journey up the mountain.'"

The angel courteously said, "May the lady from Paradise continue to help you. Come forward and climb the stairs."

The first step was white, the second step was darker than purple-black, and the third step was red.

Dante thought, *The three colors represent the three stages of repentance:*

*1) self-examination: white,*

*2) sorrow for sin, contrition: darker than purple-black, and*

*3) penance: red.*

The angel rested his feet upon the third step, and he sat on a sill (a slab of stone at the bottom of a gateway) that seemed to be made of adamantine rock. Adamantine is a legendarily hard mineral that cannot be broken.

The three steps and the one sill combined make up the number four, which suggests the four stages of human freedom:

1) innocence (white). We are born innocent.

2) fall (black). All of us sin.

3) redemption (red). Jesus has redeemed us by bleeding and dying on the cross.

4) freedom from sin (an adamantine will that rejects sin and cannot be broken). In Paradise, our souls will be perfected, and we will no longer sin.

Of course, the souls climbing the Mountain of Purgatory are working to purge their sins and perfect their souls so that they can enter Paradise. Their souls are seeking to move from *posse non peccare* to *non posse peccare*.

Human beings have free will, and this means that they can choose to sin or to not sin.

If a human being chooses to sin, their will is *posse peccare*: able to sin. A person who sins habitually can become a slave to sin and can lose their free will. Consider addiction to tobacco. If we are supposed to keep our bodies healthy, then smoking tobacco is a sin. People who become addicted to tobacco can lose their free will. They may grow to hate the habit and greatly desire to quit, but they find that they cannot. They no longer have the ability to quit, for they have lost their free will.

If a human being chooses to not sin, their will is *posse non peccare*: able to not sin. The person could have sinned but chose not to.

A person who chooses over and over to do something can develop their free will so that the person can easily do what the person wants to do. Consider exercise. A person who chooses to exercise before or after work each day and does so consistently will soon find it easy to begin

exercising at the proper time and place they have chosen. It can become difficult to skip a day of exercise.

A person who chooses over and over not to sin can develop their free will so that the person can easily do what the person wants to do. A person can become so accustomed to not sinning that it can be difficult to sin. A person can develop such a hatred of sin that it becomes impossible to sin. On the Mountain of Purgatory, souls are developing the ability to *non posse peccare*: to not be able to sin.

Such souls still have free will because they can do what they want to do. A smoker who wants to quit but cannot has lost his or her free will. The souls on the Mountain of Purgatory are working to purge their souls and to avoid sin. They want to not sin, and they are developing their free will so that they will always choose not to sin. They are doing what they want to do: They want to do the right thing, and they in fact do the right thing. They choose not to sin — every time.

Dante and Virgil climbed the steps, and Virgil said to Dante, “Ask the angel now, humbly, to turn the keys and let us through the gate.”

Dante knelt and begged the angel to let him and his companion through the gate.

First, the angel carved with his sword seven P’s on Dante’s forehead and told Dante, “Make sure that you heal these seven wounds as you journey up the mountain.”

The angel thought, *The P is an abbreviation for Peccatum, the Latin word for “sin.” All who journey up the mountain will heal seven wounds. Pride is the foundation of all sins; pride makes a person think that he or she is the center of the universe. These are the seven wounds, and these are illustrations of how these sinners think:*

1) *Pride — A sinner who is guilty of Pride thinks, “I am the center of the universe, and I am better than other people. Quite simply, I am more important than other people.”*

2) *Envy — A sinner who is guilty of Envy thinks, “I am the center of the universe, and if you have something I want, I envy you.”*

3) *Wrath — A sinner who is guilty of Wrath thinks, “Because I am the center of the universe, everything ought to go my way, and when it does not, I get angry.”*

4) *Sloth — A sinner who is guilty of Sloth thinks, “I am the center of the universe, so I don’t have to work at something. Either other people can do my work for me, or they can give me credit for work I have not done because if I had done the work, I would have done it excellently.”*

5) *Avariciousness and Prodigality — A sinner who is guilty of Avariciousness or Prodigality thinks, “I am the center of the universe, so I deserve to have what I want. If I want money, I get money and never spend it, or if I want the things that money can buy, then I spend every penny I can make or borrow to get what I want. Either way, I deserve to have what I want.”*

6) *Gluttony — A sinner who is guilty of Gluttony thinks, “I am the center of the universe, so I deserve these three extra pieces of pie every night. This is my reward for myself for being so fabulous.”*

7) *Lust — A sinner who is guilty of Lust thinks, “I am the center of the universe, so my needs take precedence over the needs of everyone else. If I want to get laid, it’s OK if I lie to get someone in the sack and never call that person afterward. My sexual pleasure is more important than the hurt of someone who realizes that he or she has been used.”*

*As saved souls climb the mountain, they will purge each of these deadly sins. They will learn some examples of the sins and they will learn some examples of the virtues that are opposed to the sins:*

*Ledge 1: Sin — Pride; Virtue — Humility*

*Ledge 2: Sin — Envy; Virtue — Kindness and Love of Others*

*Ledge 3: Sin — Wrath; Virtue — Meekness and Patience*

*Ledge 4: Sin — Sloth; Virtue — Zeal and Diligence*

*Ledge 5: Sin — Avariciousness (and Wastefulness); Virtue — Charity and Detachment from Riches and Detachment from What Riches can Buy*

*Ledge 6: Sin — Gluttony; Virtue — Abstinence or Temperance*

*Ledge 7: Sin — Lust; Virtue — Chastity or Proper Sex*

The angel wore a robe that was the color of ashes: the color of penitence. From beneath the robe he took out two keys: one was gold and one was silver.

The angel inserted both keys and turned them one at a time.

The angel said, “If either of these keys does not turn, the gate will not open. One key is more precious than the other, but both are precious.”

The angel thought, *The gold key is the God-given authority to absolve — forgive — a person who has sinned. The silver key is the act of absolution. To be absolved of sin, a person must really repent sin and not be trying to scam God.*

The angel said, “Peter gave me these keys and told me to err on the side of mercy, saying, ‘It is better to admit too many than to admit too few. They must ask for mercy.’”

Dante thought, *Jesus gave keys to Peter in Matthew 16:18-19: “And I say also to you, That you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven.”*

The angel pushed against the gate, and it swung open.

The angel said, “Go through the gate, but don’t look back, or you will find yourself in Purgatory again.”

The gate creaked as it swung open, but Dante heard the souls in Purgatory Proper rejoice as another soul joined them. The rejoicing souls sang the “*Te Deum Laudamus*” — “You, O Lord, We Praise,” of which these are the first few lines:

“Lord God, Your praise we sing;

“Lord God, our thanks we bring;

“Father in eternity,

“All the world worships You.

“Angels all and Heavenly host

“Of Your glory loudly boast;

“Both Cherubim and Seraphim

“Sing ever with loud voice this hymn:

“Holy are You, our God!

“Holy are You, our God!

“Holy are You, our God, the Creator and Lord of All!”

The creaking of the gate made it difficult for Dante the Pilgrim to hear some of the words being sung, just as at church a worshipper may not hear some words of a hymn because of the music of the organ.

Dante the Poet thought, *At this time, I was not yet a perfected soul. I was required to spend time in Purgatory in part to learn that one can prepare to be a perfected soul before one dies and before one enters Purgatory Proper. One way to do that, of course, is through the sincere repentance of one’s sins. Another way is through religious songs. The main point is this: Don’t wait before repenting and before beginning the process of purging your sins.*

## Chapter 10: First Ledge — Pride (Purgatory)

Dante and Virgil walked through the gate, and they did not look back. The people who walk through that gate learn to love the right things for the right reasons and with the right intensity.

Then they climbed a narrow, zigzagging path through a cleft in the mountain.

Virgil advised Dante, “Walk carefully.”

Finally, they walked through the metaphorical eye of the needle and reached the first ledge of Purgatory Proper, which has seven ledges, each devoted to purging a particular sin. This ledge is not wide: It is the width of three men’s bodies, lying end to end.

Dante looked at the side of the mountain, which was sheer and impossible to climb. The mountain’s side was pure white marble, a sculptor’s dream, and an Artist who was better than the ancient Greek sculptor Polycletus, the greatest of all human sculptors, carved it. The Artist who had carved the mountain was also a better Artist than nature.

Dante thought, *God is the sculptor here; God created the art on the Mountain of Purgatory. Previously I learned that He is an architect — when He built the Gate to the Inferno. Now I see that He is a great sculptor, too.*

Dante looked and saw an exemplum of humility or lack of pride: Mary and the Annunciation. He thought, *When the angel announces to Mary that she will give birth to the Messiah, Mary could have understandably been proud. Instead, she gave all glory to God and called herself a servant (handmaid) of God.*

The carving was so well done that speech seemed visible. As Dante looked at the carving, he seemed to hear the angel say, “Ave,” as in “Hail, Mary.” And he seemed to hear Mary reply to the angel, “*Ecce ancilla Dei,*” or “Behold the handmaid of God.”

Virgil watched Dante look at this carving for a while and then suggested, “Why don’t you look at the other carvings as well?”

Dante looked ahead and saw another carving and moved closer to it. Here in the marble he saw oxen and a cart bearing the Ark of the Covenant: a chest containing the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written. In the carving, King David showed humility by dancing as the ark is brought into Jerusalem. In contrast to the humility of David, his first wife, Michal, shows scorn for her husband, as he dances with his robes pulled up, revealing his legs. Because Michal was so proud, God punished her by making her barren: She could not bear children. In the sculpture, incense came from censers, and Dante seemed to smell the incense as he looked at the carving. Dante also seemed to hear the singing of the choirs as the ark entered Jerusalem.

Beatrice looked down from Paradise and thought, *All of these carvings are important, but Dante, pay special attention to this carving. King David is especially noted for these things: 1) He is a great politician: a King. 2) He is a great poet: the author of the Psalms. 3) He is a great sinner who was saved by God. 4) He is a very talented man, just like Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro in the Inferno. Fortunately, David repented. And he had a lot to repent. From a rooftop, David once saw a woman bathing, and he desired her. Because he was King, he was able to sleep with her, although she was married — her husband (Uriah the Hittite) was away on a military mission. Because of King David, she got pregnant. David sent for her husband so that he (her husband) would have sex with Bathsheba and so think the child was his, but her husband did not want to have sex while people were dying in war. (David should have been fighting, not committing adultery.) Therefore, King David ordered that Bathsheba’s husband be*

*put in the front lines where he would probably be killed, and he was killed. Other people were killed with Uriah. Bad battle tactics were needed to get Uriah killed, and other innocent men died with him. David then made Bathsheba one of his wives. This story does have a happy ending, as David repents his sin, is forgiven, and is now in Paradise. You, Dante, are very much like David in being a great poet and a mostly successful politician. Of course, both you and David are highly intelligent people. Dante, you have also sinned, and you can learn a lot from David. You need to learn to be humble: to give credit to God and not to yourself. You also need to learn to repent your sins.*

Dante then moved to see a third carving, one that showed the humility of the Roman Emperor Trajan. On his way to fight a war, Emperor Trajan spoke to a poor widow who wanted him to give her justice for her son who had been killed. At first, Emperor Trajan wanted her to wait for justice in the murder of her son until he came back from a military campaign, but she asked him, "What if you don't come back?" Emperor Trajan said, "Then whoever replaces me will give you justice." The widow replied, "How can you let another person's virtue do what you should do?" He then agreed to give justice to her for her son's death, saying, "Justice demands that I perform my duty." All of this conversation Dante seemed to hear as he looked at the carving. God is such a good sculptor that He can create visible speech.

By looking at the carvings, Dante understood that good art can lead to education. For example, to understand something, look at examples of it. He would soon learn that one should look also at examples of its opposite. For example, to understand humility, look at examples of humility and at examples of pride.

Dante thought, *We need to tell the right kinds of stories, and we need good role models, and we need the ability to identify bad role models.*

Virgil said to Dante, "Look at the crowd of souls slowly approaching us. They will be able to tell us how to climb further up the mountain."

Dante the Pilgrim now looked and saw something, but what exactly it was he could not make out. He said to Virgil, "Some things seem to be moving toward us, but they do not appear to be souls. What are they? I can't make them out."

Virgil explained, "These souls are being purged of pride. Because they were proud, each now humbly bends toward the ground. Look closely. You can see huge stones, and underneath each stone is a soul purging its pride. Each soul beats his or her breast."

Dante the Pilgrim thought, *These souls carrying huge stones look like corbels, little sculptures of people that appear in architecture. They sometimes appear to be holding up a roof or other heavy weight such as a column. The souls on the first level of Purgatory Proper look like corbels, and each soul seems to be saying, "I can't go on."*

*Dante the Pilgrim noticed that the stones the souls carry are not of equal weight. The prouder a sinner was, the heavier the stone is.*

Dante the Poet thought, *Someone may want to say that the repentant sinners are being punished for their sins, but it would be better to say that they are being purged of their sins. The stones the souls are carrying are huge; however, they will gain from all of their hard effort. They will be purged of their sin.*

*Although some souls suffer in Purgatory, the purpose of the suffering is to educate the souls and to purge the souls of sin. The souls benefit from their suffering, and they expect to benefit from their suffering. The souls want to be in Purgatory. They are confident that God will keep His promises and they will reach Paradise. People should keep in mind the purpose of the suffering that takes place in Purgatory.*

*Christians should also understand that each of us is born to die. When we die, the immortal part goes to God to be judged and leaves the mortal part behind. A living person is defective. Only after purgation of one's sins can a soul be perfected.*

*A good Christian will avoid pride and so make the perfecting of his or her soul easier.*



## Chapter 11: First Ledge — Aldobrandesco, Oderisi, Provenzan (Purgatory)

As the souls, burdened with heavy stones, slowly walked on the ledge, they prayed a version of the Lord's Prayer that emphasizes humility:

"Our Father who is in Paradise, by choice, because You love the angels, whom You created before You created Humankind,

"May Humankind, your creation, regard Your name and Your power as holy to show our thanks to You.

"May Your kingdom come and bring us peace, for we cannot attain Your kingdom through our own efforts, but only as Your gift.

"As the angels obey Your will and sing 'Hosannah,' so may Humankind obey Your will.

"Give us this day our daily manna, as You gave manna to others who were in exile from the Holy Land. Without Your blessing, even those who are most eager to go forward will instead go backward.

"And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us, although we do not deserve Your forgiveness.

"Although we want to be strong, we recognize that we are weak, and we pray for all Humankind that You lead them not into temptation and instead save them from the Evil One.

"This last request, God, we make not for ourselves, who are saved souls, but for those members of Humankind who are still alive on Earth."

Dante the Poet thought, *The prayers of these souls do good for the living, and the prayers of the living can do much good for the saved souls on the Mountain of Purgatory. Our prayers can help these souls wash away sins and ascend into Paradise more quickly.*

These saved souls, who prayed both for themselves and for others, moved slowly toward Dante and Virgil. Some souls were burdened by heavier stones than other souls — they had been prouder, perhaps of family, talent, or power. They moved as slowly as a man moves in a nightmare when pursued by something or someone who induces panic.

Virgil said to the saved souls, "May justice tempered by mercy free you from the stones and the sins you carry so you may climb up the mountain and reach Paradise. Please do a good deed now. Please help us. Show us the path by which we may climb to the next ledge of the mountain. This man I am traveling with carries his own burden: the weight of his still-living flesh. Because of that, his progress up the mountain is slow."

Someone answered, but because the souls were bent over by the weight they were carrying, Dante could not see their faces and so did not know which soul had spoken.

However, a soul said, "Walk along the ledge with us, and you will find a place up which you can climb the mountain. If I were not carrying so heavy a weight, I would look up and see if I recognize this still-living man. Perhaps I could move him to feel compassion for me.

"I was an Italian, and my father was a great Tuscan named Guglielmo Aldobrandeschi ... but perhaps you have never heard of him."

Dante thought, *Everyone in Italy knows the name Guglielmo Aldobrandesco. This soul who spoke just now was feeling pride of family, but recognizing that, he has wisely attempted to regain his humility by stating that perhaps I may never have heard of his very famous father.*

The saved soul continued, "I had pride of family. My lineage was ancient, and my ancestors had done notable deeds. I held people in disdain. Because of my disdain, I died. A

much larger force besieged my castle. Because I held my enemy in such contempt, I did not surrender, but instead charged into the midst of them, killing many before I myself was killed.

“My name is Omberto. With my death, the power of my family passed on to other people. Because of the pride I had in my family, I now bear this weight on the first ledge of this mountain. I will bear this weight until I have purged my sin and made God happy.”

Dante had bent over to listen, and now another soul, also burdened with a stone, lifted his head — with difficulty — enough to look at him and recognize him.

The saved soul called to Dante, who recognized him and said, “You are Oderisi, the artist of Gubbio, who is expert in that art the French call ‘Illuminating.’ You created artwork in illuminated — that is, illustrated — manuscripts.”

Oderisi replied, “Another artist is now better than me. Franco Bolognese illuminates manuscripts with more radiance than I ever did. I had honor, but he has much more honor. When I was alive, however, I would have hated to admit this. I wanted to be the best. I had pride in my talent, and now I carry this stone here. When I was still alive, I turned to God, and I was saved. If not for that, I would be in the Inferno.

“Excessive pride is a sin, and the products of one’s pride soon fade. Another artist comes along who is better. Cimabue was once the number-one painter, and now Giotto is known to be superior to him. Guido Guinizelli was once the number-one poet, and now Guido Cavalcanti is known to be superior to him. And perhaps the poet who will surpass Guido Cavalcanti has been born.”

Dante, who in the future surpassed Guido Cavalcanti, thought, *I saw Guido Cavalcanti’s father in the Inferno. He was in the tomb with Farinata.*

Oderisi continued, “Few people achieve lasting fame. For most people, earthly fame is like a gust of wind. Consider a person who dies in infancy and a person who dies of old age. One thousand years from now, both are likely to have exactly the same amount of Earthly fame: none. Suppose someone achieves a level of fame in which one is remembered for a thousand years. Compared to Eternity, what is a thousand years?”

Dante thought, *Don’t write in order to be famous. You need to have a better reason when you write.*

Oderisi continued, “Look at the soul just ahead. At one time everyone in Tuscany spoke about him, but now his name is barely mentioned even in Siena, the city he ruled. At one time, he had so much power that he could advocate that Florence be entirely destroyed. And Florence used to be proud, but now it is like a whore.

“Whatever fame you achieve on Earth will someday fade.”

Dante said, “Your words have made me less proud and more humble, but who is the person about whom you were speaking just now?”

Oderisi answered, “His name is Provenzan Salvani.”

Dante thought, *Provenzan Salvani is Sienese, like Omberto Aldobrandesco. He is also a famous political figure. He and Farinata, who is in the Inferno, were the victors at the battle of Montaperti in 1260. Provenzan Salvani wanted to destroy Florence following the victory. Farinata, of course, did not want Florence destroyed because he wanted to rule the city. Farinata prevailed in the dispute.*

Oderisi said, “Provenzan Salvani is here because he took pride in his political power. He has been here ever since he died.”

Dante said, “Provenzan Salvani delayed repentance until late in life. How was he able to begin climbing immediately? Most souls have to wait the amount of time that they had kept God waiting (unless aided by the sincere prayers of good people). Why didn’t God make Provenzan Salvani wait because Provenzan Salvani made God wait?”

Oderisi replied, “At the height of his power, Provenzan Salvani humbled himself. Charles of Anjou was holding one of Provenzan Salvani’s friends in prison. Charles declared that he would kill the friend unless the friend was ransomed for 10,000 gold florins. Provenzan Salvani got the money, although he had to beg for it in Siena’s marketplace. If anything is a sign of humility, begging is.”

Dante the Pilgrim thought, *I can’t imagine Farinata begging. He is too proud. I saw him in the Inferno, and he looked like he was posing for a statue.*

Oderisi continued, “Let me make a prophecy. Someday you, Dante, will learn the humility of begging.”

Dante the Poet thought, *After I was exiled from Florence, I indeed had to beg for help from others.*

## Chapter 12: First Ledge — Exempla of Pride (Purgatory)

Like humble oxen submitting to the yoke, Dante and Oderisi walked together until Virgil said to Dante, “We must move faster, so leave him and press forward. On this mountain, each one must press ahead with all the speed that each one is able to use.”

Dante now stood up straight, but his thoughts were still humble. Now Dante and Virgil walked together much more quickly. By spending time on this terrace dedicated to purging the sin of pride, they were becoming lighter of foot.

Virgil said, “Look down. You will see something that you can learn from and that will make your journey up the mountain easier.”

Dante looked down and saw carvings of the kind that might be seen on a tomb to preserve the memory of the person whose body is within. Often, such carvings bring tears to the eyes of a pious person who remembers the dead.

These carvings were similar, but of higher artistic quality. Like the previous carvings that were on the side of the mountain, these carvings on the ledge were intended to teach. Previously, the carvings on the side of the mountain taught examples of humility. Now, these carvings on the ledge taught examples of pride.

First in the works of art, Dante saw the angel who was supposed to be the most beautiful of all, the one who rebelled against God and now resides at the bottom of the Inferno, chewing the worst sinners of all time in his three mouths for all time. This angel is Lucifer. Lucifer was so proud that he rebelled against God.

Then in the works of art Dante saw Briareus, who rebelled against Jupiter, the King of gods and men in ancient times. Just as Lucifer tried to unseat God, so Briareus tried to unseat Jupiter, who killed him with a thunderbolt. Briareus and other giants fought against Jupiter and the gods on Olympus. After the battle, Apollo, Minerva, Mars, and Jupiter looked down at the severed and scattered arms and legs of the giants they had defeated. Briareus is now one of the giants who guard the well that leads to the Final Circle of the Inferno. Briareus was so proud that he rebelled against Jupiter.

And in the works of art Dante saw Nimrod, who thought that he could build a tower that would reach Heaven. To stop the tower from being built, God created many languages instead of the one language that human beings had spoken until that time. Because the workers were now speaking different languages, they were unable to coordinate their actions and so the Tower of Babel was not built. Because of Nimrod’s pride, God changed the speech of human beings, and now human beings no longer share the same language. Nimrod is another of the giants who guard the well that leads to the Final Circle of the Inferno. Nimrod was so proud that he rebelled against God.

And in the works of art Dante saw Niobe, who had seven sons and seven daughters, and so she boasted that she was more worthy of praise than Leto, aka Leto, who had given birth to only one son and only one daughter: the god Apollo and the goddess Diana. Because of Niobe’s pride, Apollo and Diana killed all of Niobe’s children in one day. Because of Niobe’s pride, Apollo and Diana turned her to stone. Even when she was stone, she grieved for the deaths of her children, and tears trickled down her marble cheeks. Niobe was so proud that she thought she was a better mother than the goddess mother of the god Apollo and goddess Diana.

And in the works of art Dante saw King Saul, the first King of the Israelites. Saul disobeyed a command of God, and after losing a battle to the Philistines, he committed suicide on Mount Gilboa by falling on his sword rather than be captured. After Saul died, David

cursed Mount Gilboa with drought. Saul was so proud that he disobeyed a commandment that God made to him.

And in the works of art Dante saw Arachne, who challenged Minerva to a weaving contest. Arachne produced a magnificent cloth without fault, but because of Arachne's pride, Minerva tore up the cloth and turned Arachne into a spider. Arachne was so proud that she challenged the goddess Minerva to a weaving contest.

And in the works of art Dante saw Rehoboam, who arrogantly rejected the advice of wise old men and would not lower the taxes on the tribes of Israel. Rehoboam sent Adoram to collect the exorbitant taxes, the tribes revolted and stoned Adoram to death, and Rehoboam fled, although no one was pursuing him. Rehoboam was so proud that he ignored the advice of wise old men.

And in the works of art Dante saw Alcmeon, who avenged his father, Amphiaraus, a soothsayer who knew that he would die if he took part in a war against Thebes and so hid himself. Polynices, the leader of the forces against Thebes, bribed Eriphyle, the wife of Amphiaraus, with a gold necklace to reveal her husband's hiding place. Forced to go to war against Thebes, Amphiaraus asked Alcmeon to avenge him, and Alcmeon killed his mother, Eriphyle. Alcmeon was so proud that he killed his own mother.

And in the works of art Dante saw the two sons of Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, who warred against the Israelites, who defeated his superior number of forces with divine aid. Later, when Sennacherib was praying to false gods, his two sons murdered him. The two sons of Sennacherib were so proud that they killed their own father.

And in the works of art Dante saw Tomyris, the Queen of a Scythian people, who avenged the death of her son, whom the Persian Emperor Cyrus had murdered. Her army defeated his army, and he died in the battle. Her thirst for revenge was not satisfied by his death, so she cut off his head and threw it into a container that was filled with human blood, saying as she did so, "Drink your fill." Tomyris was so proud that her revenge went beyond the bounds of human decency.

And in the works of art Dante saw the Assyrians who had been led by Holofernes, the general of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Holofernes attacked the Israelite city Bethulia, and he mocked the god of the Assyrians. Judith, an Israelite heroine, went to Holofernes' tent, gaining entrance by pretending that she would tell him information that would help him conquer the Israelites; however, a few days later when Holofernes lay drunk, she cut off his head with a sword and brought the head back to the Israelites. The next day, learning that Holofernes was dead, the Assyrian army fled. The Assyrians were so proud that they warred against the Israelites and mocked the one true God.

And in the works of art Dante saw the city of Troy. Paris, a prince of Troy, stole Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, from Menelaus, her lawful husband, in addition to stealing treasure from him. Because of Paris' pride, and because the Trojan citizens would not return Helen to Menelaus, Troy fell to an Achaean army led by Agamemnon, Menelaus' brother. Paris was so proud that he stole the lawfully wedded wife of another man, and the Trojans were so proud that they would not return the wife to her legal husband.

The art that Dante saw on the ledge was much better than the art created by human beings. God had created the art on the ledge. Looking at the art, Dante thought that the depictions of the living people really seemed to be living people and the depictions of the dead people really seemed to be dead people. No eyewitness to the scenes depicted had a better view of the scenes than Dante.

Dante the Poet thought, *So be proud, sons of Eve, if you dare. If you are proud, hold your head high so that you never look down and see the evils of the pride you regard so highly. If I*

*were asked for a synonym of “man,” I would give the answer “pride.”*

Dante the Pilgrim kept walking, and thinking, until noon. Then Virgil said to him, “Raise your head now. Look, and see. An angel is coming. Show reverence when you look at the angel so that he will help us. Let us not waste time. We will never see this day again when it is over.”

Dante the Pilgrim thought, *Often, you tell me not to waste time. You are correct.*

The angel, wearing white and with his face shining, came to Dante and Virgil. He first spread his arms, and then he spread his wings. He told them, “Come. The steps you must climb are very close. You will find the climbing much easier from here on.”

Dante the Poet thought, *Such an invitation is given to all men and women, but few accept it. All men and women should climb high, but for most a little puff of wind keeps them from climbing higher and makes them fall back down.*

The angel led Dante and Virgil to a cleft in the rock, and he brushed his wings against Dante’s brow before telling him that his climb would go well.

Climbing upwards was easier in part because the stone had steps. Previously, they had followed a path through a narrow cleft in the rock.

While Dante and Virgil were climbing those steps, they heard sweetly sung a beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.”

Dante the Pilgrim thought, *Entering a new area of Purgatory is much different from entering a new area of the Inferno. In Purgatory, one hears music; in the Inferno, one hears cries of grief, violently expressed.*

Dante felt light as he climbed the steps. The steps made the climbing easier, but they could not be the full explanation for why he was climbing upward so much easier than before.

Dante asked Virgil, “Why do I feel so light now? Why does climbing up the mountain seem so much easier?”

Virgil replied, “The angel has removed one of the P’s from your forehead, and the other P’s are much lighter than they were. By purging the sin of pride, which is the foundation of all of the other sins, you are lighter because the burden of pride has been lifted from you. When all of the other P’s on your forehead have been completely removed like the first P, you will easily climb upward. Your feet will not complain; instead, they will rejoice.”

Dante the Pilgrim, hearing that one of the P’s had been removed from his forehead, used his right hand to explore his forehead. Yes, six P’s — not seven — were on his forehead. He had six more sins to purge.

Virgil watched as Dante touched his forehead, and Virgil smiled.

## Chapter 13: Second Ledge — Envy (Sapia) (Purgatory)

Dante and Virgil reached the next ledge: the second ledge of Purgatory Proper. This terrace was much like the one below it, but because it was higher on the mountain, the circle it made around the mountain was smaller.

Here no souls could be immediately seen. Here no sculpture could be seen. No bas-reliefs were on the wall or ledge of the mountain. The color of the rock was dark like a bruise.

Virgil said, “If we wait until someone comes whom we can ask directions from, we may lose much time.”

Virgil looked at the Sun, a symbol of God for many, but a symbol of Natural Reason to Virgil. Natural Reason — what we can learn from reason and from nature — is a good guide that we should follow unless it is superseded by something that is superior to it: Revelation from God.

Virgil prayed to what the Sun represented for him, “Light in whom I place my trust, please guide us. We are unfamiliar with this place, and so we need guidance. You are warm and light the world. We should always look to you unless you are superseded by something that is superior to you.”

Dante and Virgil walked along the ledge for a mile — quickly, for they wanted to climb the mountain quickly. Then they began to hear voices without bodies.

The first voice they heard said, “They have no wine,” as it flew by them.

Dante thought, *Jesus’ very first miracle was turning water into wine so that the guests at a wedding in Cana of Galilee could celebrate. This is a miracle that Jesus performed at the request of his mother, Mary. This shows generosity on the part of Mary. She wanted other people to be able to celebrate a wedding properly. She was concerned with the happiness of other people, and she showed her love for other people.*

Before the sound of the first voice had faded, Dante and Virgil heard another voice cry, “I am Orestes!”

Dante thought, *When Agamemnon returned home to Greece after fighting the Trojan War for 10 years, his wife, Clytemnestra, killed him. She had taken a lover during the years that he was away from home. Her son, Orestes, killed her because she killed his father, and Orestes was sentenced to die. His friend Pylades was willing to die in Orestes’ place, although Orestes did not want him to, so both told the executioners, “I am Orestes!” In John 15:13, we read, “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Pylades loved Orestes so much that he was willing to die for him.*

Dante asked Virgil, “Where are these voices coming from?”

They then heard a third voice: “Love your enemies.”

Dante thought, *Matthew 5:44-45 gives us the words of Jesus: “But I say to you, Love your enemies, bless them who curse you, do good to them who hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you; That you may be the children of your Father who is in Heaven: for He makes His Sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”*

Virgil answered Dante’s question: “On the second ledge of the Mountain of Purgatory, the envious purge their sin. What you are hearing are examples of the virtues that are opposed to envy: kindness and the love of others. In addition to the examples of the virtue, you will learn examples of the sin itself.

“Now look ahead, and look carefully. Some people are over there; their backs are against the cliff.”

Dante looked ahead, and he saw souls wrapped in cloaks that were the color of bruises.

As Dante and Virgil came nearer to these souls, they heard the souls cry, “Holy Mary, pray for us” and “Michael, Peter, and All Saints.” The souls were singing the “Litany of the Saints,” of which this is a small part:

“Holy Mary, pray for us.

“Holy Mother of God, pray for us.

“Holy Virgin of virgins, pray for us.”

Dante the Pilgrim thought, *Any person on Earth would feel pity if he or she saw what I saw. I cried. They looked like blind beggars asking for alms at the doors of churches. They ask for food, and one blind beggar leans against another blind beggar for support. Their cries arouse pity, and simply looking at them arouses pity. Blind people cannot enjoy sunlight, and these saved souls were still denied the light of Heaven until they could climb to the top of the mountain. The eyelids of the envious had been sewn together with iron thread, just as falconers will sew with silken thread the eyelids of falcons to make them quiet and tame them. These souls when living had looked upon their neighbors with envious eyes, and now they can no longer look upon anything. Because they are blind now, voices teach them the virtue of loving others. In life, their sin of envy had bruised their soul, and so now they wear cloaks of coarse cloth that is of the color of bruises. In life, they had wished evil upon their neighbor, but now they lean upon their neighbor for support or give support to their neighbor.*

Dante felt guilty because he was looking at people who could not look at him, and so he turned to Virgil with a question.

Virgil, who could read Dante’s mind, answered the question before Dante could ask it: “Yes, you may talk to these souls. Speak briefly, and don’t be sidetracked.”

Dante was in the middle, between Virgil and the saved souls. Virgil, always protective of Dante, was walking along the outer edge where someone could fall.

Dante said to the souls, “Saved souls, you know that someday you will reach your goal and be in Paradise. Please help me. Is anyone here Italian? I may be of help if someone is.”

A saved soul replied, “All of us are citizens of the one true city that is Paradise. You mean to ask if someone here used to be a living person in Italy.”

Dante thought, *No destructive factionalism is in Purgatory. Everyone is a citizen of the same place, and everyone helps each other.*

Dante moved forward to where the voice had come and saw a female soul with a raised chin.

Dante asked, “If you are the one who spoke, please tell your name or tell me where you lived.”

The soul replied, “I lived in Siena. Like the others here, I am purging the sin of envy. My name is Sapia, or Wisdom, but I was not wise in life. I enjoyed the discomfort of other people more than the comfort of myself. Listen to a story that shows my lack of wisdom. The men of Siena were fighting a battle outside of the town of Colle. I prayed to God that the Sieneese be defeated. The Sieneese, led by my nephew Provencal Salvani and by Count Guido Novello, lost the battle, and my nephew, whom I envied for his rise to power, was killed. I rejoiced in the defeat of the Sieneese, and I cried to God, “I no longer fear you.” I was like a blackbird that is afraid during the cold winter but is cocky during the warm summer.

“I did not repent until at the end of my life. I would still be in Purgatory if Peter the Combseller, a good and pious and virtuous man who would not sell a defective comb, had not



prayed for me.

“But tell me who you are. If I am correct, your eyelids are not sewn together, and you breathe as you speak.”

Dante replied, “Someday my eyes will be sewn shut, but not for long because I seldom look at another person with envy. What fills me with fear is the great amount of time that I will spend on the ledge below that is devoted to purging the sin of pride. Already I seem to be feeling the weight of the stone that I will carry.”

Sapia asked, “Who has guided you here? How have you been able to come here if you think to return to a lower ledge?”

Dante replied, “This man beside me who has not spoken is my guide. I am still alive. If you want, once I am back in the Land of the Living I will help you.”

Sapia said, “This is a miracle! God really loves you! Yes, please help me. Say a prayer for me occasionally. I also ask you by what you hold valuable to please restore my reputation among my family in Siena. I was envious, but I repented and so I am on this mountain.

“My family lives among foolish people in Siena. The people of Siena are ambitious, but they pursue foolish projects. First they looked in vain for an underground river they named the Diana. Then they embarked upon the more foolish project of building a harbor at Talamone, a project that failed because of malaria and because the harbor filled with silt as quickly as it was dredged.”

## Chapter 14: Second Ledge — Envy (Guido del Duca, Rinier da Calboli (Purgatory))

Dante heard a saved soul ask another saved soul, “Who is this living man who can open and shut his eyes as he wishes?”

The other saved soul replied, “Who knows? I do know that someone is with him. Why don’t you ask nicely who the living man is? If you ask nicely, perhaps he will tell you.”

Dante looked at the souls, who raised their heads as if preparing to speak to him.

The first saved soul said, “Living man, who nevertheless is climbing the Mountain of Purgatory, please tell us your name and where you are from. God must love you if He allows you to climb the mountain before you have died. We have never seen that before.”

Dante made an effort to be modest and replied, “A little river has its source in Falterona and wanders through Tuscany for over one hundred miles. I come from a city by that river. I need not tell you my name because I am not yet famous.”

Virgil thought, *You are making an attempt to be modest, Dante, but you have not fully succeeded. You say that you are not yet famous.*

The first saved soul said, “If I have correctly understood you, you are speaking of the Arno River.”

The second saved soul asked the first, “Why did he not name the river? It is as if the name of the river is too horrible to say aloud.”

The first saved soul said, “I don’t know why he did not name the river, but I know that if the name of the valley the river runs through were to die, it would be a blessing. From its source to the place where the river runs into the sea, the inhabitants of the valley the river runs through hate virtue as they hate a snake. The valley may be cursed, or the inhabitants may be affected by the corruption that has long existed, but for whatever reason, the inhabitants have changed their nature. They used to be human beings, but now it is as if they are like Ulysses’ men who were transformed into pigs by the sorceress Circe and thereafter lived in sties and ate from troughs.

“This river first flows past the hoggish brutes of Casentino. Instead of eating food prepared for human consumption, they should be eating acorns, a food for pigs.

“Next the river flows past people who are the equivalent of undesirable mongrels who snarl often and bite occasionally. Usually, they snarl and turn away.

“Then the river — or more accurately, the sewer-ditch — flows past Florence, in which exist humans who are more like wolves than dogs.

“And finally the river flows past Pisa, whose inhabitants are like foxes. They are frauds, and they are experts at evading traps.

“I will continue speaking because the spirit of prophecy is upon me. Although you, my companion on this ledge, will feel pain, it is good for you to know my prophecy.

“I see your grandson, Fulcieri da Calboli, cruel and proud and famous for both qualities, committing atrocities against the White Guelfs of Florence. He will hunt the wolves. Through his actions, he will take away their lives and at the same time take away his honor. He is bloody.”

The second saved soul grieved. He was not envious of the inhabitants of Florence: He did not rejoice in their pain and death, and he did not rejoice in Fulcieri’s evil.

Dante was curious about these two saved souls, and so he asked them for their names.

The first saved soul replied, "Although you declined to tell me your name when I asked for it, I will tell you our names because God has honored you. I am Guido del Duca. I was envious, and I hated to see the happiness of another person. I sowed envy; now I reap purgation. Now I wonder why Humankind wants those things that either cannot be shared or are lesser when they are shared instead of wanting those things that are greater when they are shared.

"The saved soul beside me is Rinier da Calboli, whom Guido da Montefeltro defeated in battle in 1276. He has no heirs to inherit his very great worth. Throughout the entire region of Romagna, many families are lacking good and chivalrous people. All who remain are evil.

"Where are the good people of Romagna? Dead. Gone.

"Where are Mainardi, Lizio da Valbona, and Pier Traversaro?

"Where is Guido di Carpigna, who was so hospitable that he once sold half of a valuable quilt in order to pay for a banquet, saying that all he needed was half a quilt because in winter he slept curled up and in summer he did not cover his feet?

"Where are Fabbro de' Lambertazzi, Bernardo di Fosco, Ugolin d'Azzo, Guido da Prata, Federigo di Tignoso, members of the Traversaro clan, and members of the Anastagi clan? These two clans have no heirs.

"Where are these people? They were models of chivalry and virtue, but they are no more.

"Which people exist now? Only the bad.

"Bretinoro is a town in Romagna that ought to no longer exist because no longer do good people live in it. It is best that families in this town have no sons. The heirs of families in this town are degenerate. Only families with no sons have a chance of retaining the goodness of their name.

"But now, living man from Tuscany who is climbing the mountain by the will of God, continue your journey. I am so disgusted by the degeneracy of the inhabitants of Romagna that I need to cry rather than to speak."

Dante thought, *Guido del Duca has come a long way in being purged of the sin of envy. Envious people are saddened when other people have good fortune, and they are made happy when other people have bad fortune. If Guido were still envious, he would be happy at the bad fortune of living people — being evil is bad fortune because evil people run the risk of eternal damnation unless they repent.*

Virgil thought, *Guido del Duca has come a long way in being purged of the sin of envy. Guido is not envious of Dante, to whom God is showing special grace by allowing him to travel through Purgatory although he is still alive.*

Dante and Virgil walked away. The saved souls were silent, and so Dante and Virgil knew that they were traveling in the right direction. If they had gone in the wrong direction, the saved souls would have told them. Souls in Purgatory are helpful.

As Dante and Virgil walked, they heard a voice say, "Anyone who finds me shall slay me."

Dante thought, *According to the Biblical story of Cain and Abel, both brothers gave offerings to God. Cain was a farmer, and his offering was "the fruit of the ground." Abel was a shepherd, and his offering was "the firstlings of his flock and the fat thereof." God liked Abel's offering, but God did not like Cain's offering. Out of envy, Cain killed Abel. Of course, God knew that Cain had killed Abel, and God punished Cain by sending him into exile. Cain then said the words that appear here in Purgatory: "Anyone who finds me shall slay me." However, God is merciful, and He marked Cain as a sign that no one should kill him. Cain was so envious of Abel that he killed him.*

Then Dante and Virgil heard another voice: "I am Aglauros, and I was turned to stone."

Dante thought, *I have read this story in Ovid's Metamorphoses. Aglauros was envious of her sister, whom the god Mercury loved. Aglauros attempted to keep Mercury from seeing her sister, and Mercury turned her into a stone statue.*

Virgil said to Dante, "You have just heard two examples of people infected with envy. Learn from them why envy must be avoided. Too often, Humankind gives in to sin, and neither positive examples of virtues nor negative examples of sins educate them and affect their actions. Paradise is above, but Humankind looks below. God is aware, and God strikes down those who focus their attention on the wrong place."

### **Chapter 15: Third Ledge — Anger (Purgatory)**

The time was 3 p.m. — the Sun is never still just as a child running and playing is never still — when Dante saw a light that was brighter than any that he had previously seen. His mind was stunned, and his head was forced down, and he put his hands above his head in an unsuccessful attempt to shield himself from the light.

Dante asked Virgil, "What light is this? I can't shield myself from it! Isn't it moving toward us?"

Virgil replied, "Don't be surprised that the brightness of angels can still blind you. We are being invited to climb to the next ledge of the mountain. Soon, you will be able to look at angels and see them without being blinded. The more that you are without sin, the more that you will be able to see."

Dante and Virgil stood before the angel, who said, "Climb higher now. These stairs are less steep than the stairs you have climbed before. The more that you are without sin, the easier it will be for you to climb."

Dante and Virgil walked past the angel and started climbing, and they heard the angel sing, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." They also heard "Conquer and rejoice." Having conquered another sin, they rejoiced.

Dante wished to learn from Virgil as they climbed, so he asked, "What did Guido del Luca mean when he said, 'Now I wonder why Humankind wants those things that either cannot be shared or are lesser when they are shared instead of wanting those things that are greater when they are shared'?"

Virgil replied, "He wishes you to avoid his sin: envy. He wishes you not to strive for material things but instead to strive for things that are nonmaterial."

Dante asked, "Can you explain in more detail, and give some examples?"

Virgil said, "Those things that are lesser when they are shared are material things. If you have \$100 and you pay someone \$50 to perform a task for you, you have only \$50 left. What was once \$100 is now \$50. That can lead you to become envious of someone who has \$100.

"Here is another example: Suppose you have a rare book that is worth \$1,000. If you own it by yourself, you have the equivalent of \$1,000. But if you are an equal co-owner of it with someone else, then you have the equivalent of \$500. Material possessions, when shared, become lesser. Often, of course, material possessions are not shared. When it comes to material possessions, if one person owns something, then other people do not own it."

Dante asked, "How can something that is shared by many souls make each of those souls wealthier?"

Virgil replied, "Nonmaterial, and especially spiritual, things, when shared, become greater. For example: Instead of owning a valuable and rare edition of a good book, suppose you and a friend both read an inexpensive edition of that good book. What you would share would be an

appreciation and knowledge of the book. This is something that can be shared by all the people who read that book. When that is shared, it becomes greater, not lesser.

“The more someone loves God, the more they are able to know that God loves him or her. Beatrice told me that in Paradise everybody shares his or her spiritual gifts, and everybody gains because of the sharing.

“Love is shared and grows greater in Paradise, and Paradise is what you should strive for.

“If my words are hard to understand, soon you will see Beatrice, and she can help you to truly understand.

“For right now, work to rid yourself of the five P’s that remain on your forehead. Two have entirely vanished. The angel brushed your forehead with his wings and erased a second P.”

Dante was going to say, “I understand,” but he was distracted because he and Virgil had reached the next ledge.

Here Dante fell into a trance, and he saw visions. These were visions of Meekness and Patience, the virtues opposed to the sin of Wrath.

The first vision was of Mary asking her young son, Jesus, “Why have you treated us in this way? Your father and I, frightened and crying, have searched throughout Jerusalem to find you.” Mary, Joseph, and Jesus had gone to Jerusalem for Passover. When Joseph and Mary left Jerusalem, they assumed that Jesus was in the group of people, including kinsmen and friends, with whom they were traveling. They traveled an entire day and discovered that Jesus was not in their group of people. They returned to Jerusalem and spent three days searching for him before finding him teaching in a temple. All parents would be relieved to find their lost child, and most parents would then be understandably angry at the child for causing them to worry that the child had died or been injured or been kidnapped. But Mary did not get angry at Jesus. She simply asked, “Why have you treated us in this way?”

The second vision was of a kind ruler of Athens, Pisistratus, who was known for his ability to deal with angry people. His wife, crying, was upset because a young man had publicly hugged their daughter, and so she wanted him killed. She said to her husband the King, “Since you are the ruler of Athens, take vengeance on this man who hugged our daughter.” In reply, Pisistratus asked her, “What shall we do to those who want to harm us, if we condemn those who love us?” Pisistratus felt compassion for, not anger toward, the young man.

The third vision was of Saint Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who died while praying for the forgiveness of his killers. The attackers were throwing stones at him and crying, “Kill him! Kill him!” But Stephen cried, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” Even as he died, Stephen forgave his enemies and wished that God would show them mercy.

Dante recognized that these were visions and were not actually happening in front of him, but he recognized the truth that resided in the visions.

Virgil saw that Dante had finished experiencing the visions, and he asked Dante, “What is wrong with you? You have been walking unsteadily, as if you are half-asleep.”

Dante replied, “I will tell you the visions I have seen.”

Virgil replied, “I know every thought you had. I know the visions you have seen. They were given to you so that you may learn from them and may learn to avoid the sin of anger and instead enjoy the peace that comes from Paradise.

“When I asked, ‘What’s wrong with you?’ after the visions had ceased, I simply wanted to encourage you to move faster. Those who climb the mountain must not be lazy. Here vigor is needed.”

Dante and Virgil walked together, and a cloud of black smoke rose and moved toward them. It enveloped them and they were not able to see. The smoke also made the air noxious.

## Chapter 16: Third Ledge — Anger (Marco Lombard) (Purgatory)

No night was ever so dark as the darkness created by the smoke that enveloped Dante and Virgil. No veil ever obscured vision as much as that smoke.

The smoke was so stinging that Dante could not see, and so Virgil grabbed Dante's hand. Virgil placed Dante's hand on his shoulder so he could be Dante's guide through the smoke. Virgil was a sighted man leading a blind man.

Virgil told Dante, "Be careful not to go away from me. You need me now."

Dante thought, *That is true in more than one sense. I literally need Virgil to prevent me from going over the edge of this ledge of the mountain. But also Virgil is a perfect example of reason. This smoke is blinding me the way that anger can blind a human being. Reason is needed to be a guide to good conduct when one is angry. If a human being is not guided by reason, that human being can do harmful actions.*

Dante heard voices singing the "Agnus Dei" or the "Lamb of God":

"Lamb of God, You who take away the sins of the world,

"Have mercy on us.

"Lamb of God, You who take away the sins of the world,

"Grant us peace."

The voices sang the song in unison and harmony.

Dante asked Virgil, "Those voices — do they come from saved souls?"

Virgil replied, "Yes. The lyrics help heal and take away anger."

One of the saved souls then spoke: "Who are you who walks through the smoke? You are speaking of us saved souls as if you were not one of us — as if you were still living and measuring time by the calendar instead of by the intensity of your purgation."

Dante replied, "Saved soul, you who clean your soul so you can give it back to God, I can tell you wonders if you walk with me."

Dante thought, *The wonders are that I have traveled through the Inferno and am climbing this mountain although I am still alive.*

The saved soul replied, "I will walk with you for a while — for as long as I am allowed. Because of this smoke, we cannot see each other's face, but we can hear each other's words."

Dante said, "I am still alive, and God is allowing me to climb this mountain. To get to the Mountain of Purgatory, I journeyed through the Inferno.

"God wants me to see Paradise. Please tell me who you are, and please tell me the way up this mountain. We will follow your instructions so that we may climb higher."

The saved soul replied, "My name is Marco, and I come from Lombard. I knew the world, each of whose inhabitants is like a slackened bow that no one uses to aim at virtue. The path you are on is the correct one; it will lead to the way up to the next ledge. When you are above, in Paradise, please pray for me."

Dante replied, "I promise that I will pray for you, just as you have requested. But I have a question that I hope you can answer. This has been bothering me. As you have said, correctly, the world lacks every virtue and it lacks no evil. Why? Please tell me so that I can tell living men. Some people believe that the cause of evil is due to the stars' and planets' influence on people, while other people think that the cause of evil is people themselves."

Marco sighed and said, "The world is blind, and from your question I can see that in this matter you are blind, too. Too many people on earth attribute evil entirely to the influence of the stars and planets on people. If this were true, human beings would have no Free Will. And

if people have no Free Will, why should people be rewarded with the bliss of Paradise for doing good or rewarded with the pain of the Inferno for doing evil?

“If Free Will does not exist, then God’s afterlife does not make sense. Why should there be an Inferno if people are not responsible for their sins? Why should there be a Paradise if people are not responsible for their good deeds? Why should there be a Purgatory if people are not responsible for the sins they have repented and are not responsible for their repentance? If no Free Will exists, people are not responsible for what they do or don’t do.

“But first let me give you some background information. People of your time and my time believed in the astrological idea that the stars and planets influence us. People in the afterlife are often able to see the future. I see that the future will bring the rise of science, which will show that the stars and planets do not influence us. Astrology is not science. However, it is true that heredity — as well as environment — influence us. Instead of the influence of the stars and the planets, we should talk about the influence of heredity and environment. And neither the influence of heredity nor the influence of environment takes away our Free Will. People still know the difference between good and evil, and people still have the ability to choose to do good or chose to do evil.

“According to Determinism, nothing is free to move in any other way than it moves. Everything follows natural laws. For example, planets orbit the Sun because of natural laws. Planets are not free to stop orbiting the Sun. Planets are not free to stop revolving. We will never have a day in which the Earth stops revolving for an entire day, meaning that one side of the planet is light for 24 hours, and the other side is dark for 24 hours, and then the planet starts revolving again. Using the laws of physics, scientists will be able to accurately predict where a planet will be 100 years from now.

“Of course, Determinism as applied to planets is not controversial. However, people who are Determinists say that human beings are also determined. We are alive, however, and therefore it is much more difficult to predict our behavior, but according to the Determinists, everything we do is caused by our environment and heredity. According to the Determinists, Humankind does not have Free Will. Whenever we make a decision, we are making the decision in accordance with the kind of character we have. Our character is caused by heredity and environment. According to the Determinists, we have no Free Will that we can use to shape our character.

“In contrast, Free Will is what it sounds like. Planets may be determined, but human beings have the ability to make choices. You can choose to do good, or you can choose to do evil. The choice is yours to freely make.

“Human beings are free to choose good or evil, and so if the world is filled with moral evil, that is due to human beings alone, and not due to heredity, with an exception given to the criminally insane, who, like criminals, should be locked up, although the criminally insane should be locked up in a mental hospital rather than a prison.

“Just because you have Free Will does not mean that it is easy to use it. Doing the right thing can mean making a major effort of the will. Willing yourself to do the right thing can be difficult.

“Instead of you giving in to your desires and saying that what you do is determined by the planets and stars (or by heredity and environment), you need to work at controlling your desires. Instead of taking the easy way out and giving in to every desire, you need to decide what it is that you ought to do, and then you need to do it.

“This is something that all of us ought to be working for. In fact, it is what the souls in Purgatory are working for. Instead of giving in to feelings of anger, or envy, or pride, the souls

in Purgatory want to rein in these feelings and to substitute instead feelings of meekness, generosity, and humility.

“Listen, for this is important. I will explain to you how evil enters the world. The soul is born innocent, without evil. The soul can turn its attention to various things, some of which can be as trivial as a toy. The soul needs good guidance. The soul needs good teachers, just laws, and good rulers. We need good lawmakers to come up with just laws to be a guide for us. The just laws will not annihilate our excessive desires, but just laws can help us restrain our excessive desires.

“Currently, Italy has good laws, but it has no one to enforce them. The Holy Roman Emperor is not in Italy, and the current Pope, Boniface VIII, is more interested in playing power politics than in ruling justly and enforcing just laws, so the Roman law is not doing Italy any good. The Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope have even fought each other instead of working together to provide a good environment for all people, including the common people.

“The people who should be enforcing just laws are instead more interested in gaining wealth and power. The bad behavior of their leaders has a bad influence on the common people.

“Yes, we do have Free Will, but it is best not to be tempted in the first place. Bad leaders can create a society in which temptation reigns.

“Bad leadership has created an environment in which it is difficult for people to use their Free Will to do the right thing. The Pope and the Bishops are pursuing wealth and power. The common people see that, and they feel free to pursue their own base desires. Just leadership is important if you want a just society.

“Three good people still exist: Currado da Palazzo, Gherardo da Camino (who was the captain-general of Trevisio and the father of Gaia, a poet), and the nobleman and poet Guido da Castel. Currado bore a banner in a battle. Even though both of his hands were cut off, he held the banner in his arms and kept it waving to boost the morale of the troops.

“Dante, tell the world that the Pope has grabbed secular power as well as spiritual power. Secular power does not belong to the Pope.”

Dante replied, “Well spoken, Marco. I see why the sons of Levi were not permitted to inherit wealth. They served the Temple, and to keep focused on their service, they were not permitted to own property. The Pope and the Church have amassed secular power and wealth and so are distracted from the spiritual service that they should be performing.”

Marco said, “Rays of light are piercing the smoke. We are approaching the angel. I must leave before the angel sees me. God be with you.”

Marco turned and walked away from Dante and Virgil.

Dante thought, *I have learned from you, Marco. When I return to the Land of the Living, I must be a good leader. Leaders need not be Emperors or Popes; they can be teachers, parents, and other ordinary people, including poets.*

*I have also learned that Free Will exists and that we ought not to blame the stars and planets for our actions. Astrologers do that, and astrologers are in the Inferno.*

*Suppose you regarded astrology as a way to live your life. What then? Then you would regard the stars as exerting control over your life. You would not make an important decision without consulting an astrological chart, and then you would decide in accordance with what the stars “told” you.*

*By doing this, of course, you would be denying your Free Will. You would be controlled by what you think the stars are telling you. A strong belief in astrology can lead to a denial of Free Will. A denial of Free Will can lead to an abdication of responsibility. Repenting your sins means acknowledging that you are responsible for committing sins and regretting your sins.*



*Unless you take responsibility for your sins, you cannot repent your sins. Unless you repent your sins, you cannot achieve Paradise.*

*The astrologers are in the Inferno because they have kept people from taking responsibility for their actions, including their sins. Sinners can say, "It's no wonder I sinned. The stars predetermine it all. It is not up to me whether or not I sin. Therefore, I don't have to take responsibility for my sins."*

*Of course, we have seen that many of the sinners in the Inferno avoided taking responsibility for their sins. Francesca da Rimini blamed Love and a book for her sins.*

*Unless you take responsibility for your actions, how can you change your life for the better?*

*We need to reject astrology and to affirm Free Will and responsibility.*

## Chapter 17: Fourth Ledge — Sloth (Purgatory)

Imagine being caught in a mountain fog. Imagine trying to see through the fog with eyes that seem to be covered with membranes, partially blinding you. Imagine that the fog begins to dissipate, and finally you can see the Sun again.

That is how Dante felt as he saw the Sun again, just before the Sun set.

Following Virgil, Dante walked out of the cloud of thick smoke that blinded the wrathful. Similar to how he had experienced examples of meekness, now he experienced examples of wrath — in inner visions.

Where do such inner visions come from? Some people say from the stars; other people say from God. The people who say that the inner visions experienced on the Mountain of Purgatory come from God are correct.

First, Dante experienced an inner vision of Procne, a wrathful woman who was transformed into a bird in a myth told in Book 6 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Procne was married to Tereus, a Thracian King, and she bore him a son named Itys. Tereus then raped Procne's sister, Philomela, and cut out her tongue so that she could not tell anyone what had happened. Philomela wove a tapestry. The tapestry contained pictures that told the story of the rape. When Procne saw the tapestry and realized that her husband had raped her sister, she was so angry that she killed her son, cooked him, and served him to her husband.

Procne experienced anger against family.

Second, Dante experienced an inner vision of the Persian Haman, a high official of the Persian King Ahasuerus, who is better known in modern times as Xerxes. He was famous in ancient Greek history as well as in Old Testament history. In ancient Greek history, his father, Darius, invaded the Greek mainland, but was defeated at Marathon. People got the name "marathon" for our long-distance race because a runner carried the news of the Greek victory all the way to Athens, dying after he delivered the news. Xerxes also invaded the Greek mainland. He was delayed at Thermopylae, a pass in the mountains. During the Battle of Thermopylae, 300 Spartans, and 1000 other Greeks, led by King Leonidas of Sparta, held off the vastly numerically superior Persians for a few days, giving the Greeks time to gather their forces. The Spartans knew that they would die. King Leonidas told them that they would eat the morning meal in the Land of the Living, and they would eat the evening meal in the Land of the Dead. The Greeks defeated the Persians in such battles as the Battle of Salamis and the Battle of Plataea, thus preventing the Persians from subjugating Greece.

According to the Book of Esther in the Bible, Haman decided to have all the Jews killed because Mordecai, the cousin of Esther, would not bow down to him. Haman told Xerxes that some people in his kingdom did not obey his laws, and therefore those people ought to be killed. Xerxes agreed.

Esther asked that the Jews, herself included, fast for three days, and then she would see the King. (She was his Queen.) Xerxes was unable to sleep one night, and he ordered a book of chronicles to be read to him. The selection read told about the loyalty of Mordecai, who had prevented a plot to assassinate King Xerxes by two eunuchs.

Esther went to King Xerxes, her husband, and asked him not to kill all the Jews. He asked who was planning to kill all the Jews. Hearing from Esther that Haman was planning to kill all the Jews, Xerxes ordered that Haman be crucified. In fact, the crucifix that Haman had planned to use to crucify Mordecai was used to crucify Haman. Even as Haman died, he was still filled with anger against Mordecai.

Haman experienced anger against neighbor.

Third, Dante experienced an inner vision of Queen Amata, who committed suicide. Virgil's *Aeneid* tells her story. Amata, a Queen in Italy, wanted her daughter, Lavinia, to marry Turnus. However, following the end of the Trojan War, the Trojan Prince Aeneas came to Italy in order to fulfill his fate of becoming an important ancestor of the Roman people. Aeneas was fated to marry Lavinia, and together they would have children and their descendants would eventually become the Romans. Turnus wanted to marry Lavinia, and he fought a war against Aeneas and the Trojan warriors whom Aeneas had brought with him.

When Queen Amata heard a rumor — it turned out to be false — that Turnus had been killed in battle, she committed suicide rather than see Lavinia married to Aeneas. Lavinia mourned when she discovered that her mother was dead. Lavinia said, "Why, mother, did you allow your rage to take away your life? Now I must mourn you before I mourn another person who will soon die — Turnus!"

Queen Amata experienced anger against God — who wanted Aeneas to marry Lavinia and become an important ancestor of the Roman people.

A person who is asleep will wake up when light suddenly falls across his or her eyes. So Dante woke up when bright light flashed across his eyes.

Then Dante heard a voice that said, "This is the place where you can climb higher."

Virgil explained, "This is an angel. Very helpful, he tells us what we need to know even before we ask. He follows the ethical rule 'Treat others as you would like to be treated.' Some people see a person who needs something, but they wait to be asked for help. Such people are half-guilty of not helping those who need help.

"Let us climb as high as we can while light still remains. Once the light is gone, we will not be permitted — or able — to climb higher."

Dante and Virgil started climbing the stairs, and with his first step, Dante felt a wing pass over his forehead, and he heard the words "Blessed are the peacemakers, who feel no sinful wrath."

The light faded, and Dante thought to himself, *Why is my strength fading?*

Dante and Virgil climbed the last of the stairs to the next ledge. Then they stopped, just like a ship has to stop once it runs aground.

Virgil thought, *The end of the day has arrived, and on the Mountain of Purgatory, no sinner can ascend at night.*

Dante listened, heard nothing, and then asked Virgil, "What sin is purged on this ledge? Although we cannot climb higher, we can talk to each other."

Virgil replied, "The sinners here are purging the sin of sloth. They failed to pursue with zeal the things they should have pursued with zeal. The sinners were not necessarily lazy, except when it came to spiritual things. Some sinners here were very busy indeed, just not when it came to pursuing what they should have been pursuing. On this ledge, the sinners pursue with zeal and diligence the purgation of the sin of sloth."

Virgil thought, *I am not a Christian, but I learned much during the Harrowing of Hell. I have also spent much time in the library in Limbo. Beatrice also told me much.*

Virgil continued, "Let me tell you some of what I know about the sins purged on the Mountain of Purgatory. You can benefit from that knowledge.

"All people have love. Love is of two kinds: natural love and rational love. These terms come from Aristotle.

"Natural love is simply a desire for something. Natural love does not involve the use of reason. Later, I will talk about natural love. Right now, I will talk about rational love.

“Rational love involves choosing what we love. One way to look at it is rational love involves choosing what we pursue. We may choose wisely or foolishly. We may choose to pursue what we love with not enough force or with too much force or with just the right amount of force.

“Because we have Free Will, we can choose what we love, and we can choose with how much force we will pursue it. It is important to choose to love the right things and to pursue them with the right amount of force.

“What we choose is what we love. We can choose to love the right thing or the wrong thing.

“Rational love should stay fixed on the Eternal Good. However, we can choose to love the wrong thing, such as money, instead. Or we can choose to love something good but pursue it with either too much zeal or not enough zeal. Making the wrong choice or pursuing what you love with the wrong amount of force can put you in the Inferno or make you spend additional years in Purgatory, depending on whether or not you repent your sins before you die.

“The first three ledges of the Mountain of Purgatory purge the sins of pride, envy, and wrath. These are sins of loving the wrong thing.

“Sinners who were guilty of pride, envy, or wrath were guilty of loving the wrong things; they wished some kind of evil upon their neighbors.

“If a sinner was proud, the sinner placed the sinner at the center of the universe and therefore wished for the sinner’s neighbors to be beneath the sinner.

“If a sinner was envious, the sinner placed the sinner at the center of the universe and therefore did not want the sinner’s neighbors to have good fortune.

“If a sinner was angry, then the sinner placed the sinner at the center of the universe and therefore wished to do something like punch the sinner’s neighbors in the nose.

“We are now on the middle ledge, which purges the sin of sloth. The saved souls here loved the right thing, but they pursued it without sufficient zeal.

“We have three ledges above this ledge to climb. They are devoted to purging the sins that involve loving the right thing too much. I won’t tell you what they are. I prefer that you discover for yourself what they are.”

Virgil thought, *The ledges above punish the sins of avarice, gluttony, and lust.*

*Rational love and staying fixed on the Eternal Good involve staying temperate, something that many unrepentant sinners in the Inferno and many repentant sinners on the Mountain of Purgatory did not do.*

*Sinners who were guilty of avarice, gluttony, or lust were guilty of loving the right things too much.*

*If a sinner was guilty of avarice, the sinner loved money or material things too much. The sinner either hoarded money or spent every penny the sinner could borrow in order to get more stuff. Nothing is wrong with money or material possessions provided they are used wisely, but a person can love either money or material possessions too much.*

*If a sinner was guilty of gluttony, then the sinner over-ate and over-drank. Of course, food and drink are good things if they are used wisely, but the sinner loved food and drink too much.*

*If a sinner was guilty of lust, then the sinner loved sex too much. God invented sex, and when sex is indulged in wisely and ethically, it is one of the best things on Earth, but it is possible to love sex too much and to misuse sex.*

*Everyone loves, but it is necessary to love the right things and to love them with the right amount of zeal.*

## Chapter 18: Fourth Ledge — Sloth (Abbot of San Zeno) (Purgatory)

When Virgil had finished speaking, he looked at Dante to see if he wanted more information. Dante, although he wanted more information, wondered whether Virgil was tired of answering questions. Of course, Virgil could read his mind, and he encouraged him to ask questions.

Dante said, “The information you have given me is very good, but please explain love to me. It is, you say, the source of every virtue as well as of every vice.”

Virgil replied, “Listen carefully, and I will explain love. Not every love is good. The Epicureans believed that, but they were wrong. The Epicureans taught something false, and when they taught it, they were like blind people leading other blind people.

“People have desires, but not all desires are good. The Epicureans would say that anything that gives pleasure is good, but the Epicureans are wrong. As we have seen, it is important to love the right things. Loving the wrong things leads to pride, envy, and wrath. It is important to love to the right degree. People who are guilty of sloth love the right things, but not strongly enough. And when we climb to the final three terraces, you will see saved souls who loved the right things but too strongly.

“The soul senses something, whether material or nonmaterial, forms an image of it, and if the image seems desirable, the soul desires — or loves — the thing as naturally as a flame shoots upwards. If the thing is sufficiently desirable, the soul moves toward possessing it.”

Dante asked, “If all of this is completely natural, does it make sense for one to be praised or blamed for one’s choices, whether good or bad? It seems as if the soul must act as it does.”

Virgil replied, “I will explain to you what I can explain. Although the soul’s wanting a thing is completely natural, as natural as a bee’s making honey, people must use their reason to determine whether to pursue the thing or not. Some things we should pursue, and some things we ought not to pursue. Humankind has knowledge of right and wrong. Humankind has reason. Humankind has ethics. All of these things can help people to decide whether what the soul wants is good or bad. And Humankind has Free Will to make a decision and act on it. Whatever your heredity and environment are, reason can help you make the correct decision and Free Will can help you implement that correct decision.

“We human beings do have Free Will to choose, and what we choose is important.

“To summarize: What we choose is what we love. However, we have reason, and we can use our reason to understand the difference between good loves and bad loves. We also have Freedom of the Will, and we can use our Freedom of the Will to choose good loves.

“I have explained to you what I can explain. When you see Beatrice, she can give you more information. Beatrice, not I, understands faith.

“Intellect will not solve all of our problems or tell us everything that we ought to know. We have had an intellectual discussion of love, but you still need to have faith as well as intellect.

“I understand human reason, but Beatrice understands faith, and Beatrice will be able to take you further than I can.

“Again: Quite simply, intellect is not able to understand everything. Some things will remain a mystery and must be accepted on faith.

“I am aware of my limits, and I am aware that Beatrice will be able to answer some questions that I am unable to answer. I, of course, will soon turn you over to Beatrice. Beatrice will be your next major guide.”

The time was close to midnight. Dante was satisfied that Virgil had answered his question the best he was able to, but he realized that Beatrice could answer his question in more detail.

Dante's thoughts began to wander, but then he and Virgil heard people running toward them. The followers of Bacchus in Thebes were zealous in their worship of the god, and the saved souls running toward Dante and Virgil were also zealous.

Two souls were ahead of the others. One soul shouted, "Mary ran to the hills."

Dante thought, *After the Annunciation, in which an angel told Mary that she would bear Christ, Mary hurried to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist. Mary did not delay; she wished to hurry to share the good news with Elizabeth.*

The next soul shouted, "Caesar struck at Marseilles and then hurried to Spain to subjugate Ilerda."

Dante thought, *Julius Caesar warred against Pompey the Great. Eager to meet Pompey in battle, Caesar left some of his army to besiege Marseilles, and then he took as quickly as he could the rest of his soldiers to the showdown with the Spanish army of Pompey. Caesar won the Battle of Ilerda.*

*Mary and Julius Caesar are examples of zeal and diligence that we ought to emulate.*

Other souls running behind the two souls in front shouted, "Faster! Faster! Don't waste time! Purge the sin of sloth! Do good deeds to rid yourself of sloth and be blessed!"

Virgil said to the running souls, "Saved souls who are eager to make up for lost time — time lost due to the lukewarm love of doing the right thing and of doing good deeds — this man who is alive would like to climb higher when dawn arrives. Please show us the way up."

One of the saved souls shouted to him, "Follow in our tracks, and you will arrive at the way up the mountain.

"We cannot stop. We cannot lose time. We are keeping our eyes on the prize. We beg your pardon, but we must purge our sin of sloth."

Dante thought, *These souls certainly are keeping their eyes on the prize. Elsewhere on the mountain, souls have been distracted from the prize when they have found out that I am still alive. These souls refuse to be distracted. Cato would be proud of them. Those who were slothful while they were alive are now purging their sin by staying busy day and night. The slothful purge their sin by running and running, both day and night.*

The saved soul continued, "I was the abbot of San Zeno in Verona when Barbarossa was Emperor. He destroyed Milan in 1162, even sowing salt into the ground so that nothing would grow in the fields. A person who has power over the monastery, but who will soon die, replaced the true pastor with a person who is an illegitimate bastard, unqualified mentally because of mental retardation, and unqualified physically because of physical handicaps. Thus, he is triply unqualified. Unless exceptional circumstances exist, a man with these qualities cannot become a priest. Such qualities can interfere with the duties of a priest. For example, a priest with severe physical handicaps may not be able to pour the liquid for the Mass. Living men abuse their power, and they make bad times worse by providing bad leaders."

He raced on.

Virgil said to Dante, "Turn around. More souls are racing toward us as they work to purge the sin of sloth."

Two souls at the end of the group of souls shouted, "Most followers of Moses never reached the Holy Land."

*Most of the followers of Moses never reached the Promised Land because they were slothful after God opened the Red Sea so that they could escape from Egypt. As recorded in Numbers 14:22, God told Moses, "Because all those men who have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times,*

*and have not hearkened to my voice, surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them who provoked me see it.” Among the older men, only Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, made it to the Holy Land.*

And then the two souls at the end shouted, “Some followers of Aeneas never made it to Italy.”

Dante thought, *This is true. When Aeneas and his followers were on the island of Sicily, the women set fire to some ships because they were tired of wandering and wanted to stay on Sicily. Some of the ships burned, and Aeneas did not have enough ships to take all of the Trojan refugees to Italy. Therefore, he left nearly all of the women on Sicily (he did take to Italy at least one mother) and all the men who desired to stay there rather than going on to glory in Italy. Virgil tells this story in Book 5 of his Aeneid.*

*These slothful followers of Moses and of Aeneas are not to be emulated.*

When the souls had gone on, Dante’s thoughts wandered. He went to sleep, and he began to dream.

## Chapter 19: Fifth Ledge — Avarice and Wastefulness (Purgatory)

Just before dawn, a time when dreams sometimes bring truth, Dante dreamed about a hag — a stutterer and stumbler, with crossed eyes, yellow skin, and hands deformed as if by arthritis. Dante stared at her, and under his gaze the hag changed and became gradually beautiful.

The now beautiful woman spoke, “I am a Siren. I am she who sings sweetly and entices sailors to crash their ships upon my shores. I am the Siren who convinced Ulysses to stray from his path. Anyone who spends time with me seldom leaves because I satisfy them.”

Ulysses sought dangerous knowledge. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Circe told him about his upcoming voyage, “First you will come to the island of the Sirens, who enchant men with their lovely song. Sailors who hear their song crash their ships on the Sirens’ island, whose shores are strewn with the bones of men. Sail quickly past the Sirens! Your men must not hear their song. Soften beeswax and plug their ears with it. But if you must hear their song, have your men tie you to the mast so that you don’t jump overboard and swim to their island and die. Tell your men that when you order them to untie you, they must tie you tighter.” Ulysses did this, and he heard the song of the Sirens and lived.

The Siren had barely finished speaking before a Heavenly lady appeared to defend Dante and said to Virgil, “What is this? Do your duty!”

Virgil then stepped up the Siren and ribbed her garment from the top to below her belly. A stench then poured forth, and Dante gagged and woke up.

Virgil said, “I have been calling you three times now. You are slothful, and you are not acting like the saved souls purging their sin on this ledge.”

Dante followed Virgil.

As Dante walked, he was thinking about his dream. He was stooped over and resembled half of a bridge. He then heard a soft, kindly voice say, “This is the way up.”

An angel’s wings fanned Dante and erased one of the remaining P’s on his forehead, and the angel said, “Blessed are they who mourn: for they shall be comforted.”

Virgil asked Dante, “What are you thinking about?”

Dante replied, “I had a dream that I cannot stop thinking about.”

Virgil knew Dante’s thoughts, and he knew the dream that Dante had had. He said to Dante, “You saw an evil witch that causes the sinners on the three upper ledges to mourn. You also saw how to escape from her.

“The Siren was once hideous but then seemed beautiful, just as a sin is repulsive at first but when habitually engaged in seems attractive. Think of addiction to tobacco, which a later age will regard as at least a bad habit. Anyone smoking a first cigarette is likely to have a very unpleasant experience, with coughing and, in some cases, vomiting. But continued smoking makes a person an addict to tobacco, and smoking becomes a pleasure — until it results in disease. But a better example is perhaps food. Food is necessary and eating too much of it can be pleasurable, but eating too much can lead to obesity and disease. What seemed good at first — overeating — can very quickly show that it is bad in reality. The same is true of other sins, which sometimes can have an attractive veneer but which always have an ugly reality.

“In your dream, a Heavenly lady and I came to your rescue. I know reason well, and reason is important in recognizing what is good and bad. But more is needed than reason. The Heavenly lady represents divine guidance, which is something that is outside of reason. With reason and divine guidance, you can recognize sin and see how ugly it is in reality rather than



be taken in by the attractive veneer it at first seems to have. Reason and divine guidance can and should work together.

“Please realize that the Siren is a liar. She said that she convinced Ulysses to stray from his path. That is not true. Ulysses’ path went by the Siren. Ulysses was able to hear the song of the Siren and survive. He ordered his men to tie him to the mast of his ship so he could not jump overboard and swim to the Island of the Siren. His crewmen, however, put wax in their ears so that they could perform their duties without hearing the song of the Siren. Ulysses heard the song of the Siren, but he did not deviate from his path.”

This is partially correct. Ulysses did not deviate from his literal path: His attempt to return to his home island of Ithaca continued. But his attempt to acquire knowledge of all things, bad and good, deviate from the path to ought to have taken: to acquire knowledge of what is good to know.

Virgil then said, “Let us continue climbing. Look upward. Paradise is calling to you.”

A tame falcon will stay still until its master calls for it to soar. Now Dante strained to climb higher.

Dante and Virgil reached the fifth ledge of the mountain. There they saw saved souls, in tears, lying face down, their backs to the heavens and their faces looking at dust. Their hands and feet were bound.

Dante heard the souls say a prayer that was taken from Psalm 119 — “*Adhaesit Pavimento Anima Mea*” or “My Soul Cleaves Unto the Dust”:

“My soul cleaves unto the dust: quicken You me according to Your word.

“I have declared my ways, and You heard me: teach me Your statutes.

“Make me to understand the way of Your precepts: so shall I talk of Your wondrous works.

“My soul melts for heaviness: strengthen You me according to Your word.

“Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me Your law graciously.

“I have chosen the way of truth: Your judgments have I laid before me.

“I have stuck unto Your testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame.

“I will run the way of Your commandments, when You shall enlarge my heart.”

Virgil said to the saved souls, “You will reach Paradise, and the purgation you are now undergoing is made easier by justice and the promise of Paradise. Please tell us how to reach the steps that lead upward.”

A saved soul said, “If you are not required to spend time on this ledge purging your sin, go to the right, and you will find the steps that lead upward.”

Dante thought, *This saved soul has mistaken Virgil and me for saved souls who do not need to spend time on this ledge. Some souls can skip ledges, if they are not guilty of the sin purged on that ledge. Also, it is good to note once more that the saved souls in Purgatory are helpful.*

Dante also thought, *I would like to talk to this saved soul.*

Virgil, who knew Dante’s thoughts, nodded to him that it was OK to talk to the saved soul.

Dante said to the saved soul, “You are purifying yourself with tears, and you will see God. Please tell me who all of you were and why you weep in the dust. Also, can I help you in some way in the Land of the Living when I return?”

The saved soul replied, “I will tell you soon why we lie in the dust with our backs to Heaven, but first let me say that I was a successor to Saint Peter. In the Land of the Living, I was Pope Adrian V. I was Pope for only 38 days, but that was enough time for me to learn how difficult it is to be a good and virtuous Pope. I converted very late in life. When I became Pope, I understood how false the world is. I realized that true peace could not be found in this world. I instead sought the true peace that is found in Paradise.

“Until I came to the realization of the falseness of the world, I was greedy and I was separated from God. On this ledge we are punished for being greedy in life. Because we looked at money and material possessions in the Land of the Living instead of looking to God, on this ledge our purgation is to look at the dust of the ground and to turn our backs on God. Our hands and feet are bound because we used them to pursue money and material possessions with too much zeal in the Land of the Living. This is the worst punishment on the mountain.”

Dante thought, *Each sinner is most horrified by his or own sin, and so each sinner regards his or her punishment as the worst because he or she must think constantly about that particular sin.*

*This purgation is just because the avaricious turned their backs on Heaven, instead choosing to look toward money and material things. Now they are forced not to look toward Heaven. Because they used their hands and feet to pursue money and material things, now their hands and feet are tied.*

Dante kneeled.

The saved soul said to him, “Why are you kneeling to me?”

Dante replied, “You have been a Pope. You have had high office.”

The saved soul replied, “Please rise to your feet. Do not kneel to me. I am a servant, as are you and all the other souls here, of God. You know the words of Jesus when he was asked by the Pharisees which of seven husbands a woman had had in the Land of the Living would that woman be married to in Paradise: ‘For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels who are in Heaven.’

“In the Land of the Living, I was married to my diocese, but now I am not married. The title of Pope is not applicable to one in the afterlife, and therefore you ought not to kneel to me.

“Please do not stay longer. Please let me go back to purging my sin. Let me cry in penance. In the Land of the Living, I have a niece named Alagia. I hope that she may retain her goodness and not be led astray. There is no lack of bad examples that she could follow. She is all that remains to me in the Land of the Living.”

Dante thought, *The saved souls in Purgatory still care about and wish the best for people who are still in the Land of the Living. Also, on this ledge Virgil and I see the former Pope Adrian V being purged of the sin of greed. Of course, the Simoniac Popes in the Inferno were greedy, but they did not repent their sins before dying.*

## Chapter 20: Fifth Ledge — Avarice and Wastefulness (Hugh Capet) (Purgatory)

Dante left then, respecting the wishes of Pope Adrian V. The desire to be purged of sin is more important than the desire to have a few more questions answered.

Virgil, as always, led the way. Many souls have been guilty of avarice, and this ledge was crowded. Walking along the outside of the ledge would have been dangerous, and so Virgil led Dante to the innermost part, next to the mountain. A narrow path was there.

Avarice is a sin that has captured many, many souls. Someday someone will come to drive away the She-Wolf that is avarice.

Dante and Virgil walked slowly, and Dante kept thinking about the souls lying face down on the ledge. From a soul ahead of Dante and Virgil came a voice crying out like a woman having the pain of giving birth, “Mary! Your poverty was shown by the place where you gave birth!”

Dante the Pilgrim thought, *I am beginning to piece together more information about the Mountain of Purgatory. On each ledge saved souls are given examples of a virtue they need to acquire and a sin they need to purge. So far, an event from the life of Mother Mary has been the first example of the virtue the saved souls need to acquire. That has been the case in the first five ledges of Purgatory Proper, and probably it will be the case with the two ledges Virgil and I still need to climb. The virtues that need to be acquired here are Charity and Detachment from Riches and What Riches can Buy, and the sin that needs to be purged is, of course, avarice, aka greed. The first example of the virtue that needs to be acquired is the Christmas story. Mary was pregnant and about to give birth, but no room was available in an inn; therefore, Mary gave birth in a stable and lay baby Jesus in a manger — a trough used to feed animals. She accepted this, and she did not complain about it.*

In Paradise, an angel thought, *If Mary had lived in a much later time, she may have given birth in a decrepit trailer park.*

The saved soul then cried out, “Good Fabricius, you chose to keep your virtue and be impoverished rather than to acquire vice and live in luxury.”

Dante thought, *Gaius Fabricius Luscinus was incorruptible, refusing to take bribes, and he died without money to pay for his funeral or to provide dowries for his daughters. Fortunately, the Romans greatly respected him. The Romans paid for his burial, and the Romans paid for the dowries of his daughters. Fabricius valued virtue. He could have become rich by taking bribes when he served as Consul and as Censor, but he chose to stay poor.*

Dante was impressed by the words that the voice had spoken, and he pushed ahead to find out which saved soul the voice belonged to. As he did so, the voice spoke again, this time speaking of St. Nicholas, whom a later age would know as Santa Claus, and of the gold he had given to an impoverished father.

Dante thought, *Saint Nicholas provided dowries for three girls so that they could be married instead of being forced into prostitution. At that time and place, females needed a dowry in order to be married. Their father lacked the money to provide dowries for his three daughters and so it seemed that they would be forced to give up lives of virtue. Each night for three nights, Saint Nicholas threw a bag of gold through the window of the father’s house, and the three bags of gold became the dowries for the father’s three daughters.*

Dante said, “Saved soul, you who speak of such good things, please tell me who you are and why no one else is speaking. I can reward you with prayers when I return to the Land of

the Living.”

The saved soul replied, “I will help you, but not for any reward that I may win. I will help you because we souls in Purgatory are helpful, and because your presence here as a living man shows that God is showing you grace.

“I am Hugh Capet, and my descendants have been bad Kings of France. They have ruled from my time until the present day, and they have been named Louis and Philip.

“When the old line of Kings had died, my family was rich and influential enough to replace the old line. My descendants at first were not especially good, but they were not especially bad because they had a sense of shame.

“But then they became greedy. They annexed the kingdom of Provence to the kingdom of France, and then they annexed Ponthieu, Normandy, and Gascony.

“Let me tell you about three descendants of mine, all named Charles, and their sins, some that are already done and some that will be done. The first Charles, of Anjou, defeated Manfred at the Battle of Benevento in 1266. He was so evil that people thought that he had poisoned Saint Thomas Aquinas and sent him to Paradise. Charles of Anjou thought that Saint Thomas was going to give a bad report about him to the 1274 Ecumenical Council of Lyons. Charles asked Saint Thomas what he was going to say about him. Saint Thomas replied, “Only the truth.” People think that therefore Charles poisoned him.

“The second Charles is Charles of Valois, who serves Pope Boniface VIII. The Pope brought him to Italy to be a peacemaker, but his real job is to beat down the enemies of the Pope. This Charles, who is Philip the Fair’s brother, will play a role in helping the Black Guelfs.”

Dante thought, *I am a White Guelf, and I oppose the Black Guelfs.*

Hugh Capet thought, *This Charles will play a role in helping the Black Guelfs take over Florence. You, Dante, will be exiled.*

The saved soul continued, “The third Charles is Charles II, King of Naples. In return for a large amount of money, he will marry his young daughter to a much older man: Azzo VIII of Este. He will be like a pirate selling for as high a price as possible a female captive.

“These sins, past and future, are bad, but worst of all is a future sin. A Pope will be badly treated. A King of France — one of my descendants — will send troops to Anagni to take the Pope prisoner and treat him badly for three days, beating him and threatening to carry him off in chains and execute him. In doing this to a Pope, it is as if he is doing this to Christ Himself. Again Christ is mocked, and again Christ is crucified, and this Christ is crucified between two living thieves: the leaders of the forces this King of France sent against the Pope. I want to see this King of France punished. The Pope is the Vicar of Christ, and he ought not to endure such treatment.”

Virgil thought, *I know the future. King Philip IV (aka the Fair) of France will send bullies to beat up Pope Boniface VIII, who will die on 11 October 1303, one month after he was badly beaten. Of course, Pope Boniface VIII will end up in the Inferno, but I know Dante well enough to know that he will find this bad treatment of a Pope — even a Pope who is his enemy — to be shocking. Dante would never approve of this kind of treatment for any Pope.*

The saved soul then said, “On this ledge, to purge avarice by day we saved souls cry aloud the examples of the virtues known as Charity and Detachment from Riches and What Riches can Buy and by night we cry aloud the examples of the sin known as avarice.

“By night we cry aloud the name Pygmalion. Dido was married to Sichaesus, but Pygmalion, her brother, killed him out of greed to steal Sichaesus’ wealth. Because of that, Dido fled. Landing in northern Africa, she founded Carthage. In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, she has an

affair with Aeneas, and after he leaves her to fulfill his destiny in Italy, she commits suicide. She is in Circle 2 of the Inferno, which punishes the Lustful.

“By night we cry aloud the name Midas. He was so greedy that he wished that everything he touched would turn to gold. The god Bacchus heard and granted his prayer. Unfortunately, whenever Midas wanted to drink something, the liquid turned to gold. Whenever he tried to eat something, the food turned to gold. And when his young son ran to him for a hug, his son turned into a statue made of gold. Bacchus took back his gift when Midas requested him to.

“By night we cry aloud the name Achan. Joshua ordered the blowing of trumpets, and the walls of Jericho fell down, so the Jews conquered the city. The spoils of Joshua were supposed to be consecrated to, aka set aside for, the Lord, but a Jew named Achan stole some of the spoils: a good garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight. He and his family were stoned to death — the other Jews threw heavy stones at them and killed them.

“By night we cry aloud the name Sapphira. Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, sold some land for the Apostles, but he kept part of the land (with his wife’s knowledge) rather than selling all of the land and turning over all of the money to the Apostles. Peter rebuked him, and he fell dead. Later, Peter rebuked her, and she fell dead.

“By night we cry aloud the name Heliodorus. Heliodorus wanted to steal treasures from the temple in Jerusalem, but a man in golden armor appeared. The man was riding a horse that kicked Heliodorus. Also, two strong men whipped Heliodorus, and he was carried away in a litter.

“By night we cry aloud the name Polymnestor. Polymnestor was a King of Thrace to whom King Priam of Troy entrusted his son, Polydorus, in an attempt to keep him safe. Unfortunately, King Polymnestor coveted the treasure that the prince had, and out of greed, after Troy fell, he killed the prince so that he could steal the treasure.

“By night we cry aloud the name Crassus. Crassus is a very wealthy man from Roman history. He, Pompey, and Julius Caesar were triumvirs. Crassus led an army against the Parthians, who in 53 B.C.E. defeated him, cut off his head and right hand, and sent them to King Hyrodes. The King knew of Crassus’ great wealth and of his greed for more wealth, and to mock the fallen enemy, he poured melted gold into the mouth of Crassus’ head.

“By night we cry aloud these names. Sometimes, we cry these names loudly. Sometimes, we cry these names softly. By day we cry aloud the names of the virtuous you heard me crying. I am not the only one who cries these names. It was simply by chance that no other soul was crying the names of the virtuous when you heard me crying them.”

Dante and Virgil had already started to continue their journey when the mountain shook as if an earthquake had struck. The island of Delos used to float freely until Jupiter rooted it so that it would be a stable place for his paramour Latona, aka Leto, to give birth to his twin children: the god Apollo and the goddess Diana. The mountain shook more than that moving island ever did.

All of the souls on the mountain cried out, and Virgil, afraid that Dante would be alarmed, said to him, “Don’t worry. I am still here, and I am still your guide.”

All the saved souls shouted, “*Gloria in excelsis Deo.*” This song — “Glory to God in the Highest” — is the song that angels sang on the eve of the birth of Christ.

Dante and Virgil stood still and listened, just as the shepherds had listened to the angels. Then they walked on.

Dante wondered about the meaning of the shaking of the mountain and the shouting of the souls. He did not want to slow their pace by questioning Virgil, and so he walked on, wondering.

## Chapter 21: Fifth Ledge — Avarice and Wastefulness (Purgatory)

Dante kept walking as he continued to wonder about the shaking of the mountain. He thirsted for the answers to his questions just as the woman of Samaria thirsted for the water of everlasting life that Jesus offered to her and to all. Dante also thought about the saved souls purging their sin on this ledge, and he grieved.

Suddenly a figure appeared just like the newly risen Christ had appeared to two apostles on the road to Emmaus. The figure appeared from behind Dante and Virgil as they carefully maneuvered through the saved souls who were lying on the ledge.

Dante and Virgil were not aware of the figure until he spoke to them: “May God give you peace, brothers.”

Virgil greeted the figure and said, “I have appropriately been banished to Limbo by God, and I trust that God will appropriately lead you to Paradise.”

The figure said, “I am surprised. If you two souls are appropriately banned from Paradise by God, how can it be that you are climbing this mountain?”

Dante thought, *We are on the shadowy side of the mountain. I am not casting a shadow, and so this figure does not know that I am still alive.*

Virgil said to the figure, “Look at the forehead of this man beside me. You will see the remaining Ps that the angel carved on his forehead. This man, who still lives, will eventually make his way to Paradise. But because he still lives and the Fates are still spinning his thread of life and the Fate named Athropos has not yet cut the thread, he cannot climb the mountain as we can. His eyes do not see as the eyes of souls do. Because he needed a guide, I was brought up from the Inferno to guide him, and I will do my duty and guide him as far as I can with the knowledge that I have.

“But can you tell me please why the mountain shook just now and why all the souls shouted, ‘*Gloria in excelsis Deo*,’ as if with one voice?”

These were exactly the questions that Dante wanted to have answered, and he listened eagerly to the reply of the figure, who said, “This mountain is not subject to the natural laws that move the rest of this world. What causes earthquakes there does not cause earthquakes here. Heaven itself causes what happens here. In Purgatory Proper are no dew, no rain, no frost, no snow, no clouds, no lightning, no rainbows. An earthquake caused by natural laws can occur in Pre-purgatory, but never in Purgatory Proper.

“Here in Purgatory Proper, the mountain shakes when a soul feels itself to have become purified. The mountain shakes with joy when a soul is purified enough to ascend to the top of the mountain and then to Paradise. And that is when all the saved souls shout with joy, ‘*Gloria in excelsis Deo*’ or ‘Glory to God in the highest.’ The saved souls are not envious.

“The saved soul determines when its sins are purged and the saved soul is ready to climb to the top of the mountain. The saved soul is trustworthy. When it is not sufficiently purged of a particular sin, it desires to stay on the appropriate ledge and purge the sin. When that sin is sufficiently purged, it moves to a higher level. Not all souls need to spend time on each ledge. Some souls can skip a ledge and move to a higher ledge. It all depends on the kind of life that the soul lived while in a living body. When all sins are sufficiently purged, the soul moves to the top of the mountain and then to Paradise.

“Purging one’s sins takes time. I have spent 500 years on this ledge, purging my sin of greed. I died in the year 96 C.E., and since this is the year 1300 C.E., I have been purging my sins for 1204 years. Only just now did I feel myself sufficiently purged of sin that I am ready

to climb to the top of the mountain. This is why just now you felt the mountain shake and you heard souls shout. I hope that soon the other saved souls will be with God in Paradise.”

Dante was happy. His thirst for knowledge had been quenched in a most satisfying way.

Virgil said to the figure, “Now I understand why the mountain shakes and the souls shout. You have broken through a net that bound you. Please tell me who you are, and why you have lain on this ledge for 500 years.”

The figure replied, “I was alive during the reign of the Roman Emperor Titus, who, with justice and before he became Emperor, revenged the crucifixion of Christ by destroying Jerusalem and defeating the Jews in 70 C.E.

“I was a pagan, but I became a Christian.

“I was a poet — a title that long endures and is much honored. I was, others say, a major poet of Rome’s Silver Age. I wrote the *Thebaid*, which told of the Seven Against Thebes. Oedipus ruled Thebes, and after he died, his two sons, Eteocles and Polynices, decided to take turns ruling the city. Eteocles would rule for a year, and then Polynices would rule for a year, and so they would alternate as rulers of Thebes. However, after Eteocles’ first year of rule, he was greedy and refused to let Polynices rule for the following year. Polynices raised an army. Thebes had seven gates, and the seven captains in the army raised by Polynices each attacked one of the seven gates. The two brothers fought in single combat, and they killed each other.

“I also started to write the *Achilleid*, an epic poem about Achilles, the greatest warrior of the Trojan War, but I died before I could complete it.

“My name is Statius, and I am still famous in the Land of the Living.

“I became a poet because of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the epic poem that also caused more than 999 other people to become poets. The *Aeneid* is the mother of my poetry and of much other poetry. I learned how to write poetry from the *Aeneid*; without that model, my poetry would have been worthless. I wish I had been alive when Virgil was alive. I would willingly spend another year on this ledge if only that would happen.”

Virgil looked at Dante and silently communicated, *Don’t tell him who I am.*

But Dante had already started smiling, anticipating Statius’ joy when he found out that Virgil was standing before him. He quickly stopped smiling, but too late — Statius had already seen the smile.

Statius looked at Dante and requested, “Please tell me why you were smiling just now. You quickly smiled and quickly stopped smiling.”

Dante was standing between two souls. One soul wanted him to tell what he knew, and the other soul did not want him to tell what he knew.

Dante sighed, and Virgil relented and said to him, “Feel free to tell this soul what he wants to know.”

Dante said to Statius. “I was smiling because my guide who is helping me climb to Paradise is Virgil, the one who taught you how to write poetry that sings the deeds of gods and of men.”

Statius was happy and was kneeling so he could hug Virgil’s knees to show him respect, but Virgil said to him, “Don’t. You are a saved soul, and I am not. You should not show me reverence.”

Statius relented, stood up, and said, “Now you can understand how much I respect you and your poetry.”

Dante thought, *Purgatory has surprises, and the surprises are good surprises. Statius said that he would love to meet Virgil, and here Virgil is.*

The three poets walked on: Virgil, a pagan who had stayed a pagan; Statius, a pagan who had become a Christian; and Dante, a Christian.

## Chapter 22: Sixth Ledge — Gluttony (Stattius) (Purgatory)

Dante and Virgil and Stattius had passed the angel, who had removed another P from the foreheads of Dante and Stattius, and the three poets had begun climbing to the next ledge. The angel had said, “Blessed are they who thirst after righteousness,” leaving out the words “hunger and.”

Dante, now feeling lighter than he had at any time since he had started climbing up the mountain, easily followed Virgil and Stattius.

Virgil said to Stattius, “Love always kindles love, if the first love is virtuous and is clearly seen. You showed much love to me when you tried to kneel and embrace my knees, as was the custom of our times. Now let me tell you that when Juvenal, who lived at the same time as you, first entered Limbo, he told me of the great love you bore me. Since then, I have felt for you as much love as it is possible to feel for a person I had never seen. Our journey will now seem much shorter because we can enjoy each other’s company.

“But please tell me, if you will, how can it be that you were greedy? You have acquired much good sense, as can be seen from the diligence with which you educated yourself to write poetry.”

Stattius smiled briefly, and then he said, “Your words show that you must really love me. Appearances can be misleading. Because you found me on this ledge and because all the sinners whom you have seen so far have apparently been guilty of greed, you assume that my sin was greed. Actually, I was far from greedy — too far! My sin, which I have been purging for thousands of months, was the opposite of greed: prodigality. Instead of valuing money too much, I valued the things that money can buy too much, and I spent all I had, and more.

“Extremes are evil. I should have learned from Aristotle’s mean between extremes earlier in my life. Keeping in mind Aristotle’s Golden Mean, we can understand that both extremes (too much and too little) are sins. When it comes to handling money, it is wrong to save every penny you make and never spend money on necessities, and it is wrong to spend every penny you make and every penny you can borrow on things that you don’t need. I was guilty of overspending.

“I learned to repent my sin from some lines that you, Virgil, wrote: “Accursed love for gold / To what extremes will you drive us?” You wrote about greed, but because I had studied Aristotle’s Golden Mean, I began to think about the opposite extreme, and so I realized that I had sinned, and I repented. If not for your lines, I would be in the Inferno. Instead, I repented that sin, and all of my other sins.

“In the Inferno, the avaricious and the prodigal are in the same place, but they are in conflict, slamming huge boulders against each other. Here in Purgatory we have cooperation rather than conflict, as the avaricious and the prodigal work together to purge their sins. But here in Purgatory, as in the Inferno, sinners who engaged in opposites can be found together.

“On Judgment Day, many will rise not knowing that prodigality is a vice, and not having repented that sin.

“I repented that sin, and I became a Christian, and so I have spent 500 years on this ledge among the greedy purging my sin of prodigality.”

Virgil said to Stattius, “When you wrote the *Thebaid*, you gave no indication that you were a Christian. If it is true that you were not a Christian then, what caused you to become a Christian later?”



Stattius replied, "Again, it was some verses that you had written that directed me to Christianity. First, you influenced me to become a poet and then you, although you were not a Christian, influenced me to become a Christian. You were like a traveler who holds a lantern behind him. The light does not help the traveler to see, but it does help the people behind him to see.

"Virgil, you wrote, 'A new age is dawning, / Justice is returning, and the first age of Humankind, / And a new child comes from Heaven.'

"Christianity had arisen in the Roman Empire, and I listened to Christians, and what they said matched what you had prophesized. When the Roman Emperor Domitian persecuted the Christians, I wept as they suffered. During my lifetime, I helped the Christians. I also learned that theirs was the true faith. Before I had written the seventh book of the *Thebaid*, I had been baptized. But out of fear of the persecutions of Emperor Diocletian, I kept my Christianity secret. For many years, I pretended to be a pagan, and because of my lack of zeal I spent 400 years running with the slothful on the fourth ledge.

"Now, Virgil, please tell me, where is Terence, the Roman comic playwright?

"Where is Plautus, the Roman comic playwright?

"Where is Caecilius, the Roman comic playwright?

"Where is Varius, the Roman writer of tragedies and epics?

"All of these poets died before Jesus Christ appeared on earth. Are they in the Inferno? If so, in which circle are they?"

Virgil replied, "All of them, along with Persius, the Roman satirist, are with me, and with the Greek epic poet Homer, whom the Muses blessed more than any other poet, in Limbo, the first circle of the Inferno. We often talk about Parnassus, the mountain of the nine Muses. Also with us are the Greek tragedian Euripides, the Greek tragic poet Antiphon, the Greek lyric poet Simonides, and the Greek tragic poet Agathon.

"Also in Limbo are many people whom you wrote about: Antigone and Ismene, who are the daughters of Oedipus and Jocasta; Argia, the wife of Polynices; Hypsipyle, who conducted Kings such as Adrastus to a fountain when they needed water; and King Lycomedes' daughter Deidamia, one of the young women among whom Achilles was hidden after his mother, Thetis, disguised him as a young woman."

They had reached the ledge. They were silent as they stood on the ledge. The time was between 10 and 11 a.m., and Virgil said, "Let's walk toward the right."

Stattius agreed, and they started walking. Dante listened closely as Virgil and Stattius talked about poetry.

Soon, they came to a tree that had fruit with a pleasant odor. The tree resembled an upside-down fir tree. Its branches grew wider toward the top, preventing any souls from climbing the tree. A stream of water also fell onto the tree.

Virgil and Stattius drew closer to the tree, and a voice shouted, "You cannot eat this fruit, and you cannot drink this water."

Then the voice coming from the tree shouted examples of temperance, the virtue that is opposed to gluttony:

"Mary was worried because the wine ran out at the wedding feast in Cana. Mary did not care about the wine for the alcohol's sake, but she did care about the marriage being celebrated properly. She persuaded her son, Jesus, to perform his first miracle, turning water into wine.

"The ancient Roman women did not feel the need to drink wine; instead, they drank water.

"Because Daniel would not eat the food of King Nebuchadnezzar or drink the drink of the King, he was given prophetic powers.

“In Humankind’s earliest history, acorns served well as food and water served well as drink.

“John the Baptist lived in the desert, where he ate locusts and wild honey. John the Baptist prophesized the coming of the Messiah.”

## Chapter 23: Sixth Ledge — Gluttony (Forese Donati) (Purgatory)

Dante looked up at the tree, trying to see from where the voice was coming.

Virgil called to him, “Dante, we need to make better use of our time. Let’s go.”

Dante quickly turned and followed Virgil and Statius and listened — with profit — to their conversation. Suddenly, the three poets heard chanting: “You shall open my lips, O Lord: and my mouth shall show Your praise.”

Dante asked Virgil, “What am I hearing?”

Virgil replied, “Most likely, the voices are coming from saved souls who are purging their sin and therefore paying off their debt to God.”

A group of souls, now silent, came up behind them. These penitents had been gluttons. While alive, they should have used their mouths to praise God instead of eating and drinking too much. Like monks, they now sometimes sang and sometimes were silent. The souls noticed Dante’s shadow, looked at him doubtfully, and then — their eyes still on the prize — walked past him and the other two poets.

These saved souls were emaciated. Their eyes were sunken and surrounded by dark shadows. Their bones could be seen clearly.

Dante thought, *These souls remind me of Erysichthon, who cut down trees that were sacred to the goddess Ceres. He himself cut down a tree that was hung with wreaths: one wreath for each prayer that Ceres had granted. By cutting down the sacred tree, he killed a dryad nymph: the deity of the tree. In revenge, the nymph cursed him. Ceres heard the curse and punished Erysichthon by making him endlessly hungry. The more he ate, the hungrier he became. He sold all of his possessions to buy food to consume. He even sold his own daughter for money to buy food and eventually cannibalized his own flesh.*

*These souls also remind me of Miriam. During the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Miriam, according to the Jewish historian Josephus, was so hungry that she cooked and ate her own baby boy. She acted like a bird of prey cannibalizing its own young.*

Dante the Poet remembered, *The eye sockets of the penitents were clearly visible. Anyone looking at the penitents’ faces would have clearly seen the letters O and M and O in their faces: The two O’s are the eye sockets, and the M is the middle of the face (eyebrows and nose). The word ‘omo’ — or ‘homo’ — is Latin for man, and believers say that when God made Humankind, He put his mark on each human being.*

*Who would think — without knowing the nature of souls and how Purgatory works — that these souls who smell the fruit of the tree and who smell the stream of water that falls on the tree could be so emaciated?*

Suddenly, one of the shades turned toward Dante and said, “This is a blessing that I have received from God!”

Dante recognized this soul from his voice; the soul was so emaciated that Dante could not recognize him from his face and body. This soul was his friend Forese Donati.

Dante thought, *We used to write comic insult poems about each other and send them to each other. I criticized Forese for his gluttony and his huge belly. He wrote that I was once so afraid that I filled my pants with a substance that polite people don’t mention except when talking to their physician.*

Forese said to him, “Ignore the way I look: the sickly skin and shriveled flesh. Tell me about yourself and the two souls with you. Who are they? Please tell me your story!”

Dante replied, "When you died, I wept. And now I feel like weeping again seeing you as emaciated as you are. What has stripped the flesh from your body? Don't ask me to speak. I am in shock at how you look, and I cannot talk well in such a state."

Forese replied, "The tree with its fruit and with a stream falling onto it makes me lean. God has given the tree that power. All of us here fill our mouths with words to repent our sin of gluttony rather than fill our mouths with food and drink to make our bellies bigger. The tree makes us hungry and emaciated, and each time we go around this ledge our hunger and emaciation are increased. People may call this pain, but it is also solace. On the cross, Christ called out, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" Christ did not want to be on the cross, but He did what had to be done to redeem Humankind. He was eager to help Humankind. We are eager to do what has to be done to purge our sin of gluttony."

Dante said, "Forese, you died not even five years ago. You repented late in life, so how were you able to climb so high up this mountain so quickly? I thought that I would see you in Purgatory with the late repentant."

Forese said, "I had a good wife who has been a good widow. Nella cried for me, and she has prayed for me. Only because of her prayers, which come from a virtuous person, have I been able to climb so high and so quickly up this mountain. Because of her, I have been able to skip the other ledges.

"Both God and I love Nella, and she stands out in contrast with other women who lack her virtue. In Sardinia are wild women who go about with bare breasts. These wild women have more virtue than the women who are my Nella's neighbors in Florence. Those 'ladies' of Florence go about with too-low necklines. Muslims dress much more modestly by their own choice. Trouble is coming to Florence, and if the 'ladies' of Florence knew the trouble that awaits them, they would scream. They will experience much trouble before the infants they now are holding grow up and grow beards.

"But now, Dante, tell me your story. I and my fellow penitents are looking at your shadow and are wondering how a living man has come to climb this mountain."

Dante replied, "When you think about some of the times we spent together in the Land of the Living, you must cringe from some of the sins we committed. Because of my sins, my guide came to me to be my leader a few days ago. We journeyed through the Inferno, and then my guide led me up this mountain. He will be my guide until I meet Beatrice, whom you knew, and then Beatrice will take over as my guide.

"The other soul with me is that soul for whom the mountain trembled recently, showing that he is ready to enter Paradise."

## Chapter 24: Sixth Ledge — Gluttony (Bonagiunta da Lucca) (Purgatory)

The conversation of Dante and Forese Donati did not slow down their journey. They walked as they talked, and their speed was like that of a ship with favorable winds.

The saved souls marveled at Dante because they knew that he cast a shadow and was a living man.

Continuing to answer Forese's question about the souls who were traveling with him, Dante said, "And this second soul could travel much faster up the mountain, but he is acting courteously as a companion to us.

"But please, tell me, where is the soul of Piccarda, your sister? Also, among these souls, is there anyone I should know?"

Forese answered Dante's first question: "Piccarda, my sister, is already enjoying Paradise. She was both virtuous and beautiful."

Then he answered Dante's second question: "I can name the souls here — no reason not to."

Dante thought, *In the Inferno, souls in the lower circles did not want to be named. They did not want their names — and deeds! — to be remembered in the Land of the Living. Here in Purgatory, souls do not mind being named.*

Forese pointed out several souls and named them: "Here is Bonagiunta Orbicciani of Lucca, a poet who was fond of drinking wine.

"Here is Pope Martin IV, who too much enjoyed eating too much of his meals of Lake Bolsena eels, which he ordered to be stewed in wine.

"Here is Ubaldino della Pila, a great entertainer and a great feaster. His son is in the Inferno. You may have seen him as you journeyed through Hell: he is the Archbishop Ruggieri, and Ugolino is gnawing his scalp. Another of his relatives is entombed with Farinata in the circle of the heretics. Ubaldino once played host — for months — to the Pope and entertained and fed him and his entourage lavishly."

Dante thought, *Your family does not determine where you end up in the afterlife. The same family can have damned souls and saved souls.*

Forese continued, "Here is Boniface de' Fieschi of Genova, a wealthy Archbishop of Ravenna who fed his entourage feasts but neglected to feed the multitudes spiritual food."

Dante thought, *Both Ubaldino della Pila and Boniface de' Fieschi of Genova are so hungry that I see them before me trying to bite the air.*

Forese finished, "Here is Milord Marchese, a member of the Argogliosi family. When people complained that he did nothing but drink wine, he said that he was always thirsty. Now he is thirstier."

Dante looked around. One soul in particular seemed to want to speak to him: Bonagiunta Orbicciani of Lucca. Dante thought that he heard him say softly the name of a woman: "Gentucca."

Dante said to Bonagiunta, "Soul, you seem to want to speak to me. Please speak so that I may better hear you."

Bonagiunta said, "Let me prophesy to you. A woman has been born who, still not yet married, will soon give care to you and cause you to praise the city I was from in the Land of the Living, although that city is now reviled. Remember this prophecy. If it is not clear now, it will be clear later when it occurs."

Virgil thought, *This is a prophecy of Dante's upcoming exile from Florence, about which other souls will tell him more clearly later and which he will experience soon.*

Bonagiunta continued, "But aren't you the poet who wrote a poem in the new style, a poem that began, "Ladies who have knowledge of love"?"

Virgil thought, *Lots of poets are present now. We wrote in various languages. I wrote in Latin, but these poets wrote in vernacular Italian. In addition, we wrote various kinds of poetry in various styles. I wrote epic poetry, Forese wrote comic poetic insults, and other poets, including Dante, wrote love poetry. In addition, Dante wrote in a sweet new style in which Bonagiunta did not write. Dante has something to learn here, or he would not be on this ledge having this conversation with this particular poet.*

*Stattius read me, and he learned something from me that I did not know was in my own work. Stattius learned enough from me that he was able to decide to become a Christian. Perhaps Dante will be able to learn something from these vernacular poets who wrote love poetry. Perhaps, like Stattius did from me, Dante will be able to learn from these vernacular poets something about Christianity as well as about poetry.*

*The poem Bonagiunta mentioned is a different poem from the poem that Casella attempted to sing in Purgatory. That poem was a silly love song. The poem Bonagiunta mentioned marks an important shift not just in style, but in content. In this newer poem, Dante says that he realizes that his happiness lies not in love games but in praising Beatrice. This is a different, more spiritual kind of love.*

*Not all kinds of love are good. Remember Francesca da Rimini in the Inferno? Passionate and adulterous love got her an eternal residence in the Inferno. She blamed her problems on lots of things, including a book about an adulterous love affair between Queen Guinever and Sir Lancelot. Some kinds of love and some kinds of writing about love can be bad.*

*When Dante returns to the Land of the Living, he must be careful to write about love carefully and accurately. Perhaps Dante needs to Christianize the love he writes about. Stattius was able to read me and Christianize my Fourth Eclogue. Perhaps Dante needs to Christianize his love poetry when he writes new poetry after he returns to the Land of the Living.*

Dante replied to Bonagiunta, "I am a poet who, when Love inspires me, pays attention and writes down what I have learned."

Dante thought, *This is true. I have learned and advanced as a poet. The poem that Casella wanted to sing in Purgatory is much earlier and much worse than the poem that Bonagiunta just mentioned. The poem that Casella wanted to sing appeared in Convivio, an early work of mine. The poem that Bonagiunta mentioned just now appeared in Vita Nuova, a more recent work of mine. Maybe when I return to the Land of the Living, I can write an even better work. Maybe I can write about the love of God, both the love He has for us and the love that good people have for Him.*

Bonagiunta said, "Now I see what I was missing when I wrote poetry. My poetry never reached the high level that your poetry has achieved. My lack of paying close attention to Love held me back, and it held back poets like me. If I had continued learning, I could have written better about Love and I could have written better poetry."

The emaciated saved souls, except for Forese, left Dante, Virgil, and Stattius, seeming to take off like birds.

Forese was like a runner who, tired, slowed down and let the other runners pass him. Forese asked Dante, "When will we meet again?"

Dante replied, "When I return to the Land of the Living, I do not know how long I shall stay there. Even if I die soon thereafter, my heart will already have reached this island because Florence loses virtue each day and is ruining itself."

Forese said, "Here is one good thing that will happen soon. The worst citizen of Florence will end up in the Inferno. The justice that is in Paradise will make itself known. If you do not understand me now, you will later."

Virgil thought, *This is a prophecy about Forese's brother, Corso Donati. He is the leader of the Black Guelfs in Florence, and he will persuade Pope Boniface VIII to send Charles of Valois to Florence to kick out the White Guelfs. Corso will be responsible for Dante's upcoming exile. Corso was also cruel to Piccarda, his sister. She entered a nunnery to serve God, but he forced her to leave the nunnery and marry someone who would help Corso achieve his political goals. Corso will attempt to gain complete control over Florence, but the Black Guelfs will stop him and condemn him to death. Corso will attempt to escape, but the Black Guelfs will kill him during the escape attempt.*

*One's family does not determine where one ends up in the afterlife. Of the Donati family, Piccarda is in Paradise, Forese is climbing the Mountain of Purgatory, and Corso will end up in the Inferno.*

Forese continued, "Now it is time for me to leave you. We have spoken a long time, and time is precious to souls who are purging their sins."

Forese then quickly left, running after the other emaciated saved souls.

Dante walked with Virgil and Statius. Before them soon appeared another tree that had fruit. The emaciated saved souls were under the tree, arms reaching high, asking for fruit, but being denied. Eventually, the souls gave up and continued their journey on the ledge.

The three poets came close to the tree, and a voice came from among its leaves, saying, "Don't stop walking. Don't come close. At the top of the mountain is a tree, and the tree you see here is an offshoot of that higher tree."

Dante, Virgil, and Statius stayed close to the cliff and passed the tree.

As they passed the tree, the voice called out examples of gluttony: "At the wedding of Pirithous and Hippodamia, the Centaurs got drunk and tried to rape the bride and other women at the wedding. Theseus and the Lapithae defended the women and killed many Centaurs.

"Gideon had many soldiers. When they arrived at a river, they were very thirsty. Gideon, following the advice of God, watched his soldiers. Some put their faces in the water and drank greedily. This was a mistake because they were not on the lookout for danger. Other, more cautious, soldiers cupped the water in their hands and brought the water up to their faces, thus remaining vigilant. Gideon led these vigilant soldiers to victory."

The three poets continued walking, and suddenly heard a voice: "You three who are alone, what are you thinking?"

The voice came from a fiery-red angel who had noticed that three figures were walking together in a place where saved souls gathered in much larger groups.

The angel said to them, "If you are looking for the way up, here it is. This is the path used by those who seek peace."

The brilliance of the angel blinded Dante. By using the sense of sound, he followed Virgil and Statius.

The angel touched Dante's forehead and erased another of the P's, leaving just one remaining. Dante smelled something sweet, and he heard these words that were spoken by the angel: "Blessed are they who hunger after righteousness instead of after excessive amounts of food."

## Chapter 25: Seventh Ledge — Lust (Body-Soul Relationship) (Purgatory)

The time was around 2 p.m., and the three poets started climbing the stairs to the next ledge: the ninth of nine ledges. They walked in single file because of the narrowness of the stairs, and they did not waste time.

Dante wanted to speak. He wanted to ask a question that had been occupying his mind for a long time: ever since he had seen the emaciated saved souls of ledge six. He began to speak, changed his mind, and was silent.

Virgil, however, as always, knew his thoughts, and encouraged Dante to speak.

Dante asked, “Why are the saved souls on ledge six so emaciated? These souls are purging the sin of gluttony, but why are they so emaciated? After all, souls do not need food and drink.”

Virgil said, “Think of two analogies, and they will help you to understand the answer to your questions.

“First think of the myth of Meleager. When he was born, his mother learned from the Fates that Meleager would live only as long as a piece of wood that was then burning in the fireplace would remain unburned. His mother, Althaea, grabbed the piece of wood, put the fire out, and put the piece of wood in a safe place. Meleager grew up and became a warrior and a hero. When the goddess Diana sent a boar to ravage Calydon, Meleager led a band of heroes to hunt the dangerous boar. Eventually, he was able to kill it. He presented the hide to Atalanta, with whom he was in love, but his uncles — his mother’s brothers — stole the hide from her. Outraged, Meleager killed his uncles. When his mother learned of her brothers’ deaths, she put the half-burned piece of wood in a fire, and Meleager died as the piece of wood burned. In this myth, two things — Meleager and a piece of wood — are very different but are closely related, and when something happens to the first of the pair, it affects the second of the pair.

“In addition, think of a mirror. It reflects every movement of the person in front of it. The mirror and the person are very different, but one thing imitates perfectly every movement of the other thing.

“But Statius can answer your question in more detail.”

Statius said to Virgil, “As you request, I will explain to him things he does not know. I have too much respect for you to deny your request.”

Then Statius said to Dante, “As you know, the year is 1300. Science has barely made a beginning, and some of what you ‘know’ is incorrect. As I am in the afterlife, I can see ahead into at least part of the future, and I know that science will make great increases in what Humankind knows. Science will be one of the greatest accomplishments of Humankind.

“Let me explain some things to you, using a little science but also using religion. Each can reveal truth. I will explain to you how a baby acquires a soul, and I will explain to you the aerial body: the body you see when you look at me or Virgil or any soul.

“Conception may occur after a human male deposits semen into the womb of a human woman who is ready to have a baby. Assume that it does occur. The first part of the soul becomes present. We can call this the vegetative part: it takes nourishment and it grows. The fetus grows, and it begins to move. The second part of the soul becomes present. We can call this the sensitive part: it uses its senses such as the sense of touch and it moves. At the time of quickening, when the fetus can be felt moving in the womb, God breathes the third part of the soul into the fetus. We can call this the intellective part: it can contemplate itself and it can



think. With this third part present, the soul is complete. The Spanish philosopher Averroës erred by denying the third part of the soul, which gives it immortality.

“When the body dies, the soul is freed, and it goes either to the Inferno or to the Mountain of Purgatory. The soul retains memory, intelligence, and will, but it lacks its vegetative and sensitive parts until it acquires its aerial body, which is formed from the air around it. This aerial body is visible, and it is often called a ‘shade.’ This aerial body can move and it has all five senses. The aerial body can speak, and it can laugh, and it can cry, and it can sigh. The aerial body also reflects the feelings of the soul: it changes with those feelings. Thus, if the soul is hungry, the aerial body can take on the appearance of emaciation. This should answer your question. My words also explain how you are able to see the souls you have seen in the Inferno and on the Mountain of Purgatory.

“Let me summarize a few main points of Christian doctrine:

“First, God directly creates the human soul.

“Second, each body is given a soul.

“Third, body and soul, joined, become one unified person.

“Fourth, even after the death of the body, the soul continues to exist.”

The three poets continued walking and reached the next ledge. Then they saw a fire. Only a narrow space along the edge of the ledge was without fire. The three poets had to walk in that space in single file.

Dante was terrified by the narrowness of the path left to walk on. On one side was the fire; on the other side was air and no solid ground to walk on.

Virgil told Dante, “Be sure to walk on the narrow path. This is a place where it is easy to make a misstep.”

Then the three poets heard a song — “*Summae Deus Clementiae*” or “God of Supreme Clemency” — that asked God to banish lustful thoughts and to cleanse the sinner with healing fire:

“Great God of boundless mercy hear;

“You Ruler of this earthly sphere;

“In substance one, in Persons three,

“Dread Trinity in Unity!

“Do You in love accept our lays

“Of mingled penitence and praise;

“And set our hearts from error free,

“More fully to rejoice in You.

“Our reins and hearts in pity heal,

“And with Your chastening fire anneal;

“Gird You our loins, each passion quell,

“And every harmful lust expel.

“Now as our anthems, upward borne,

“Awake the silence of the morn,

“Enrich us with Your gifts of grace,

“From Heaven, Your blissful dwelling place!

“Hear You our prayer, Almighty King;

“Hear You our praises, while we sing,

“Adoring with the Heavenly host

“The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”

The song was coming from the fire. Dante looked and saw souls walking in the fire. He made sure that he stayed on the narrow path.

When the souls had sung the entire hymn, they shouted, "*Virum non cognosco.*"

Dante thought, *This is an example of the virtue of Chastity. As always on the Mountain of Purgatory, the first example of a virtue comes from the life of Mary. When the angel told Mary that she would give birth to the Savior, she replied, "Virum non cognosco" or in English "I know not man." In other words, she was a virgin. Of course, she did as God willed and although she was a virgin, she gave birth.*

The souls in the fire sang the hymn again, and then they called, "Diana banished Helice."

Dante thought, *Diana is the Roman name of the Greek goddess Artemis, who was one of the three virgin Greek goddesses. The other virgin goddesses are Minerva and Vesta. Diana was a militant virgin. When Jupiter seduced one of her attendants, the nymph Helice, Diana dismissed her. Helice gave birth to Arcas. Juno was Jupiter's jealous wife. She turned Helice into a she-bear, and Jupiter placed her into a constellation: Ursa Major. "Ursa Major" means "Big Bear" or "Great Bear."*

Again, the souls sang the hymn, and then they praised virtuous husbands and wives.

Dante thought, *These couples refrained from having coercive sex. In addition, they refrained from having affairs. These couples are not virgins. Certainly, married couples are allowed to have sex with each other. It is a heresy to believe that proper sex is sinful. Used properly, sex is far from sinful and is one of the great pleasures of life. After all, God invented sex.*

## Chapter 26: Seventh Ledge — Lust (Guido Guinizelli and Arnaut Daniel) (Purgatory)

The three poets continued walking, and Dante cast a shadow that touched the flame and changed its color, making it a deeper red.

The souls inside the flame noticed this and marveled, “His body seems to be made of flesh and blood!”

Some souls came close to Dante, but they were careful to stay within the fire and continue the purgation of their sin.

A soul said to Dante, “You who bring up the rear out of respect for the two souls ahead of you, please tell us how you are able to cast a shadow as if you had avoided death. All of us within the fire would like to know.”

Dante was about to answer, but he saw another group of souls approaching this group of souls — the two groups were walking in opposite directions on the ledge. One group walked the ledge clockwise; the other group walked the ledge counterclockwise.

The two groups of souls exchanged a brief, chaste kiss that reminded Dante that St. Paul wrote in Romans 16:16, “Salute one another with a holy kiss.”

The two groups of souls did not linger; they kissed and kept moving, intent on purging their sin.

Both groups shouted. The group that had just arrived shouted, “Sodom, Gomorrah.”

Dante thought, *I can guess that this group of souls consists of people who misused homosexual sex in some way. Sodom and Gomorrah were cities that contained homosexuals, and in these cities homosexual rape — a clear misuse of sex — occurred. In Genesis 19:1-11, we read that two angels, who resembled human men, visited Lot in Sodom. That night, men of Sodom came to Lot’s house and ordered him to give them the two men who were visiting him so that they could “know” the two men. “Know” is used here in the Biblical sense: to have sex with. In addition, the men of Sodom didn’t care about getting consent before having sexual intercourse. In other words, when the Sodomites say, “Bring them out to us so that we may know them,” they are really saying, “Bring them out to us so that we may homosexually rape them.” Of course, the angels are not raped. When the men of Sodom attempt to rape the angels, the angels blind them. This story concerns homosexual rape.*

*Other non-Biblical stories about Sodom and Gomorrah exist. The inhabitants of both Sodom and Gomorrah were suspicious of strangers. Anyone who was different from them in any way they treated badly. Strangers in Sodom and Gomorrah were placed on a bed. If they were too long to fit in the bed, their legs were chopped off so they would fit. If they weren’t long enough to fit in the bed, they were placed on a rack and stretched until they fit the bed. And so the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah forced anyone who was different from them to conform.*

*In addition, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah were said to not allow beggars into the city. But when they did allow a beggar into the city, they would each give the beggar a coin. The beggar would be happy to get the coins because he thought that he could buy food with it. However, each coin had the name of an inhabitant of the city written on it. The sellers of food would look at the coins, see the names, and would not sell the beggar food. Also, the beggar was not allowed to leave the city. When the beggar starved to death, the inhabitants of the city would stop by the corpse and take back their coins.*

*The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah did not love their neighbor and did not treat other people the way that the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah wanted to be treated.*

The other group of souls shouted, “Pasiphaë and the bull.”

Dante thought, *I can guess that this group of souls consists of heterosexuals. Pasiphaë was guilty of misusing sex. In particular, she was guilty of bestiality: having sex with an animal. She was a Queen of Crete who fell in love with a bull, so she commissioned Daedalus to create an artificial cow for her to creep into. The bull made love to the artificial cow (and to Pasiphaë), and Pasiphaë conceived and gave birth to the Minotaur, a mythical half-human, half-bull creature that feasted on human flesh. This story relates to an abuse of heterosexual sex, although it concerns a form of sodomy, which includes sex between human beings and animals. The heterosexual sinners acted like animals, giving in to lust instead of using human reason to control lust, and the Pasiphaë myth is an extreme form of acting like an animal.*

After kissing, the two groups separated and continued walking, crying tears of mourning because of the sins that they had committed.

Dante then answered the question that the souls had asked him, saying, “You souls are destined for Paradise. Please know that my body and soul have not been separated. My body is here, walking beside you. My body has flesh, blood, and bones. I am climbing the Mountain of Purgatory because in my life I have been blind. A lady who resides in Paradise has won for me a great gift. In order that my eyes be opened, I am now allowed to walk while still alive through your world.

“Please, tell me who you are. Who is in this group? And who is in the group of saved souls who walk in the opposite direction? I will make known in the Land of the Living your answers to my questions.”

The souls were surprised at who Dante — still a living man — was, but the soul who had earlier spoken to Dante said, “From the experience you are having now, you can die a better death than you would have suffered otherwise.

“The shades who move in the opposite direction to ours were guilty of the same sin that got Caesar called ‘Queen’ as he rode in triumph.”

Dante thought, *When he was a young man, Julius Caesar was an ambassador to the court of King Nicomedes IV of Bithynia. Caesar supposedly had a homosexual relationship with the King, something that led to his political enemies calling him the Queen of Bithynia. As I thought, the other group of souls consists of homosexuals.*

The soul continued, “Therefore, that group of souls shouts ‘Sodom’ as they walk around the ledge.

“The sin of my group of souls is the misuse of heterosexual sex. We did not act like human beings and use our reason so we could do the right thing; instead, we gave in to our lust and acted like animals. That is why we shout ‘Pasiphaë’ as we walk around the ledge.”

“Now you know our guilt. If you want to know our names, too many souls are here for me to name, and anyway, I don’t know everyone’s name.

“My name is Guido Guinizelli. I died in 1276, and I climbed so high up the mountain in only 24 years because I repented my sins early in life.”

Dante thought, *I know the poetry of Guido Guinizelli. He was a forerunner of those of us who write in the sweet new style. He is a poet of genius.*

Dante told him that he would be happy to help him in any way possible, and the poet said, “I am happy to hear that, but please tell why you are willing to help me in any way possible?”

Dante replied, “I have read, studied, and learned your poetry, which is and will be valuable as long as poetry is known.”

Guinizelli pointed to a soul and said, “This man is a poet who wrote in his native language better than I wrote in mine. Some people do not value him enough. They think that other poets are better, but they base their opinion on reputations, not on the actual poetry itself.

“But please say a *Paternoster* for me when you climb to Paradise — at least the part that applies to me.”

Dante thought, *The Paternoster is the Lord’s Prayer: “Our Father who is in Heaven, holy be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.” The part that does not apply to Guinizelli or any other of the saved souls on the Mountain of Purgatory is “lead us not into temptation.”*

Guinizelli then left to make room for another soul. He vanished into the fire like a fish vanishing into deeper water.

Dante moved to the man whom Guinizelli had pointed out and said that he was pleased to meet him.

The man replied in Provençal, his native language. The man said, “I am Arnaut Daniel. I cry as I mourn having committed sins, but I feel joy as I think about the Paradise that is to come to me. Please remember my suffering here.”

Then he vanished into the flames.

Dante thought, *The sin of lust is a burning sin — one can burn with lust — and therefore the sin of lust is purged with fire. The souls who need to be purged of lust do so by staying in a fire until the sin is purged.*

## Chapter 27: Seventh Ledge — Lust (Third Prophetic Dream) (Purgatory)

The time was 6 p.m., and soon the Sun would set.

Dante saw an angel on the other side of the fire. He was singing, “Blessed are the Pure of Heart.”

Then the angel said, “Souls, to climb higher on the mountain, you must pass through the fire. Whatever sins are left in you will be purged. Enter the fire, and remember, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’”

Statius thought, *Going through fire is the only way to reach the Earthly Paradise.*

Dante was afraid when he learned that he must pass through the fire. He had seen burned bodies at public executions, and he remembered what those bodies looked like.

Virgil thought, *Dante, when you are exiled from Florence, the penalty for coming back to Florence will be death by fire.*

Both Virgil and Statius turned to Dante, and Virgil said, “Remember what we have already been through! We have safely gone through the Inferno! Remember when we rode the back of Geryon! If I kept you safe then, won’t I be able to keep you safe now, when we are so much closer to God! Believe me: If you were to stay one thousand years in this fire, it would not singe even a hair on your head. Test the fire. Put the hem of your robe into the fire — the fire will not burn your robe. You will feel pain in the fire, but you will not die. It’s time to take this step forward. Don’t be afraid. Come with me.”

But Dante stood still. He was ashamed, but he stood still.

Virgil was annoyed, but he knew the right way to motivate Dante. He said, “This is the path you must take if you are to see Beatrice.”

Just like a dying lover hearing the name of his beloved, Dante was all attention. He was now ready to walk through the fire. He turned toward Virgil, who said, “Let’s go.”

Virgil asked Statius to bring up the rear, and then Virgil walked into the fire. Dante followed, and although the fire did not burn flesh or clothing, it was so hot that Dante would have eagerly jumped into boiling glass in order to cool down.

Virgil continued to motivate Dante to walk across the fire, saying, “I think I can already see the eyes of Beatrice.”

The three poets walked through the fire, and they heard an angel singing, “Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” These are the words spoken to those who are entering Paradise.

The angel was so bright that Dante had to turn his eyes away from him. The last of the seven P’s vanished from Dante’s forehead.

The angel then said to the three poets, “The Sun is setting, but do not waste time. Climb as many steps as you are able before the Sun completely sets.”

The three poets had climbed only a few steps before the Sun set and Dante’s shadow vanished. The stars looked bigger to the three poets than they do to people in the Land of the Living.

The rule of the mountain still held: At night no one can climb higher.

Each poet slept on a stair of his choosing, and Dante was like a goat or lamb protected by two goatherds or shepherds against carnivorous beasts.

Dante dreamed during the hour before dawn; such dreams sometimes bring knowledge of the future.

Dante dreamed that he saw a young, lovely girl picking flowers in a meadow. The girl said, “My name is Leah. I spend my time picking flowers and weaving garlands. I am an artist, and I admire my creations when I look in the mirror. My sister’s name is Rachel, and she sits and looks at her eyes in the mirror and never looks away from the mirror. Rachel looks, and I do, and both of us are happy.”

Dante thought later, *In the dream, Leah is a doer; she is active. Leah walks through a meadow, gathering flowers to make a garland for herself. Rachel, on the other hand, looks in a mirror all day, contemplating her eyes. Rachel is contemplative. Both are good ways of living life. Although Leah is mostly active, she also contemplates herself in the mirror, but much less often than Rachel. One can be mostly active, or one can be contemplative. In Genesis, Leah and Rachel were the wives of Jacob. If this dream gives knowledge of the future, it means that I will meet two more guides. One, of course, will be Beatrice.*

*This is the third dream I have had on the mountain. In the first dream, I dreamed that an eagle carried me higher up the mountain. While I was asleep, Saint Lucia did exactly that. In the second dream, I dreamed about being rescued from a Siren by a Heavenly lady. In this, the third dream, I dreamed about Rachel and Leah.*

The Sun rose, and Dante woke up. Both Virgil and Statius were already awake.

Virgil said to Dante, “The eternal happiness that all men search for will — today — be yours.” The words also applied to Statius. On this day, the two poets would reach the Earthly Paradise and make the final preparations for Paradise.

The three poets climbed higher, and Dante felt light — so light that he felt as if he were growing wings.

They reached the top of the stairs, and Virgil said to Dante, “You have journeyed through the eternal fire of the Inferno and the temporary — because it will disappear on the Day of Judgment — fire of Purgatory. We have traveled through the places of which I have knowledge. Here my knowledge ends. I have led you here, and I have done that with skill and intelligence. From now on, your Free Will is perfected. You are the master of your desires; they are no longer the master of you. You can no longer desire the wrong things, but only the right things, so let pleasure be your guide. Do what you want to do because that will be the right thing to do. The narrow path to follow lies below; here you are free to wander anywhere. Soon you will see the eyes of Beatrice. You no longer need me to be your guide. Your Will is now Free and perfect, and you are now the King of yourself and you are now the Bishop of yourself. I crown and miter you lord of yourself!”

Dante thought, *I still need a Christian guide, and that guide will be Beatrice. Virgil has taken me as far as he can. Virgil need say no more words to me because his job is done except for delivering me to Beatrice.*

*Now that I have passed through Purgatory Proper, my Will is Free. I am no longer shackled by sin. I control my desires; they do not control me. My Free Will is perfect and is unrestrained.*

Virgil told me, “I crown and miter you lord of yourself!”

*A crown is what a King wears. A miter is what a Bishop wears; it is a headdress. Because I have perfected my Free Will, have been restored to innocence, and am purged of sin, I no longer need a King or a Bishop to guide me. I no longer need the guidance and restraint of Church or State.*

*I am now my own King and my own Bishop.*

*However, I will return to the Land of the Living, and I will return after my death to the Mountain of Purgatory. Like all living people, I will sin again, and I will need to purge my sins again.*

## Chapter 28: Forest of Eden (Matelda) (Purgatory)

Dante was eager to explore the top of the mountain, and without delay he set forth. On the top of the mountain is a forest. The green leaves made the light soft, without harshness. The scents were soothing, as was the light, steady breeze he felt on his forehead. The breeze always blew with the same intensity, and it always blew in the same direction. Italy is a Mediterranean country that can be hot, but this forest is cool. The sound of birds filled the air as they welcomed the morning. The two poets followed Dante as he moved deeper into the forest.

Dante moved slowly, but soon he was deep in the forest — so deep that he could not see where he had entered it.

Suddenly a stream appeared that blocked his way. The water of the stream was clear — so clear that compared to it the clearest waters in the Land of the Living appear to be clouded. This stream is constantly in shade, and the rays of the Sun and the light that the Moon reflects will never directly touch it.

Dante stopped, and he looked at the land on the other side of the stream. As suddenly as an unexpected miracle, a lady appeared. She was singing, and she was gathering flowers, and she reminded Dante of Leah, one of the two women in his prophetic dream. She was the first of the two female guides whom he would meet.

Dante said to her, “Lady, you are lovely, and your appearance glows with love. Please come nearer so that I can hear and understand the words of your song. You remind me of Proserpine, aka Persephone. She was gathering flowers, when Hades, god of the Underworld, entranced by her beauty, made her his bride and took her with him away from her mother, Ceres, the goddess of agriculture, who mourned. Because Ceres mourned, nothing grew, and Jupiter sent the messenger god Mercury to bring Proserpine back to the Land of the Living. But because she had eaten one-fourth of a pomegranate, she was forced to spend one-fourth of the year with Hades in the underworld, and so Humankind now endures Winter three months of the year, having lost the eternal Spring that Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden of Eden.”

Moving like a dancer among the red and yellow flowers, the lady turned toward Dante, but she kept her eyes modestly lowered. She walked to the stream that separated Dante from her, and then she raised her eyes and looked at him.

And now Dante was reminded of Venus. The lady’s eyes were radiant, and even Venus’ eyes could not be so radiant — not even when an arrow of Cupid, her son, lightly scratched her breast when she bent to kiss him, and the arrow made her fall in love with Adonis.

The lady stood on the other side of the stream, and in her hands she arranged the flowers of many colors — flowers that had not grown from seeds.

And Dante hated the stream because it separated him from her. He hated it the way that Leander hated the Hellespont — the water between Europe and Asia Minor — because the water separated him and his beloved, the woman named Hero.

The stream was narrow. Only three feet separated Dante and the lady, but the top of the mountain was a special place, and Dante wanted to cross the stream only when he knew that crossing it was permitted. If only the stream would part like the Red Sea parted for Moses and the Israelites when they fled slavery in Egypt! But it continued flowing.

The lady said, “You three have never been here before. You may be amazed to see me and to hear me singing here in this place that was the cradle of Humankind. To understand why I was singing, think of Psalm 91 — “*Delectasi Me*” or “You Did Delight Me”:



“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Your name, O most High:

“To show forth Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night,

“Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound.

“For You, Lord, have made me glad through Your work: I will triumph in the works of Your hands.

“O Lord, how great are Your works! and Your thoughts are very deep.’

“I am rejoicing in the beauty of the Earthly Paradise: this Forest of Eden that is also known as the Garden of Eden. And I am filled with love for its and my Creator.

“You who spoke to me just now, if you have any questions, please ask.”

Dante said, “I have heard that no rain falls here, so what is the source of the stream? And what is the source of this breeze?”

Dante thought, *Statius told me earlier that no rain falls here and that the breezes of the Earth’s atmosphere have no effect here.*

The lady said, “I will explain the nature of this place. This is where God created Adam, who was supposed to do good and to dwell in this Earthly Paradise, but Adam sinned and he was banished from the garden to work instead of enjoy. You know that God created Adam first and then Eve. God had created the Earthly Paradise for them, and He allowed them to eat all the fruit of the Earthly Paradise except for the fruit of one tree: the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. A serpent came to Eve and tempted her to eat the forbidden fruit. She did eat, and then she persuaded Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. Because of this sin, they were banished from the Earthly Paradise, as were all their descendants. But after death, saved souls can climb to the top of the Mountain of Purgatory and reach once more the Earthly Paradise.

“This is a place where the laws of nature sometimes are not in effect. No storms occur here. The Earthly Paradise is so high that storms cannot reach here. Earthly winds also cannot reach here. The movement of the heavens above us causes the breeze that constantly blows.

“Plants grow here without the need of seeds. All plants grow here in this perfect place. But seeds from plants here travel to the rest of the world. In the Land of the Living, the plants that grow here in profusion will grow only when the soil and weather conditions are right. Here in the Earthly Paradise you can find every species. Here are species that bear fruit of a kind that no man has ever plucked. The Earthly Paradise is a fruitful place.

“The water here does not come from a natural source. The source of the water here is a fountain that is created by the will of God, who causes it to flow without ceasing. The fountain of water divides into two streams. The stream before you has the power to erase the memory of sin’s sting when its water is drunk. You will remember many of your sins, but you will know that they have been forgiven, and you will rejoice and be happy that they have been forgiven. Gone will be the pain of the knowledge that you have sinned. This stream is called Lethe, which means ‘oblivion.’

“The other stream found here is called Eunoë, which means ‘well minded’ or ‘good memory,’ and it also has a special power, but to enjoy the special power of the Eunoë, you must drink first from the Lethe. Drinking from the water of the Eunoë will restore the knowledge of every good deed that you have ever done.

“Let me tell you one more thing. Poets of long ago sang of a Golden Age. They fell asleep on Parnassus, the mountain of the Muses, and dreamed of this place. The Golden Age they dreamed and sang of was the time when Humankind lived here. Here, Humankind was without sin and without guilt, and here were clear water and every fruit. The nectar that ancient poets sang of was and is found here.”

Dante looked back at Virgil and Statius, two of the ancient poets who sang of the Golden Age, to see what they thought of the lady's words about them. The two poets were smiling. Then he looked again at the lovely lady.

## Chapter 29: Forest of Eden — Pageant of Revelation (Purgatory)

The lady then sang, “Blessed are they whose sins are forgiven.”

Dante thought, *The sins of anyone who is allowed to drink from the stream named Lethe are forgiven.*

The lady began to walk along the stream. Dante followed her, and the two poets followed him. She walked like a beautiful woman who was at home in Nature. She walked upstream with small steps, and Dante walked slowly with short steps so that he did not outpace her.

The stream curved, and Dante faced East. The lady stopped and said to Dante, “Look and listen.”

The sky brightened and at first Dante thought that lightning had flashed, but the brightness did not diminish but instead increased. Dante also heard a melody.

The beauty of what he was experiencing made him angry at Eve, whose sin banished Humankind from the Earthly Paradise until such time as a saved soul could climb the Mountain of Purgatory. If not for Eve, Dante could have enjoyed the Earthly Paradise during all of his previous and future life.

Here was the beginning of the happiness of Paradise, and Dante longed for the greater happiness to come.

The light grew brighter among the green leaves, and the sound grew louder into a chant.

Dante prayed to the Muses — the Holy Virgins — for help in relating what he was seeing and hearing: *If I have labored long and hard to write good poetry, for a reward I want to write better poetry on a better subject. Let the waters of the sacred stream of you Muses pour upon me, and let Urania, the Muse of astronomy — and thus of Heavenly things — inspire me as I write.*

Dante saw what appeared to be seven golden trees, but he was mistaken because of the objects’ distance from him. When the objects came closer, he saw that they were seven golden candlesticks.

He also heard the word *Hosanna* — “Save, we pray!” — being sung.

Above the gold of the candlesticks was a brilliant light.

In amazement, Dante turned and looked at Virgil, who answered his glance with his own look of amazement.

Virgil thought, *I am not a Christian. I have no knowledge of what I am seeing.*

Dante turned back.

The religious procession moved slowly, and Dante looked at the seven golden candlesticks. The lady, impatient, said to him, “Why are you looking only at the seven golden candlesticks? Look also at what follows them!”

Dante then looked past the candlesticks, and he saw a spectacular pageant, and he realized that he was looking at a religious procession in which Heavenly figures dressed themselves in allegorical guises. Some of the Heavenly figures may have actually been themselves. Each guise, including the candlesticks, had a religious and specifically Christian meaning.

Dante thought, *The seven golden candlesticks are an image from the Book of Revelation. The seven candlesticks can be interpreted as representing the gifts of God’s spirit: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Might, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of (aka Reverence for) the Lord.*

Following the candlesticks were 24 figures dressed in white. The whiteness was reflected in the stream to Dante’s left, and Dante saw his left side reflected there. He moved as close to the stream as he could, and then he looked at the pageant.

The seven candlesticks advanced, and in the sky they left seven streams that were the seven colors of the rainbow. The pennants of color stretched further back than Dante could see. The width of each stream of color was fully 10 strides.

Next came 24 elders, marching two by two, and wearing crowns of lilies. The 24 elders sang to the Virgin Mary, “Blessed be You of all of the daughters of Adam. Blessed be your beauty forever.”

Dante thought, *The 24 elders represent the books of the Old Testament in the Vulgate Bible of Saint Jerome, counting the books of the 12 minor prophets as one book. Saint Jerome translated the Bible into Latin in what is known as the Vulgate Bible. The word “vulgate” is Latin, and it can be translated as “widespread.” Of course, the purpose of translating the Bible into Latin was the same as that of other translations: to make it more available to more people.*

*It is important that these figures who represent the books of the Old Testament are praising the Virgin Mary. This shows their prophetic power.*

*The 24 elders are dressed in white, a color that is symbolic of illuminating faith.*

*These are the 12 minor prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Michah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.*

Following these 24 elders came four beasts that were wearing forest-green crowns. Each beast had six wings, each of which was covered with eyes.

Dante thought, *These beasts represent the four authors of the gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Why are these four authors represented as beasts? The image comes from Revelation 4:6-8 and from Ezekiel 1:4-14. The crowns of green signify hope.*

The four beasts were spaced around a two-wheeled chariot that was drawn by a Griffin — which is part eagle and part lion — with wings raised high. The part of the Griffin that was an eagle was gold, and the part of the Griffin that was a lion was white with dark red marks.

Dante thought, *A Griffin is a figure from mythology; it has two natures because it is half-eagle and half-lion. The Griffin is a symbol of Jesus, Who also has two natures: Jesus is fully human, yet fully divine.*

The chariot was splendid — more splendid than the triumphal chariot ridden in by Scipio Africanus, who finally conquered the Carthaginian general Hannibal, who had crossed the Alps with his elephants in order to war against the Romans. It was also more splendid than the triumphal chariot ridden in by Caesar Augustus, the first Roman Emperor. It was even more splendid than the chariot of the Sun ridden in by Phaeton when he could not control the horses and nearly burned up the planet Earth — Jupiter destroyed him in order to save the Earth.

Dante thought, *The chariot drawn by the Griffin is a symbol that represents the Church.*

Beside the left wheel of the chariot were four ladies, all of whom were dressed in purple, and one of whom had three eyes. All four ladies were dancing.

Dante thought, *These ladies are symbolic of the four virtues from classical antiquity: Prudence, Temperance, Justice, and Fortitude. These are known as the cardinal virtues. The lady with three eyes symbolizes Prudence. Why? Prudence can see the past, the present, and the future.*

Circling in a dance by the right wheel of the chariot were three ladies. One lady was fiery red. One lady was emerald green. One lady was as white as newly fallen snow. Sometimes, the white lady led the dance, and sometimes the red lady led the dance.

Dante thought, *These women at the sides of the wheels of the chariot are symbolic of the three Christian virtues: Faith (White), Hope (Green), and Charity (Red). These are known as the theological virtues.*

Then came two aged men in the procession. One aged man was wearing the garments of a follower of Hippocrates, a healer of the ill. The other aged man bore a sharp sword that frightened Dante.

Dante thought, *Side by side, these two figures represent the healing physician Luke (beloved physician and author of the Acts of the Apostles) and Paul (author of the major epistles) with his frightening, sin-wounding sword.*

Behind the two aged men came four humble men.

Dante thought, *These figures represent the other epistle writers: Peter, James, John, and Jude.*

Then came one old man by himself. The old man appeared to be dreaming, and his face was inspired.

Dante thought, *This is John the Divine, the author of the Book of Revelation.*

All of these seven figures at the end of the procession were dressed in white and were wearing wreaths with red roses and other red flowers, giving the effect — from far away — of flames. When the chariot was opposite Dante, thunder boomed, and each part of the procession stopped at exactly the same time.

Dante thought, *God revealed himself in three stages during Biblical times: 1) The Hebrew Testament, aka Old Testament, 2) The four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), 3) The later books of the New Testament. In the pageant, I have seen figures representing all of these books.*

## Chapter 30: Forest of Eden — Exit of Virgil; Entrance of Beatrice (Purgatory)

When the seven candlesticks and the rest of the procession had stopped, the 24 elders who followed them all turned to the chariot, which was a symbol of the Church, and one of the 24 elders sang, “Come, soul wedded to Christ, from Lebanon.” The other elders then joined their voices to his, as he sang the words three times.

When the Day of Judgment arrives, all the dead, newly rejoined with their bodies, will sing, “Hallelujah.” With sound and feeling just like that, a hundred angels above the chariot sang, “Blessed are You Who is Coming.” They followed this by singing, “Give Lilies with Both Hands,” as they tossed flowers into the air.

Dante thought, *This is a major compliment to Virgil. The first words the angels sang are, in Latin, “Benedictus Qui Venis,” which is very close to Matthew 21:9: “Benedictus Qui Venit”: “Blessed is He Who is Coming.” The next words the angels sang are, in Latin, “Manibus, O Date Lilia Plenis,” which is a direct quotation from Book 6 of Virgil’s Aeneid. For the angels to sing both a variant of sacred scripture and in almost the same breath sing some words from Virgil’s masterpiece has to make Virgil happy.*

Sometimes, at the beginning of dawn, a rose color appears in the East, and the starry air is remarkably clear, and then the Sun appears in a mist that allows the eye to look at it without harm.

Like the appearance of such a Sun, a lady appeared as angels tossed flowers that covered the chariot. The lady wore a white veil, a green cloak, and a red gown. She also wore an olive crown. Dante recognized the lady: Beatrice.

Dante thought, *The purpose of the procession I just saw was to prepare for the entrance of Beatrice, who is wearing three colors that have religious significance. The three colors represent the theological virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity. In addition, the olive crown symbolizes wisdom.*

As soon as Dante saw Beatrice, his long-time love for her — love he had felt for her since he first saw her when she was eight years old and he was nine — returned to him. He had felt that love from the time he first saw her until she had died at the age of 24.

Dante the Pilgrim turned to his left to talk to Virgil just like a child who is frightened or who needs comforting runs to his or her mother. He wanted to say to Virgil, “Every drop of my blood is filled with love for Beatrice. I recognize signs of the ancient flame.”

Dante the Poet thought, *The second sentence of what I wanted to say to Virgil is a direct quote from Virgil’s Aeneid — “Agnosco veteris vestigia flammae.” Dido, the Queen of Carthage, says these words when she falls in love with Aeneas, the Trojan warrior who had survived the fall of Troy and was destined to become an important ancestor of the Roman people.*

But Virgil was not present. His job was done, and he had started the journey back to Limbo. Now that he had delivered Dante to Beatrice, he did not stay around, and he did not say goodbye.

Even though Dante was in the Earthly Paradise, aka the Garden of Eden, and even though delights surrounded him, still he cried. He had delivered the safekeeping of his body and soul to Virgil, and he had not had the opportunity to thank or even say goodbye to him. Virgil had washed the stains of Dante’s tears away at the bottom of the Mountain of Purgatory, but now Dante cried.

Beatrice told him, "Dante, do not cry. Or, rather, do not cry yet. You are crying because Virgil has left you. Soon, you will have a better reason to cry. Do not cry now."

Beatrice was standing on the chariot the way an admiral stands on a ship. An admiral calls the men to work, and Beatrice was calling on Dante to do the work of repenting his sins.

Dante turned and looked at Beatrice. She was wearing a veil, but Dante could still see the expression on her face. She was stern as she looked at him. The words she had to say to Dante were not intended to be pleasant to hear, although they were necessary for Dante's salvation.

Beatrice said to him, "Yes! Look at me! I am Beatrice. Finally, you have climbed the mountain! Have you learned yet that this is the way to eternal happiness?"

Dante was ashamed and looked down. He saw his reflection in the stream, and he looked away from his reflection.

Dante was like a guilty child being judged by his or her mother. He was miserable, and she was stern. Even a loving mother can be stern when sternness is needed.

When Beatrice had finished speaking, all of the angels sang the first eight lines of Psalm 31:

"In You, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in Your righteousness.

"Bow down Your ear to me; deliver me speedily: be You my strong rock, for a house of defence to save me.

"For You are my rock and my fortress; therefore for Your name's sake lead me, and guide me.

"Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for You are my strength.

"Into Your hand I commit my spirit: You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

"I have hated them who regard lying vanities: but I trust in the Lord.

"I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy: for You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities;

"And have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy: You have put my feet in a large room."

Figuratively, Dante the Pilgrim was standing in a large room.

Just like the snow of the Apennines, a mountain range in Italy, will melt when air from equatorial Africa makes its way over it, so Dante's heart was chilled when he heard Beatrice criticize him, but it melted when he heard the angels plead for him as they said to Beatrice, "Lady, why are you so hard on him?" The ice that had been within Dante melted and turned into tears.

The angels were compassionate, but Beatrice was not yet compassionate. She told the angels, "Your eyes see Paradise, yet no act on Earth is hidden from you. Even though I am now talking to you, the purpose of my words is to make this man who is now weeping realize just how guilty of sin he is.

"This man was gifted. Not only was he gifted through heredity, but also he was gifted through the workings of God. From an early age, he had great gifts. If he had used his gifts the way they ought to have been used, he would have seen enormous benefit.

"A rich soil when cultivated will bring forth much fruit, but a rich soil when uncultivated will bring forth many weeds. This man did not cultivate his gifts. He let bad seeds flourish.

"At one time, he loved me, and I loved the revelation of God, but when my physical body died, and I lost life but acquired Life, this man abandoned all thought of me and chased after others. He was unfaithful and did not do those things he ought to have done.

"I had left behind my body and had become all spirit, and yet he stopped loving me and he found no pleasure in thinking about me. He wandered from the path that leads to good and

followed the path that leads to evil. He pursued things that pretended to be good and that promised much more than they were capable of delivering.

“I did not abandon him. I knew that his soul was in danger. Through prayer, I won for him truthful dreams and visions so that he could be inspired to pursue the path that leads to good. He refused to be inspired. Eventually, he became so evil that the only way to get him back on the correct path was to show him the Damned in the Inferno.

“To make this happen, I, a saved soul, visited Hell, and in Limbo I pleaded, in tears, to Virgil to be his guide and to lead him here. This man here cannot be allowed to drink of Lethe yet. To allow him to do that would be a violation of the laws of God. First, he must cry tears of true repentance.”

The angels thought, *Beatrice knows what Dante must do. Christians believe that anyone can be saved — God offers salvation to all, not just to a few. However, the way that people can be saved can vary, although it will always involve confessing and repenting their sins. God reaches people in many ways. In Dante’s case, God reaches him through Beatrice. Beatrice is able to show Dante the way to Paradise. Beatrice is a harsh judge for Dante at this point. To be ready for his journey to and through Paradise, Dante must confess and repent his sins. Beatrice is stern as she talks about the bad things that Dante has done and about the good things that he has failed to do. Beatrice is taking her job as guide seriously, as she should. Beatrice wants Dante to end up in Paradise rather than in the Inferno. Beatrice is working hard to help Dante be saved.*



## Chapter 31: Forest of Eden — Lethe (Purgatory)

Beatrice spoke to Dante, “You there on the other side of the stream Lethe, speak. Isn’t what I have said true? You must confess that you have sinned.” Beatrice’s words had been like the edge of a sword before — they cut. But now her words were like the point of a sword — they pierced.

Dante stood before her. He felt paralyzed. He felt confused. He moved his lips, but no sound came forth.

Beatrice continued, “What are you thinking? Answer me. The bitterness of your sins has not yet ceased because you have not yet drunk from this stream. Do you confess that you have sinned?”

*I still have the bitter memories of the sins I have done and of the good things that I have not done. Many people — those who are not pathological — remember with bitterness things that they have done in the past but should not have done. They also remember things that they have not done but should have done. Sometimes, these bitter memories keep us awake at night.*

Finally, Dante was able to force a word from between his lips. He confessed, miserably and with full knowledge of his guilt, “Yes.”

An arrow launched by a crossbow that breaks has little force, and so Dante, racked by guilt and with tears and sighs, launched his “Yes” with so little force that only a lip reader could know what he had said.

Beatrice said to him, “You loved me, and I tried to lead you to the Eternal Good, but you did not follow. What obstacles lay in your way that interfered with your pursuit of the Eternal Good? What did you find so desirable that you pursued them instead of the Eternal Good?”

Dante sighed, and weeping, he confessed, “After I lost sight of you, I pursued things that offer false joys, things that were offered to me by the world, things that led away from the Eternal Good.”

Beatrice said, “Your confession is heard. But if you had not spoken, or if you had denied your sins, your sins would still be known by God, the Judge who knows everything.”

The angels thought, *Dante has learned from the trip that he has taken through the Afterlife: Dante has learned to take responsibility for his sins. This is something that the sinners in the Inferno did not do. Dante has also learned to repent his sins. This is also something that the sinners in the Inferno did not do. Many people become defensive when they are charged with something serious. Instead of admitting their guilt, they blame someone or something else: Love made them do it, or a book made them do it, or the Devil made them do it. Instead of blaming someone or something else, Dante simply admits that he is guilty — he made himself do it.*

Beatrice continued, “But when a sinner confesses his sins, the punishment in this court is lessened.

“But you still need to feel the shame of the sins you committed. That way, when you return to the Land of the Living, and the Siren sings for you, you will be strong enough to resist the Siren’s song.

“Listen to me. Learn how my flesh, which is buried, was intended to teach you to take a better path than the one you freely chose to take.

“You never saw anything more beautiful — not in nature, not in art — than the living flesh that made up my body. That flesh is now dead and turned to dust.

“Once you knew that my living flesh could die and turn to dust, how could you pursue anything else that had only temporary value and temporary beauty? You should have learned from my death to turn your attention to the things that last. Instead of physical beauty, you should have pursued spiritual beauty.”

The angels thought, *What are the eternal things — what are the good and beautiful things that last? What are some possible answers? They are such things as virtuous love, truth, and beauty. These things appear in the virtuous love we experience on Earth, and these things are part of great works of art. These things are important in Paradise.*

Beatrice continued, “When I died, you should have rushed to pursue spiritual beauty. You had suffered one blow. Why love another pretty woman or other temporary beauty and set yourself up for another blow?”

“A fledgling waits and suffers a blow from a second arrow, but the mature bird sets itself in flight and does not let itself be used by a second arrow as a target.”

Dante stood before Beatrice like a child silently standing before a mother who has scolded the child. The child knows that he or she is guilty, and the child feels sorry. So did Dante.

Beatrice said to Dante, “If simply hearing my words causes you grief, raise your beard and look at me and see what will cause you greater grief.”

And when Dante, an adult man who had pursued glittery trivialities the way that a child would, raised his eyes and looked at Beatrice, he saw that she was facing the Griffin — the being that has two natures.

Beatrice was still wearing a veil, and she was still on the shore across the stream, and she looked more beautiful than she ever had while she was still alive on Earth, when she was the most beautiful woman in the world.

Dante felt guilty. After Beatrice had died, he had loved some things, but now he hated them. His guilt overwhelmed him, and he fainted.

When he regained consciousness, the lady whom he had first seen in the Earthly Paradise was over him and telling him, “Hold on tight to me.”

Dante was in the stream, the lady was walking on the water, and she pulled him across the stream with ease.

As he was being drawn across the stream, he heard the sweet singing of some words from Psalm 51: “Cleanse me of sin.”

The lady dipped Dante into the stream, and he drank, and then she drew him out of the stream, cleansed of his sins.

The four ladies who are symbolic of four virtues from classical antiquity — Prudence, Temperance, Justice, and Fortitude — came dancing to Dante and raised and joined their hands over him.

They said to him, “When you first arrived on the Mountain of Purgatory, you saw us as four stars. Now we are here before you and appearing to you as ladies. Even from the time before Beatrice was born, we were meant to be her handmaids. Now we will lead you to her eyes. The other three ladies, who were at the sides of the wheels of the chariot and who are symbolic of three Christian virtues — Faith, Hope, and Charity — see more deeply than we do and will help you to see more deeply than we can.”

The four ladies led Dante to Beatrice and the Griffin, and Beatrice looked at the Griffin.

The four ladies told Dante, “Look deeply into Beatrice’s eyes. These are the eyes that made you love Beatrice.”

Dante looked at Beatrice’s eyes. Reflected in her eyes was the Griffin, who has two natures that are symbolic of Jesus, who has a divine nature and a human nature, and who has both natures at the same time.

Dante looked, and he saw first one nature and then the other, but he was incapable of seeing both natures at the same time, although they were there and Beatrice saw them at the same time.

Dante was delighted and amazed by what he saw, and he wanted to continue to be delighted and amazed.

The three ladies who are symbolic of the theological virtues came to Dante and said to Beatrice, "Turn and look at Dante. He has come very far to look at you. Please remove the veil that covers your mouth. Smile, and allow him to see more of your beauty."

Beatrice removed her veil, and she smiled, and Dante saw beauty that he was unable to describe even with his poetic gifts that are destined to last through millennia.

Beatrice had the beauty of Revelation, and she had the beauty of Salvation.

## Chapter 32: Forest of Eden — Pageant of Church History (Purgatory)

Dante stared at Beatrice. She had died in 1290, and he had 10 years of longing to look at her to satisfy. Sight was the only sense he used, and he used it so intently that he was oblivious of his other senses.

He stared at her smile, and he was as attracted to Beatrice as he had been when she was still alive.

But then he heard the three ladies complain, “He should not look so intently.” Dante was not yet ready to look intently at Beatrice and all she represented about Paradise.

Dante was blinded like someone who had stared at the Sun. His blindness lasted only briefly.

He regained his sight and was able to look at things that seemed dim compared to what he had been staring at, and he saw that the spectacular procession had moved. The golden candlesticks, 24 elders, and all the rest had started making a right-turn-about. The procession had come from the East, but having moved it was now facing the Sun. The seven candlesticks were still in front.

Like soldiers, those in front had moved and turned first, and now the seven ladies took their places by the wheels of the chariot, and the Griffin began to pull it. The Griffin easily pulled the chariot; not a single feather of the Griffin was ruffled.

Statius, Dante, and the lady of the Earthly Paradise moved behind the chariot as it turned.

They walked in the Earthly Paradise, which was empty of living Humankind except for Dante because of the sin of Eve, who had listened to the snake, sinned, and given cause for living humans to be banished.

The procession continued moving, and Beatrice got out of the chariot. The procession murmured, “Adam,” the name of he who had been the partner of Eve in sin, and the procession surrounded a tree with branches but without leaves or fruit.

The tree was very tall, and the taller it was, the more its branches spread. This tree resembled the tree on the ledge of the gluttonous, and so Dante knew that this was the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, as described in Genesis. This is why the procession had murmured Adam’s name.

The members of the procession sang, “Blessed are you, Griffin, for you did not eat of the bark of this tree. The bark tastes sweet, but it causes illness.”

The Griffin replied, “And so I preserved the seed of righteousness.”

Beatrice thought, *The bark of this tree represents the things that religious people ought to resist, especially including material wealth. Jesus lived in holy poverty, and so he was able to concentrate on spiritual wealth rather than on material wealth.*

The Griffin had pulled the chariot with pieces of wood that made a pole with a crossbar that formed a cross. Now the Griffin tied the pole to the tree, which grew purple blooms.

Beatrice thought, *This tree represents the Roman Empire, as shown by the height of the tree. Tall trees are used in Scripture as symbols of the great empires of Assyria and Babylon. This tree is higher than the highest trees of India and so the Roman Empire is superior to the empires of India. When Empire and Church are properly connected and related to each other, things can bloom. The tree had been barren, but now that it is connected again with the Cross, all is well. The true Cross was made of wood taken from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and so those pieces of wood are now united again with the tree. The tree’s blooms are purple, representing the blood of Jesus when he died to save Humankind.*

The procession began to sing a hymn that Dante did not recognize because that hymn is not sung on Earth — and Dante fell asleep. In falling asleep, he missed experiencing what else the procession did.

He woke up when a voice called, “What are you doing there? Arise!”

Dante thought, *Matthew 17 recounts that the disciples Peter, John, and James witnessed the transfigured Christ. They fell trembling to the ground until Jesus touched them and said, “Arise!”*

Dante looked up, and he saw that the lady of the Earthly Paradise was bent over him. He asked, “Where is Beatrice?” He was afraid that she had gone.

The lady replied, “She is sitting on the roots under the tree’s newborn leaves. The procession has left with the Griffin and gone to Paradise.”

The lady may have said more words, but Dante did not hear them because he was paying attention to Beatrice.

She was guarding the chariot that the Griffin had left connected to the tree.

The seven ladies were with her, and they were holding the seven golden candlesticks that had led the procession.

Beatrice told Dante, “For a short time, you will continue to dwell in the Land of the Living, and then you will be with me forever in Paradise. You will be saved. You will not be sentenced to eternal torment in the Inferno.

“Watch carefully now. You will see things that I want you to remember and to tell the living.”

Dante wanted to be of service to Beatrice. He watched carefully.

An eagle swooped to earth and attacked the tree, tearing off its bark and its blooms. Then the eagle attacked the chariot, which resembled a ship in a storm, battered by waves.

Dante thought, *The chariot is a symbol of the Church, and the eagle is a symbol of the Roman Empire. The Roman legions carried standards into battle. The standards were poles with insignia or symbols at the top. The Roman standards often had the figure of an eagle at the top. Here I am seeing a representation of the persecutions of the early Christians by Roman emperors such as Nero and Diocletian.*

Then a skinny fox jumped into the chariot. Whatever food it fed on did not nourish it. Beatrice chased the fox away and accused it of abominations.

Dante thought, *The fox is a symbol of the early heresies that the Church had to confront. The Church was successful in resisting the heresies, which provide no nourishment to Christians. A heresy is an opinion that differs from orthodox doctrine. For example, a disbelief in immortality is a heresy.*

Again the eagle swooped down. It had golden feathers, and it left a few golden feathers in the chariot. Dante heard a voice from Heaven cry, “My little ship, the cargo you carry is not worthy of you.”

Dante thought, *A ship is often used as a symbol for the Church, so that is what the voice is referring to here. This scene is a reference to the document known as the Donation of Constantine. Constantine was the first Christian Roman emperor. When he moved from Rome to the city of Constantinople, he gave much power and many material possessions to the Pope. Constantine deliberately moved East in order to reward Pope Sylvester I with power and possessions because Pope Sylvester I had cured him of leprosy. This Donation of Constantinople corrupted many Popes and the Church. The Donation of Constantine caused a crisis in the Church because suddenly the Popes became more concerned about money and power than they were concerned about God. In fact, the Donation of Constantine is having bad*

*effects in Florence and Rome 1,000 years after Constantine gave his Donation to the Church. Constantine died in 337, and Constantinople is named after him.*

*Beatrice thought, Dante is mostly right. The golden feathers do represent material riches. When the Church began to pursue material riches rather than spiritual riches, corruption began. It started slowly at first. However, the Donation of Constantine document that Dante believes in is a forgery, as will be proven after Dante dies. Still, Dante got the main point right.*

*Then a dragon came up from the ground between the wheels of the chariot. It drove its tail up through the floor of the chariot, causing a division in it. The dragon wandered away slowly, as if it might return and do more damage to the chariot.*

*Dante thought, This represents the schisms that have divided the Church. One such schism is between the eastern and the western Church. And Mohammad started another schism with Islam.*

*Then the chariot appeared to grow feathers. Possibly, the feathers grew with good intentions, but they soon covered the chariot.*

*Dante thought, People such as Constantine gave material riches to the Church with good intentions. Constantine did not mean to hurt the Church. He meant only to help the Church. But once the Church got a taste for material riches, it wanted more and more. This led to corruption — lots of corruption.*

*Then the chariot changed into a monster. Seven heads grew on it. Three heads grew on the pole of the chariot, and a head grew on each of the chariot's four corners. The heads on the pole of the chariot had two horns each; the other heads had one horn each.*

*Dante thought, The heads are the Seven Deadly Sins.*

*Then Dante saw a half-dressed whore sitting on the monster that had been the chariot and looking sluttishly around. A giant stood by her, and he and she kissed. But when the whore cast a sluttish glance at Dante, the giant became enraged and beat her. Then he dragged her and the monster that had been the chariot away out of sight.*

*Beatrice thought, Dante can tell other people what he sees here. The telling can provide knowledge to the living, if they will listen to Dante. But he and they will not know the proper interpretation of this until it occurs in the future.*

*The whore represents the Pope. When the whore casts an inappropriate glance at Dante, the whore represents Pope Boniface VIII, who will get Dante exiled. The giant represents King Philip IV, aka Philip the Fair, of France. In 1303, Philip had his bullies beat up Pope Boniface VIII, who died a month after the attack.*

*When the giant drags the whore and the chariot out of sight, this represents Philip the Fair rigging the election of Pope Clement V in 1305 so that he could move the Papal Seat to France instead of Rome. Seven Popes, all of whom were French, will stay in Avignon, France, from 1309 to 1377, when Pope Gregory XI will move the Papacy back to Rome.*

*For a while, King Philip IV of France will have the power, not the Popes. The Holy Roman Emperor should have power over secular matters and the Pope should have power over spiritual matters. Both men should be good men, and they should not engage in a power struggle.*

### Chapter 33: Forest of Eden — Purgation Completed (Purgatory)

The ladies sang words from Psalm 79, words that mourned the destruction of Jerusalem: “O God, the heathen are come into Your inheritance; Your holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps.” Beatrice listened.

The ladies and Beatrice were mourning the vicissitudes of the Church that they had just witnessed. Beatrice mourned as much as Mary had mourned at the foot of the cross.

The ladies finished singing and Beatrice stood up. Glowing like fire, she prophesied, using the words that Jesus spoke to his disciples when he announced his resurrection: “A little while, and you shall not see me: and again, a little while, and you shall see me.”

The Church undergoes vicissitudes in the short run, but the Church shall triumph in the long run.

The seven ladies began walking, Beatrice followed, and with a nod she bade Dante, Statius, and the lady of the Earthly Paradise to follow her.

She had walked only a few paces when she said to Dante, “Walk quickly, so if I have anything to say to you, you will be close enough to me to hear me.”

Dante walked quickly, and she asked him, “Why aren’t you asking me any questions now that I have arrived?”

Dante felt like someone who knew that he was before a superior and could barely speak, and he said with barely voiced words, “You know what I need to know, and you can tell me what I need to know.”

Beatrice replied, “From now on, I want you to speak freely like someone without fear and shame. Speak like someone who is not dreaming.

“You saw the dragon break the chariot. Know that the chariot was broken, but that it shall be fixed. Whoever is guilty of breaking the chariot will be punished. For so serious a sin, God is unwilling to be swayed by pitiful attempts at reconciliation. The eagle that you saw shedding feathers will have true heirs, eventually.”

Beatrice thought, *Dante may not understand me, but I know that the Church will be made whole again. I also know that although the Holy Roman Empire has no true emperor now, someday a true secular leader will arise.*

Beatrice continued, “I am telling you these things because I can see the future. I know what will happen. I know that nothing can prevent it from happening. I know that the numbers five hundred, ten, and five are important to the emissary who will kill the giant and the giant’s whore.”

Dante thought, *The Roman numerals for 500, 10, and 5 are L, X, and V. Rearrange these letters and we have the Latin word LVX, or LUX, which means “leader.” But Beatrice can speak clearly, and here she is not speaking clearly, so this may not be what she means.*

Beatrice continued, “My prophecy may not be clear to you. I know that my words are unclear, as were the words of the difficult-to-solve riddle of the Sphinx and of the obscure oracles of the Greek goddess Themis, personification of justice, law, and divine order. But soon events shall make clear the meaning of my words without the bad consequences that followed some of the prophecies of the ancients.

“Listen carefully to my words. Repeat them to those who are living and who need to learn that life is a race with death as the finish line.

“And when you write, don’t leave out the tree that you saw despoiled twice, once when the eagle attacked the tree, and once when the giant detached the chariot from the tree.

“Whoever harms the tree sins against God.

“Adam tasted the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Because of that, he was expelled from the Earthly Paradise. He lived outside of the Earthly Paradise for 930 years, and he waited in Limbo for 4,302 years until the Harrowing of Hell.

“Since Adam and Eve tasted the fruit, the tree has grown to a great height, and its branches are inverted toward the top to make the fruit inaccessible to Humankind.

“If you think correctly, you can understand why the tree had these two strange characteristics and why its fruit is forbidden to Humankind. Some things cannot be completely understood by Humankind, and one of them is the mystery of evil. Thus, God was just when He denied this fruit to Humankind. But Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, as God — Who knows everything — knew that they would do. So now Humankind must use its knowledge and its reason and what it learns from revelation to determine to the best of its ability what is the right thing to do and to do it.

“I can see that you do not fully understand my words, but I want you to bring back to the Land of the Living at least the part that you can understand.”

Dante replied, “I will do as you ask. I cannot forget your words. They are imprinted on me the way that a seal imprints itself when pressed into wax.

“But why is it so hard for me to understand your words? They fly above my mind. I try to see them, and they fly out of my sight.”

Beatrice replied, “I speak in this way so that you may see the error you committed on Earth after my physical body died, when you pursued false paths instead of the true path that God and I wanted you to follow. Your path separated yourself from God and me.

“And I want you to understand that the false paths of Humankind are far from the true path of God.”

Dante said, “I cannot remember having ever separated myself from you. I have no guilty conscience.”

Beatrice said, “You have drunk from the stream of Lethe, and you have forgotten what you did after my physical body died. The fact that you have forgotten shows that what you did was sinful.

“From now on, however, I will speak more clearly so that you may understand me.”

The Sun was overhead now, and the seven ladies stopped walking. Ahead of them was a marvelous sight. A fountain of water shot up and divided itself into two streams.

Dante asked, “What is this water that divides itself into two streams?”

Beatrice replied, “Ask Matelda. She can explain.”

The lady of the Earthly Paradise said, “I have already explained that to him, as well as other things. This knowledge is not sinful, and drinking from the stream Lethe will not have taken that knowledge from him.”

Beatrice said, “Other things may have crowded out this knowledge from his mind.”

Beatrice thought, *My reproach of him, and the spectacular pageant of the vicissitudes of the Church that he recently saw, are both important things that may have made him forget what he had previously learned.*

Beatrice continued, “The fountain divides into two streams: the Lethe and the Eunoë. You have already drunk from the Lethe. Now drink from the Eunoë so that it may revive the knowledge of every good deed that you have ever done in your life.

“Matelde, lead him to the Eunoë, as you lead all saved souls.”

Matelda took Dante by the hand and said to Statius, “You come, too.”

Statius drank from the stream, and pure, renewed, and immaculate, he rose to his place in Paradise.



Dante drank from the stream.

Years later, Dante the Poet, writing about his experience on the Mountain of Purgatory, wrote, “Reader, I wish I had more space in which I would write about drinking from the stream. But I have carefully planned the writing of the three parts of my *Comedy: Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise*, and I have used up my allotted number of words for the *Purgatory*. Art must be disciplined.”

Dante rose from the stream pure, renewed, and immaculate, and he was eager to rise as Statius had. He was ready to rise to the stars.

## Afterword

Now that you have read this retelling in prose of Dante’s great epic poem *Purgatory*, you have a good but basic understanding of it.

Now go and read the real thing. I recommend the translation by Mark Musa. The translation by John Ciardi is also very good.

The translations in this volume are taken from works in the public domain and are sometimes altered to make the language more modern.

The translation of “*Te Lucis Ante Terminum*” — “Before the End of the Light” — in this volume is by J. M. Neale (1818-1866).

The translation of “*Te Deum Laudamus*” is by Martin Luther.

The translation of the song sung by the Lustful on ledge nine is by John David Chambers (1805-1893).

## PARADISE

## Chapter 1: Beatrice and Dante Rise from Eden (Paradise)

Dante the Poet thought, *God both created all things and keeps all things in existence as long as they exist. In each moment, God is engaged in the act of creation. If God were to stop His act of creation, all of the universe, including space and time, would go out of existence. God's glory is seen in the entire universe. In some places His glory can be seen more clearly. In some places His glory can be seen less clearly. Merit determines whether God's glory is seen more clearly or less clearly in human beings.*

*I have traveled through the depths of the Inferno, I have climbed the Mountain of Purgatory, and I have risen from the Forest of Eden up through the cosmos and past it to the Mystic Empyrean, aka Paradise, the dwelling place of God. I have seen things that no person, once returned to Earth from Paradise, can tell about. Our goal is God, but after one experiences God and then returns to the mundane world, memory is powerless. Very little of the experience of God can be remembered and recounted. In Paradise, saved souls and Angels experience God continually.*

*What I can remember of my experience, I will recount in this, my work of art, my Paradise.*

*To do so, I need help. Apollo, ancient god of prophecy, please give me gifts enough to create a work of art that is worthy of a laurel crown. Previously, I have asked the Muses for their aid. I do so again, now, but I need your help as well because of the enormity and the difficulty of my task. Parnassus, the mountain of creative endeavor, has two peaks. One is dedicated to the nine Muses; the other is dedicated to you, Apollo. I ask for help in creation from all nine Muses and from you, Apollo.*

*Apollo, inspire me with the talent and the genius that you used to defeat Marsyas, the satyr who discovered a flute that played well by itself, without the help of living beings. Minerva had owned the flute, but she disliked the way her face contorted when she played it, and so she had discarded it. Marsyas found the flute, discovered the beauty of the sounds it made, and challenged you to a contest to see who made the best music. You defeated Marsyas. Please give me the use of the artistic gifts with which you defeated Marsyas.*

*Allow me to at least write the shadow of my experience of Paradise. If I can do even that, I will deserve the laurel crown that is given to persons who do great things. My lofty theme and your artistic inspiration will make me deserving of the laurel crown. Seldom are laurel leaves plucked to form a crown for politicians or for creators of works of art. Some forms of ambition are worthwhile, but are little pursued. When someone works hard to pursue such a crown, you, Apollo, should rejoice. Even if I fail in my pursuit, perhaps I may blaze the way for one who will succeed.*

Now was the time of the spring equinox, a propitious time. The time was evening in the Forest of Eden.

Beatrice looked at the setting Sun. In the world of those who are still mortal, a person who did that would be blinded, but Beatrice was able to look at the Sun without harm, just as an eagle is alleged to be capable of doing. A ray of light directed straight at a mirror bounces back to its source. A pilgrim yearns to return to his or her spiritual home. Inspired by Beatrice, Dante the Pilgrim looked straight at the Sun as no one can in the Land of the Living.

In the Forest of Eden, saved souls can experience more than living souls can. Although Dante could not look at the Sun for very long, he did see sparks of light around the Sun. They looked like the sparks that appear when molten iron is poured. Later, in the Mystic Empyrean, Dante would again see sparks.

Suddenly, the light became much brighter, as if two Suns were shining. Beatrice continued to look at the Sun, and now Dante the Pilgrim looked at her eyes.

Beatrice thought, *Dante, you do not know it yet, but you have started to rise. Your soul has been purified. It is lighter than air, and naturally it rises through the air. From the Forest of Eden you have risen through the Sphere of Air and are passing through the Sphere of Fire. Dante, you lived in medieval times, and what you will experience is reality, but it is reality as a medieval person would expect to experience it. God wants to save your soul, and He will use what He needs to, to save it. God is willing for me to appear to you and be your guide through the cosmos until you reach God's dwelling place. Because you are a medieval person, God is willing for you to experience the cosmos as a medieval person would expect to experience it. As a medieval person, you believe that the Earth is the center of the universe. Around the Earth are first a Sphere of Air and then a Sphere of Fire, from which you believe lightning strikes the Earth. Then is the Sphere of the Moon. Although scientists will discover later that the Earth is not the center of the universe, God will let you experience the cosmos in the way that you expect it to be. God is willing to approach people through what they know or think they know. The lessons you will learn, of course, are eternal and unchanging and apply to your age as well as to much more modern ages.*

As Dante the Pilgrim looked at Beatrice, he felt himself changing. The change was new, and he had never experienced it before. To describe it, he needed a new word: He was transhumanized. But such an experience of change cannot be described with a word or words. All he could do was to use as an analogy Glaucus, an ancient fisherman who noticed that fish revived when they were placed on a certain herb. Glaucus ate some of the herb, and he transformed into a sea-god and dived into the sea and experienced it as no human being has ever experienced it. Dante had changed, he had become more than human, and now he was rising to the heights of the cosmos.

Dante had changed, and he did not know that he was rising to the heights of the cosmos. Was he a soul only? Or was he a soul and a body? He did not know.

Dante had risen to the Sphere of Fire and was experiencing much light. Here he heard music: the music of the Spheres. As a medieval person, Dante believed that the boundary of the material universe was the Primum Mobile, something that a modern person might call outer space beyond the stars. In the medieval view of the cosmos, the Primum Mobile moved and imparted movement to the other Spheres of the cosmos, and that movement caused the music of the Spheres, something that living human beings normally do not hear.

Dante still did not know that he was rising. He was eager to learn the source of the music and the source of the light. Beatrice, like Virgil previously, knew Dante's thoughts. Beatrice was a good educator, and she started to answer his questions even before he voiced them.

Beatrice said, "You are not aware of the truth because you are not thinking correctly. You think that you are still in the Forest of Eden. You are not. You are rising. You have passed through the Sphere of Air and are now passing through the Sphere of Fire. You are moving quicker than lightning ever did."

Dante was pleased by what he had learned, but he now had a question: "How can I rise through these Spheres? How is that possible?"

Beatrice sighed. Dante did not have the knowledge that saved souls in Paradise have. She looked at Dante the way that a pitying mother looks at an ill child and said, "The universe has order, and that order is created by God and God's influence appears and can be seen throughout the universe. God created higher creatures — those with reason and the ability to experience love. These higher creatures include the Angels, human beings living on Earth, and the saved souls now with God in Paradise. Humanity has Paradise as the main goal. However, all created things, and not just the higher creatures, have a proper position in the cosmos.

“Some Spheres can be regarded as closer to God than others. The Inferno is as far away from God as it is possible to be. Things end up where they belong; they are attracted to their particular place — a place that reveals their relationship to God. This applies to Humankind as well. God wants each person to be saved and to rise. You and I have been purified, and being purified, we rise to our proper position in the cosmos.

“But not every person will be saved. God is a perfect Artist and a perfect Creator, but people have free will. Even though every person has as his or her goal Paradise, a person can go astray and pick up sin that weighs down that person’s soul and makes it impossible to rise. Without repentance, one’s soul can be so heavy that it is able only to fall into the Inferno.

“You should not be surprised that, having repented and purged your sins, you are rising. Your rising now is as natural as water flowing down a mountain. You should be surprised only if, having repented and purged your sins, you had not risen.”

Beatrice then turned her gaze upward.

## Chapter 2: Moon — Dark Spots (Paradise)

Dante the Poet thought, *Pay attention, readers. You have journeyed with me through the Inferno and up the Mountain of Purgatory, but the journey to Paradise is much more difficult. Think about whether you will be able to make the journey. This is a journey for a ship, not for a small boat. All who will follow in my wake should have a substantial vessel and should follow me closely for their own safety. The way to Paradise is a difficult one. For me to describe that way, I need the help of Apollo and the nine Muses, and I need Minerva — the goddess of wisdom — to fill my sails. If you have long sought the bread of Angels — the knowledge of God — then you may follow my ship in its journey, but you will be amazed by what you learn. You will be more amazed than the Argonauts who sailed with Jason in search of the Golden Fleece, who saw Jason plow a field with two fire-breathing bulls, who saw Jason plant in the plowed field dragon's teeth, and who saw the dragon's teeth grow into armed soldiers.*

Dante the Pilgrim and Beatrice rose into the heavens as fast as human eyes can rise to look at the sky. Dante looked at Beatrice, and Beatrice looked into the heavens. And as quickly as an arrow strikes its target after flying through the air after having been released by an archer, Dante and Beatrice reached the Moon. Beatrice told Dante, “Think of God and thank him, for He has raised us to the Sphere of the Moon.”

Dante saw what seemed to be a milky cloud, and Beatrice and he were *inside* the Moon. Dante wondered how that could be. How can a solid be admitted into another solid and both remain intact just like light can enter water and the water remains intact? If Dante still had his body, which he was not sure he had, his being inside the Moon with an intact body was more than remarkable. He wanted to see something else more than remarkable: Jesus, in Whose human body divinity was infused without lessening either the human nature or the divine nature of His being. Once saved souls are in the Mystic Empyrean, they will understand things that reason cannot comprehend. Things that reason cannot comprehend in the Land of the Living will appear self-evident in the Mystic Empyrean.

Dante said to Beatrice, “I am grateful to God who has raised me from the Forest of Eden to the Moon. Please tell me something: What are the dark spots of the Moon? People tell stories about them on Earth. They say that God took Cain and placed him on the Moon and made him carry a bundle of thorns on his back, and they say that the dark spots of the Moon are really Cain and his bundle of thorns.”

Amused, Beatrice smiled and said, “Human judgment often goes wrong, especially when no one can be present and see what is being speculated about. This should be no surprise, After all, when someone is present and can use the sense of sight and the other senses, errors can still be made. Optical illusions, mirages, hallucinations, and simple errors of judgment show this.

“Let me say that many of your ideas about the Moon are, quite simply, wrong, as will be shown with the rise of science in the future.

“You believe that the Moon both reflects the light of the Sun and has its own luminosity. Actually, the Moon does not have its own luminosity. It only reflects the light of the Sun.

“You believe that the Moon is smooth and without cracks. Actually, the Moon has mountains and craters and other geographical features. Any part of the Moon that is shadowed by mountains will be dark and will not reflect light. The Moon has different minerals. Some are shiny and reflect light well, and others are dark and absorb light instead of reflecting it. These things that I have mentioned explain the dark spots of the Moon.

“Of course, that is the scientific explanation, and the scientific explanation is a good one. If God had been incarnated in a later age, He could have said, ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, give to Einstein what is Einstein’s, and give to God what is God’s.’ A man named Albert Einstein will be a famous scientist centuries from now.

“But we can give another explanation of the dark spots of the Moon. This explanation will be poetic and spiritual and is not meant to displace the scientific explanation. This explanation is simply another way of regarding the dark spots of the Moon to see what we may learn from them.

“People of your age — the medieval age — believe that the stars and the planets have an influence on human beings, who nevertheless have free will. Of course, a later age will discover that the stars and the planets have no influence on human beings. It is true that human beings are influenced by their heredity and environment, but they still have reason and free will that they can use to learn the right thing to do and then do it. Human beings are responsible for their actions and should not blame the stars and the planets for what they do.

“One way of looking at the dark spots of the Moon is that this is an example of God’s mark on the universe. Listen to me carefully: God’s glory is seen in the entire universe, which He created. The dark spots of the Moon are an illustration of this: In some places God’s glory can be seen more clearly. In some places God’s glory can be seen less clearly.

“God, by the way, will use what you know, or what you think you know, in order to teach you. You and other people of your time believe that the Earth is at the center of the universe and the Sun revolves around it. People of later ages will discover that the Earth revolves around the Sun, which is the center of our solar system. However, during our journey to the Mystic Empyrean, we will visit places in the cosmos in the order in which you would expect to visit them. In addition, when we visit planets, we will meet souls who have the qualities that people of your time associated with that particular planet.

“First, we are visiting the Moon, which is associated with faith. The Moon waxes and wanes, and throughout our lives our faith in God can also wax and wane. It can grow or diminish.

“Second, we will visit Mercury, which is associated with hope.

“Third, we will visit Venus, which is associated with love.

“Fourth, we will visit the Sun, which is associated with wisdom.

“Fifth, we will visit Mars, which is associated with courage.

“Sixth, we will visit Jupiter, which is associated with justice.

“Seventh, we will visit Saturn, which is associated with contemplation.

“Eighth, we will visit Gemini, a constellation of the Fixed Stars. The Fixed Stars are the constellations and other stars. The planets move around in the sky, but the stars of The Big Dipper, Gemini, and other constellations are always fixed in position relative to each other.

“Ninth, we will visit the Primum Mobile, which is the outermost moving Sphere. The Primum Mobile gives the planets and stars their motion.

“Finally, we will visit the Mystic Empyrean, which is the dwelling place of God. The Mystic Empyrean does not move, and it is outside space and time.

“You use the words ‘star’ and ‘planet’ interchangeably. You also call the Sun a planet. I will use the word ‘planet’ to refer to the Earth, the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn only.

“Souls will be at each place we visit so that you can talk to and learn from them.

“One of the things you will learn is this: Merit determines whether God’s glory is seen more clearly or less clearly in human beings.

“God is intelligent, and His infinite intelligence is reflected in our finite intelligence. God is infinitely good, and His infinite goodness is reflected in our finite goodness.

“Each of us reflects God’s glory differently. A morally good person reflects God’s goodness well; a morally bad person reflects God’s goodness badly.”

### Chapter 3: Moon — Piccarda and the Empress Constance (Unfulfilment of Religious Vows) (Paradise)

Dante was happy with what he had learned from Beatrice, and he raised his eyes, thinking to speak to her. But immediately he saw before him, vaguely, faces. The faces were indistinct; looking at each face was like looking at a pearl lying against pearly white skin.

Dante looked behind him, thinking that they were reflections. In doing so, he made a mistake that was the opposite of the mistake Narcissus had made. Narcissus had seen his own reflection in a pool of water, and he fell in love with it, mistaking a reflection for a real thing. Dante, however, mistook what is real for reflections. The faces really were in front of him, pale and indistinct as they were.

Beatrice saw Dante turn around. She smiled and said to him, “Don’t be surprised at my smiling at your mistake. The evidence is in front of your eyes, but you do not believe it. You look in back of yourself although nothing is there to see. The faces you see in front of you really are in front of you. They are here because they broke their vows. They are here so that you may learn from them. Speak to them. Believe what they say. They are perfected souls who are blessed by God, and they will not mislead you.”

Dante faced the souls, and to the soul who seemed most anxious to talk to him he said, “Soul, you who are well created and who enjoy Paradise and endless life, things whose goodness cannot be truly known until they are experienced, please tell me who you are and please tell me your fate.”

The soul, happy, replied, “We are filled with love, as is our Creator, and we will happily respond to a just request such as the one that you have made.

“I was a nun: a virgin sister. Think, and remember, and you will find that you know me. You have not recognized me because I am more beautiful than I ever was on Earth. I am Piccarda.”

Dante thought, *Indeed, I remember you, Piccarda. You are a member of the Donati family, whom I know well in Florence. Your brother is Forese Donati, who while alive exchanged comic insult poems with me. I recently saw Forese being purged of gluttony on ledge six of the Mountain of Purgatory. Cianfa Donati, another member of the Donati family, is among the thieves in the Inferno. Forese told me that Corso, his brother, will end up in Hell. Obviously, your family does not get you into Heaven or Hell; your own freely willed actions do that.*

Piccarda continued, “I and the other souls appear here because we failed to keep our vows in some way. We promised something, and we did not do what we promised.”

Dante thought, *You were a nun, Piccarda, but your evil brother, Corso, forced you to leave your religious order and get married. You made a vow as a nun, but because of Corso you could not keep your vow. You had entered a nunnery, but Corso, who is both a brute and your brother, forced you to leave the nunnery and make a political marriage — a marriage that politically benefited Corso.*

Beatrice thought, *Corso, Piccarda’s brother, is the leader of the Black Guelfs in Florence, and he is the person who will persuade Pope Boniface VIII to send Charles of Valois and his troops to Florence — the military action that will lead to the exile of Dante from Florence. Corso will attempt to gain control of Florence, but he will fail. He will be captured, and when he tries to escape, he will take a spear to the throat and die. He will die on 6 October 1308.*

Piccarda continued, “I and the other souls you see are appearing here on the Moon, which is the slowest Sphere.”



Beatrice thought, *The closer a Sphere is to the Earth, according to Dante's medieval beliefs, the slower it moves. The Moon is the closest to the Earth, and therefore it moves the slowest. The Primum Mobile is the furthest away from the Earth, and therefore it moves the fastest.*

Piccarda continued, "We are in the slowest Sphere, and we are happy to be here because this is where God put us. We are here because of our failure to keep our vows in some way."

Dante replied, "Your face is transformed. It glows and is brilliant and is more beautiful than it was on Earth. I did not recognize you until you spoke to me, but now I remember and know you. Please tell me something. All of you souls I see here are happy, and all of you souls are in the slowest and the lowest Sphere. Do any of you wish to be in a higher Sphere? Do any of you wish to be higher in Paradise?"

Piccarda and the other souls smiled, and Piccarda, as happy as a woman newly in love, said, "We want only what we have, nothing more. We want only what God gives us. Our desires are aligned with the will of God. If we wished to be higher in Paradise, then our desires would not be aligned with the will of God, and we would not be perfected souls.

"Think about love and what it is. To be here is to exist in Love. All who are in Paradise exist in Love. Our will and God's will are perfectly aligned, and we feel Perfect Love. All in Paradise are happy with whichever heavenly Sphere they are associated. We find our peace in the will of God. Everyone in Paradise is perfectly happy and blissful. All of us souls experience all the happiness that we are capable of experiencing."

Dante knew then that all of the Spheres reflect God's glory. He also knew that in some Spheres God's glory can be seen more clearly and in some Spheres God's glory can be seen less clearly. Dante also knew that no one needs to have a perfect life on Earth to be in Paradise later. If people would need to be perfect on Earth in order to be in Paradise later, Paradise would be empty. Nevertheless, Paradise is a meritocracy. To recognize that one has sinned and to sincerely repent one's sins are major accomplishments.

Dante asked Piccarda for more details about her unfulfilled vow.

Piccarda responded, "Saint Clare, the founder of the Franciscan Order of Poor Clares, inspired me to become a nun in her order. She had been a noblewoman of wealth and beauty, and in 1212, she and Saint Francis founded the first Franciscan convent for women. Saint Clare had great virtue, and she is in the Mystic Empyrean with God. I left mundane things to follow her, and I joined the Poor Clares. I resided in the convent, and I made a religious vow to be a nun for the rest of my life. But men, led by my brother Corso, all of whom understood hate more than they understood love, took me — by force — from the convent. Corso forced me to marry to seal a political alliance that would benefit him.

"This soul to my right also experiences the love of God, and she also experienced what I experienced on Earth. She, also, was a nun. She, also, was forced to leave the convent. She, also, was forced to marry. Even though she was forced to do all these things, she wore — in her heart — the habit of a nun. This soul on Earth was the Empress Constance. Her father-in-law was Frederick Barbarossa. Her son is the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. Her grandson is Manfred."

Dante thought, *Constance, of course, is in Paradise, but her son, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, is in the Inferno with the other heretics. Constance's grandson, Manfred, is among the Late Repentant (in the group of the excommunicated) in AntePurgatory. Once again, we see that family does not determine where you end up in the afterlife. Also, we see an Empress side by side with a member of the Florentine middle class. In Paradise, royalty and commoners mix.*

Having finished speaking, Piccarda sang "Ave Maria":

“Hail, Mary,  
“Full of grace,  
“The Lord is with you.  
“Blessed are you  
“And blessed  
“Is the fruit of your womb.  
“Holy Mary,  
“Mother of God,  
“Pray for us  
“Sinners  
“Now and in  
“The hour of our death.”

Singing, she disappeared as if sinking into deep water.

Dante turned to Beatrice, but she was shining so brightly that he could not look at her, and so he found it difficult to ask her questions.

## Chapter 4: Moon — Location of Souls (The Absolute Versus the Conditional Will) (Paradise)

Dante had two questions that he wished — equally — to ask Beatrice. He was like a man who stood exactly in between two equally delicious meals — he would starve to death before choosing which to eat. He was like a lamb that stood exactly between two equally menacing wolves. He was like a dog that stood exactly in between two equally enticing does.

Unable to choose which question to ask first, Dante stood without speaking, but his face showed his desire to speak.

Beatrice then did what Daniel did. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that he wanted his advisers to recount and to interpret. His advisers were unable to do these things and so he ordered that they be executed. But Daniel was able to recount and to interpret the dream, thus appeasing Nebuchadnezzar. Beatrice appeased Dante.

Beatrice said to Dante, “I see that you desire to ask two questions, and that you are unable to speak. Your first question is this: ‘If my will remains good, how can another person’s forcing me to act against my will mean that I receive less of a reward?’ You also want to ask, ‘Where do the souls of the saved go after death? Is it true that all souls return to their particular planet or star, as we read in Plato?’

“Those are the two questions you wish to ask. I will answer the second question first because the result will be very harmful if it is answered incorrectly.

“Where do the souls of the saved go after death? All of them go to the same place: Paradise, aka the Mystic Empyrean. This is where the Angels, including the highest order of the Angels, are. This is where Moses and Samuel are. This is where John the Baptist and John the Apostle are. This is where Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is. The souls you have seen here, and all of the other saved souls, do or will (if they are still climbing the Mountain of Purgatory or if their body is still alive) reside there. Each soul will have eternal bliss. Paradise is in the Mystic Empyrean, and it is where God resides.

“You have seen souls here on the Moon not because the Moon is where these souls stay, but simply because these souls are appearing before you in order to educate you. You will see souls on other planets and other places. Where they appear will reveal the greater or the lesser degree of their blessedness. The Moon is the lowest planet, and these souls are less blessed than other souls, although they are fully and eternally happy and reside in the same place as Mary.

“The souls are appearing before you in these places and in this way because this is a form of education from which your mind will be able to benefit. Your mind and the minds of other living human beings acquire knowledge through experience and the use of the senses, which give your minds information that your reason can consider.

“This is something that God is willing to do and has done. For example, sacred scripture mentions the hands and feet of God even though God, of course, is immaterial and has no hands and feet. For example, we use spatial terms to describe Paradise, which lies outside space and time — ‘outside’ is a spatial term that does not apply literally to Paradise. The Holy Church presents Archangels that have human features although Archangels are immaterial beings. All of these things are done to help Humankind understand.

“Plato in his *Timaeus* spoke about a myth in which souls exist on planets and stars, acquire material form and live on Earth, and then after death return to the planet or star from which

they came. If this is meant to be taken literally, it is false. Souls are created by God and do not exist before the body.

“If Plato’s myth is taken figuratively, then perhaps what is meant is that the planets and the stars have some influence on human life. Your age believed that, but science will later show that astrology is false. The Romans gave the planets names such as Jupiter and Mercury and Mars, but these names led the world astray.

“Still, one element of truth remains. Plato may be saying, figuratively, that after death the soul retains what made it distinctive and individual in the living world. You will still be you, even after death.

“The main point for you to learn here is that the dwelling place of Piccarda Donati and the Empress Constance is in the Mystic Empyrean with God. Their eternal dwelling place is not on the Moon. The souls in Paradise are helpful, and these souls made an appearance on the Moon to educate you about the degrees of blessedness in Paradise. Merit determines whether God’s glory is seen more clearly or less clearly in human beings. In these souls who appeared to you on the Moon, God’s glory is seen, but it is seen less clearly than in other souls.

“Your other question is this: ‘If my will remains good, how can another person’s forcing me to act against my will mean that I receive less of a reward?’

“This question arises from a misunderstanding of the will. Absolute will exists, and conditioned will exists. Absolute will is like a flame that always desires to rise although it can be forced to the side if something such as a stone is held directly above it.

“Conditioned will gives in, to some extent. Violence can force will to give in, and a conditioned will can continue to give in even after the violence has stopped.

“Such was the case with Piccarda and the Empress Constance. Evil men used violence to take them out of the convent. Piccarda and the Empress Constance cannot be blamed for that. But their will became conditioned, and after the violence ceased, they remained instead of running back to the convent to be nuns.

“Absolute will does not give in, even when faced with bad consequences. If the choice is to give in and remain married or to run back to the convent to keep a vow made to God to be a nun even though that can result in *being hunted down and murdered*, the absolute will chooses running back to the convent to be a nun.

“This is more than a theory. For example, Saint Lawrence, a deacon of the Church of Rome, was ordered to hand over the treasures of the Church. He gathered a group of ill and poor people and called them the treasures of the church although he knew, of course, that his tormentors wanted material treasures. His tormentors tortured him and grilled him alive. He told them that one side was done, so turn him over and eat. His absolute will refused to allow his will to be conditioned and give up the Church’s material treasures — thereby violating his oath to protect the Church’s treasures — although the alternative to allowing his will to be conditioned was a horrible death. Absolute will never consents to doing the wrong thing, no matter the consequences.

“Here’s another example, Gaius Mucius attempted but failed to kill the Etruscan King Porsena. He was told that he could either give information about the Romans’ defenses or be executed. Mucius put his right hand in a fire and allowed it to be burned off to show that he would not be a traitor to his country. Instead, he would be faithful to his vow to be loyal to his country. King Porsena allowed Mucius to live. Thereafter, Mucius was known by the nickname ‘*Scaevola*’ — ‘Lefthanded.’

“Piccarda and the Empress Constance should have kept their vow. Saint Lawrence had vowed not to hand over the material treasures of the Church, and Scaevola had vowed loyalty

to the Romans. Both kept their vows, despite the consequences. But such firm will as they showed is seldom seen.

“But here arises another question. Do what Piccarda said and what I said contradict each other? Piccarda said that the Empress Constance always wore the habit of a nun in her heart. Of course, the will of Empress Constance had become conditioned. Often, someone will consent to doing the wrong thing out of fear that something worse will occur.

“For example, Alcmeon did this. His father was Amphiaraus, a soothsayer who knew that he would die if he took part in a war against Thebes and so hid himself. Polynices, the leader of the forces against Thebes, bribed Eriphyle, the wife of Amphiaraus, with a gold necklace to reveal her husband’s hiding place. Forced to go to war against Thebes, Amphiaraus asked Alcmeon to vow to avenge him, and Alcmeon killed his mother, Eriphyle. Alcmeon faced a choice: either kill his mother or risk being impious by disobeying his father. He did something evil because he was afraid that if he did not, he would do something even more evil.

“The Empress Constance did the same thing. She remained and stayed married and broke her vow although she could have run back to the convent and been a nun. She chose the lesser of what she considered to be two evils: being married, rather being killed. Absolute will would not have consented to this.

“When Piccarda spoke of the Empress Constance wearing the habit of a nun in her heart, she was referring to her absolute will. When I was speaking of the Empress Constance’s actions, I was referring to her conditioned will. Piccarda and I did not contradict each other.”

Dante understood. He said to Beatrice, “Thank you. All humans want to acquire truth, and acquiring truth is a process of asking questions and learning the answers until we are in Paradise and happy in our full knowledge. I understand the answers to the two questions that I had before, but now I have a third question: Is it possible to mend a broken vow to God by substituting good deeds for it?”

Beatrice looked at Dante. Her eyes sparkled with love, and Dante felt as if it he was about to faint. Beatrice had become more radiant.

## Chapter 5: Moon — Compensation for Broken Vows (Paradise)

Beatrice said to Dante, “You see that I have become more radiant. You will continue to see this. My radiance comes from the joy I feel as I come closer to God and as I see others, such as you, come closer to God. I can see that in your mind Eternal Light shines. One who comes closer to God comes closer to the perfect sight that sees the Eternal Good.

“Sometimes, people pursue the wrong thing through a misunderstanding of the right thing. The right thing should be understood, and it should be pursued.

“You wish to know whether a broken vow to God can be fixed with a substitution such as good deeds for what was vowed. You wish to know whether such a substitution would be acceptable in the eyes of God.

“Be aware that the greatest gift that God has given Humankind is free will. This is a gift that is most like God. This is the gift that God most cherishes. God gifted only intelligent beings such as human beings and Angels with free will.

“When we make a religious vow, we are giving back to God that gift — we are sacrificing our freedom for God. It is wrong to take back that gift. We sacrifice free will when we make a vow. For example, we are free to make and keep as much money as we can. However, if we make a vow of voluntary poverty so that we can serve God better, we give up part of our free will — we are no longer free to make and keep as much money as we can.

“When we make a vow, God can either consent to it or not consent to it. If the vow is evil, God will not consent to it. But if the vow is good, God will consent to it, and it becomes binding.

“Because free will is your most precious possession, nothing can make up for it because nothing is as precious as it is. Nothing can compensate for the free will that the person making a religious vow to God has sacrificed. The person making a religious vow is giving God the greatest gift possible: the sacrifice of free will by substituting dedication to God for free will. Someone who breaks that kind of vow is taking back something that no longer belongs to him or her.

“However, the Church does grant dispensations for vows. Let me explain why and how. Pay attention. Be sure to retain this information.

“Vows consist of two parts. First is the act of promising, and second is what is promised. The act of promising cannot be annulled. However, what is promised can be changed in special circumstances.

“For example, Jews would make a vow to sacrifice to God. This is a vow that had to be kept, but the substance of the sacrifice could change. Instead of sacrificing one particular kind of crop, another kind of crop could be sacrificed.

“But whenever some substitution is made, it cannot be made simply by one’s own choice. This is something that the Church must approve. Remember the gold and silver keys of Saint Peter.

“In addition, the substitution must be of greater value than what was originally promised. If someone vowed four, then got the approval of the Church to make a substitution, that person must pay six. A person may have vowed to volunteer a certain number of hours to a charity each year. Should that person fall into circumstances that make volunteering impossible, the Church may approve the donation of money as a substitute, but the value of the money to be donated must be more than the value of the volunteer hours that were vowed.

“In addition, be aware that some vows admit of no substitution. What can substitute for a vow of a lifetime of service?

“Therefore, Humankind must be careful to take vows seriously and not make vows rashly. Also, vows must be made rightly and ethically and must not result in evil. God does not accept all vows; God rejects those vows that result in evil.

“Remember the rash vow that Jephthah made. This King of Israel went off to fight the Ammonites. He vowed to God that if he were victorious that he would then sacrifice to God the first thing that he saw coming out of the door of his house when he returned from battle. The first thing that he saw coming of the door of his house was his daughter, and he sacrificed her. Jephthah’s vow was blind and rash, and he did evil by keeping it. Far better would have been for him to say, ‘My vow was wrong,’ and not keep it. Such a vow is not the kind that God approves.

“Remember the rash vow that Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek forces against Troy, made. He vowed to sacrifice to Artemis the loveliest creature born in a certain year. That year saw the birth of his daughter Iphigenia, and she was the loveliest creature born that year. He did not sacrifice her then, but years later, when bad winds kept the Greek ships from sailing to Troy, other people blamed the bad winds on Agamemnon’s failure to keep his vow. Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter, good winds began to blow, and the Greek ships sailed to Troy.

“When interpreting the worthiness of vows, or sacred scripture, remember that God is omnibenevolent. God always wishes good; God never wishes evil.

“Learn from the rash vows, Christians. Be wary of rushing to make vows. You need a good, weighty reason to make a vow. You need more than a feather in the wind. And don’t think that making reparations for a broken vow is easy. It will take more than a few drops of holy water!

“You do not need to make vows to wash away your sins. You have the Old Testament and the New Testament, and you have the Church. With these, you can save your soul. I repeat: You do not need to make vows to be saved. You have the Bible and the Church; these are enough for you to be saved.

“Some people may try to sell you releases from your vows. This is a scam. Don’t fall for it! Jews keep their vows although they lack the New Testament, and they will laugh at you if you fall for such scams although you have both the Old Testament and the New Testament and also the Church to guide you. Stick with the trusted guides and ignore the scammers.”

Beatrice then looked upward, and she and Dante rose to the next Sphere: Mercury. Beatrice, now closer to God, glowed more brightly, and the planet reflected her brightness. Mercury is a planet that reacted to Beatrice’s brightness. Dante, who has a soul and is coming closer to God, reacted more strongly to Beatrice’s brightness.

The fish in a pond will investigate whatever is new, thinking it may be nourishing. Here on this planet, over a thousand souls came toward Dante and Beatrice, saying, “Behold another who will increase our love.” Love in Paradise is something that increases the more it is shared.

Each of the souls shone with the brightness of love.

Dante the Poet thought, *If I were to stop writing here and not describe what happened next, you, Reader, would crave to know what happened. You would then understand how keen I was to learn from these souls.*

One of the souls said to Dante, “Blissful one, whom God allows to travel through Paradise although you are still alive, please ask us anything you want. The light of God shines in us as it shines throughout the Heavens.”

Beatrice encouraged Dante to do as the soul asked: “Ask whatever you want to ask. These souls are helpful, and they are trustworthy.”

Dante said to the soul, “You, saved soul, are bright with light. I do not know who you are, or why you are showing yourself to me on this planet that is often hidden from Humankind because it is so close to the Sun.”

The saved soul heard Dante and then glowed with much more brightness than previously. The Sun usually glows so brightly that Humankind cannot look at it and see its mass; the saved soul was hidden from Dante because of the soul’s brightness.



## Chapter 6: Mercury — Roman Emperor Justinian (Paradise)

The saved soul spoke, “The story of the Roman Empire is the story of the Roman Eagle. The Eagle followed the course of Heaven. The Sun rises in the East and sets in the West, and Aeneas, the prince of conquered Troy, journeyed West to Italy, wed Lavinia, and became an important ancestor of the Roman people.

“Constantine, however, reversed that direction. He took the Eagle Eastward, from Rome to Constantinople. In doing so, he went against the course of Heaven — the Sun travels from East to West, and taking the Eagle to Constantinople reversed that course.

“For approximately 200 years, the Eagle remained in the East, close to Troy, and then my day came, and I and people under my command reconquered Italy for the Empire.

“I was a Roman Emperor; I am still Justinian. I, inspired by God, reformed the Roman law.”

Beatrice thought, *The Roman Empire was huge, and in order to better manage it, it was divided into two centers of power. One was the Western Roman Empire, which people call the Roman Empire. Its center was at Rome. Eventually, Rome fell as Germanic tribes made war against the Western Roman Empire. However, the other Empire continued.*

*The other Empire was the Eastern Roman Empire, which people call the Byzantine Empire. Its center of power was at the city named Byzantium. In Roman times, this city was known as Constantinople. Later, it will officially be known as Istanbul. The supremacy of the Eastern Roman Empire ended in 1204 C.E., when Constantinople was sacked in the Fourth Crusade.*

*Justinian (485-565 C.E.) was one of the Byzantine Emperors. Two centuries before, Constantine had moved to the Eastern Roman Empire, making his home in Constantinople, which of course was named after him.*

*Justinian is known as a lawgiver and Roman Emperor. His upbringing was humble. He was born a peasant, but he was adopted at age eight by his uncle Justin. Justin took him to Constantinople and renamed him Justinian. His original name was Petrus Sabbatius.*

*Justinian has a connection with Ravenna, Italy, where Dante will die. In Ravenna, Justinian ordered beautiful buildings to be created; they are decorated with mosaics. Dante will live in Ravenna at the end of his life. Justinian’s general, Belisarius, was able to conquer Rome, thus making it part of the Empire again and allowing Justinian to create magnificent buildings in Ravenna.*

*Justinian’s major Earthly accomplishment was having the Roman law codified — put in an orderly fashion. Before Justinian, Roman law was disorderly. Many Emperors had made many laws, and no one really knew what the law was, and so no one had any way of knowing what was legal and what was illegal. Justinian had people clean up the law — get rid of the old, outdated laws, and make sure that the current laws made sense. In addition, he had a commentary and a textbook of the law created — that way, people could study the law and so know what was legal and what was illegal.*

*One important effect of the Justinian Code is that people began to study it in the 12th century, as city-states and national monarchies developed in Europe. Dante studies the Justinian Code in Florence, and he believes that Italy needs a Roman Emperor to enforce the law. He feels that the Roman law of the Justinian Code is good.*

Justinian continued, “Before I was able to accomplish this reform of Roman law, I needed to do other things. For example, I needed to get rid of a heresy that I believed. I believed that

Jesus had only one nature. I believed that Jesus had only a divine nature. I should have believed that the incarnated Jesus is fully divine and fully human.

“Fortunately, Pope Agapetus the First was able to correct my heretical thinking. I trusted him. Pope Agapetus was a good spiritual leader, and he helped me to correct my thinking and to establish the right relationship between church and state. Pope Agapetus handled religious questions, while I handled legal, secular questions. And now that I am in Paradise, I can see clearly that Pope Agapetus got the answers to the religious questions right.

“You know that when two statements are contradictory, one statement must be true, and the other statement must be false. Both cannot be true. For example, only one of these statements is true: 1) A bachelor is an unmarried man. 2) A bachelor is not an unmarried man.

“As clearly as you know this kind of logic in the living world, so clearly do I know in Paradise that Jesus is both fully divine and fully human. What is a mystery in the living world is self-evident in Paradise.

“To be a great ruler, you have to get the answers to the ultimate questions right. If you are going to be a great ruler, you have to think correctly about God. Pope Agapetus helped me to think correctly about God. After I thought correctly about God, I was able to turn my attention to the reform of the Roman law.

“I also delegated authority. I let Belisarius be my general and fight my wars. He was such an able warrior and leader that I knew that God approved of such a delegation of duty. By allowing Belisarius to wage war when needed, I was able to focus on codifying the Roman law. Belisarius really was a good general. He was able to gain control of Italy, which had been overrun by Germanic tribes, and thus I was able to build beautiful buildings in Ravenna.

“By allowing Belisarius to handle war, I was able to devote myself to something that is more valuable: law. I wanted the world to be well governed. To do that, you need to have both the right faith and the right laws.

“I allowed people to do what they do best. The Pope was and is the authority in spiritual matters, and I did not challenge him for power. Belisarius was a very competent general, and I allowed him to lead the troops into battle. I myself was the right person to codify the Roman law, and I did that.

“This answers your first question: Who am I? But now I need to add something more. God supported the Roman Empire, and God wanted the seat of the Empire to be at Rome. Even now, a true Roman Emperor should exist.

“People do not support the Roman Empire nowadays. The Ghibellines have taken the imperial standard as their own, but they do not support the ideal of the Empire. The Guelfs support the French Emperor and try to suppress the imperial standard. Neither the Ghibellines nor the Guelfs deserve praise because neither group supports the ideal of the Empire — an ideal that God supports.

“Courage consecrated the Empire. Aeneas came to Italy, and he fought a war against those who would keep him from fulfilling his God-given destiny of becoming an important ancestor of the Roman people. When Aeneas went to Italy, Aeneas was shown around Latium, which was built on the future site of Rome. Pallas, whose father was Evander, the King of Latium, was old enough to go to war, and his father entrusted him to Aeneas. Unfortunately, Turnus, the leader of the forces arrayed against Aeneas, killed Pallas in battle. Aeneas avenged Pallas’ death by killing Turnus.

“Aeneas established the imperial Eagle at Latium, but his son, Ascanius, moved the Eagle to Alba Longa, where it stayed for more than 300 years. By then, Rome had been built, and three heroes of Alba Longa fought three heroes of Rome to see which city would be superior.

Two of the Roman heroes died, but the third Roman hero killed all three of the Alba Longan heroes, and the imperial Eagle went to Rome.

“The early Romans were mainly men, and they needed wives. They invited their neighbors, the Sabines, who would not allow their daughters to marry Roman men, to a festival, and when Romulus (the founder of Rome) gave a signal, the Romans fought off the Sabine men and kidnapped the young Sabine women. Romulus talked to the young Sabine women and convinced them to marry Roman men.

“Seven Kings ruled Rome over the years. Sextus Tarquinius, son of King Tarquinius Superbus, raped Lucretia, a Roman noblewoman, and as a result she committed suicide. Her brother led a rebellion that cast out King Tarquinius Superbus, the last King of the Romans. The Kingship was replaced by a republic, a kind of democracy in which leaders are elected by the people — or at least some of the people.

“The Romans fought often and won. The Eagle defeated Brennus, the leader of Gaul. The Eagle defeated Pyrrhus, the King of Epirus, who supported the Greeks.

“Titus Manlius Torquatus led the Romans to numerous victories. Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus was both a great general and a simple farmer. When the Romans ran into trouble, they requested that he leave his farm and lead the Roman soldiers against the enemy. After defeating the enemy, he retired again and worked on his farm.

“The Decii and the Fabii were prominent Roman families who produced many heroes and leaders.

“Scipio Africanus became a hero by defeating the great Carthaginian general Hannibal, who warred against Rome. When Hannibal first went to war against Rome, he achieved a notable feat: He brought war elephants to Italy by crossing the Alps from Spain into Italy. For years he roamed up and down Italy, but eventually Scipio Africanus defeated him in Africa. Again, the Eagle was triumphant.

“The story of Empire is part of your story. Catiline tried to take over political power, but the Roman orator Cicero stopped him. Catiline took refuge at Fiesole, a hill outside Florence, but he was defeated.

“All of us are a part of a much larger story. God has a plan for the world, and you are a part of that plan.

“Big events have consequences on the local level. A war of worldwide importance can definitely have an effect at the local level.

“Pompey fought Julius Caesar for power. Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon River and fought many battles around the Mediterranean. Caesar finally defeated Pompey at the Battle of Pharsalia in 48 B.C.E., Pompey fled to Egypt, and Ptolemy killed him there.

“Julius Caesar defeated the rebels and invaders and gained all the power, but he was then assassinated by a number of Romans, including Brutus and Cassius, both of whom are punished in the deepest part of the deepest circle in the Inferno. Brutus and Cassius tried to stop God’s plan for the Roman Empire. Following the assassination of Julius Caesar, many people suffered and died. Because of the action of Cassius and Brutus, civil war continued in Rome.

“Following the death of Julius Caesar, another power struggle broke out, this time between Octavian Caesar (the grand-nephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar) and Mark Antony. In 43 B.C.E., at Modena, Octavian defeated Mark Antony. In 41 B.C.E., at Perugia, Octavian defeated Lucius, Antony’s brother.

“After Mark Antony and Octavian had worked together for a while, they began fighting each other. Mark Antony allied himself with Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt. In 31 B.C.E., after Octavian defeated their forces at the Battle of Actium, a naval battle, Mark Antony and

Cleopatra fled back to Egypt. Both of them committed suicide, Cleopatra by allowing a poisonous snake to bite her. Octavian became Caesar Augustus. He became the first Roman Emperor. With him, the Roman Republic ended. So did the civil wars.

“From roughly 27 B.C.E. to 180 C.E., Italy was at peace. Of course, fighting occurred on the edges of the Roman Empire, but Italy itself was at peace. This is known as the *Pax Romana*: the Roman Peace.

“Peace is a great blessing. Life during wartime is rough. Food is scarce to get. Women sell themselves to get enough to eat. Children starve. People kill and are killed.

“When Rome was at war, the doors of the temple of Janus were kept open. Because of Caesar Augustus, the doors were closed.

“Two especially important events occurred.

“First, during the reign of Tiberius, the third Caesar (that is, the second Roman Emperor; the first Caesar was Julius), Jesus Christ was crucified. This paid the price for the sin of Adam, and at the same time Christ’s crucifixion was a new sin.

“Second, in 70 C.E., Titus conquered and destroyed Jerusalem. At the time, Titus’ father, Vespasian, was the Roman Emperor. Later, Titus became Roman Emperor, serving from 79-81 C.E. The destruction of Jerusalem was just vengeance for the death of Christ.

“I began my history of the Roman Empire in the middle by telling about Constantine and myself. Then I went back in time to the beginnings. Now I will jump ahead in time to Charlemagne. From near the end of the first century, we are going 700 years ahead in time.

“Charlemagne defended the Church against a man he dethroned: King Desiderius, the Lombard. In a later age, Charlemagne is called the Holy Roman Emperor, but he called himself simply the Roman Emperor. He became Emperor in 800 C.E. Charlemagne’s story is the continuing story of the Roman Empire.

“Now let’s look at the present age: 1300 C.E. This is another big jump in time.

“The Guelfs and Ghibellines are in conflict in Florence. Both political parties are working against the Empire.

“The Guelfs are supporting the Pope against the Holy Roman Emperor. They are against the Empire. The Guelfs are allied with the French — symbolized by the yellow lilies.

“The Ghibellines want power for themselves. The Ghibellines say that they support the Holy Roman Emperor, but they are actually more concerned with getting power for themselves.

“What is needed is the formation of a competent world government. Neither the Guelfs nor the Ghibellines are helping that to happen. Neither the Guelfs nor the Ghibellines can be trusted to properly support the Empire. Political leaders of 1300 C.E. need to realize that.

“The Empire needs to be supported, but it is not being supported.

“You have two questions. I have already answered your first question. Your second question is this: Why am I showing myself to you on this planet that is often hidden from Humankind because it is so close to the Sun?

“This small planet is Mercury. The souls, including myself, who appear before you here were too concerned about lasting fame and so we are not to be found higher in Paradise.

“It is fitting for us souls to be found on Mercury because it is a planet that is often obscured by the Sun. It is much easier to see Venus in the sky — it is the Morning Star and the Evening Star. We souls wanted fame, but now the Sun and Venus often overshadow the planet we are associated with. Of course, we are really in the Mystic Empyrean, but we appear here as a courtesy to you.

“We did good works in the living world. The codification of the Roman law is a task that God wanted to be done. However, I and the other souls were too concerned about achieving

Earthly fame while we performed our good works.

“All of us are happy. We see that we have received justice. We see that God doles out in proper proportion the fitting reward for each soul’s merit. We are in Paradise.

“Many voices blend together harmoniously. We souls help to produce the harmony that is seen among the heavenly Spheres.

“One of the souls here is Romeo di Villeneuve, a person who did great deeds, but whose great deeds went unrewarded. The name ‘Romeo’ means ‘a pilgrim to Rome.’

“Romeo was not nobly born, but he was able to get husbands for the four daughters of a count named Raymond Berenger; in fact, each daughter married a king or the brother of a king. These are the daughters and the nobles they married:

“Margaret married Louis IX ( Saint Louis).

“Eleanor married Henry III of England.

“Sancha married Richard of Cornwall (the brother of Henry III of England).

“Beatrice married Charles I of Anjou.

“However, because of Romeo’s success other people envied him, and he lost his position. Romeo then begged for his bread in exile.

“The world praises Romeo, but if the world knew what was in Romeo’s heart as he begged, the world would praise him more.”

Dante thought, *The stories of Romeo, who is in Paradise, and of Pier delle Vigne, who is among the suicides in the Inferno, are similar.*

*Both Romeo and Pier lost their positions due to the envy of other people.*

*However, Romeo’s response to losing his position was much different from the response of Pier delle Vigne. Pier, of course, committed suicide, but Romeo went begging for his bread.*

*Pier delle Vigne is the negative example — how not to react to political misfortune. Romeo is the positive example — how to properly respond to political misfortune.*

*Note also a reversal. Pier praised Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. Here we have a Byzantine Emperor — Justinian — praising Romeo di Villeneuve.*

Beatrice thought, *Learn from this, Dante. You will be in exile soon, and you will need to taste other people’s bread rather than commit suicide.*

## Chapter 7: Mercury — The Mystery of Redemption (Paradise)

Justinian sang in a mixture of Hebrew and Latin, “Hosanna, holy God of hosts, whose brightness illuminates these realms’ blessed fires.” Song is one of the arts found in Paradise; dance is another. Justinian’s soul began to dance, and the other souls joined him — the one who performed the tasks of both Emperor and Lawgiver — in the dance. Then the souls sped away and disappeared.

Dante was silent, but inwardly he was thinking, *Speak! Speak! Beatrice is always willing to truthfully answer your questions.*

But Dante was still in awe of Beatrice. Even the mention of one syllable of her name — “Be” or “trice” — made him lower his head.

But Beatrice knew what he was thinking, and she smiled at him. Dante thought, *Such a smile would make happy even a man who was about to be burned alive.*

Beatrice said to Dante, “I know that you have a question: How can just vengeance be justly avenged?”

“You know that during the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius, Jesus Christ was crucified. This was just vengeance for the sin of Adam.

“You also know that in 70 C.E., Titus, who later became a Roman Emperor, conquered and destroyed Jerusalem. This was just vengeance for the death of Christ.

“How can just vengeance be required for a previous just vengeance?”

“Listen carefully. This is important.

“Adam sinned. He was allowed to eat all of the fruit of the Garden of Eden except the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. He was asked to restrain his free will in this one matter only, but he ate the forbidden fruit. Because he ate the forbidden fruit, he was cast out of the Garden of Eden and so were Eve and every human being after them.

“Because of Adam’s sin, all Humankind was sick with sin. This illness continued for centuries. But Jesus — the Word of God — descended from Paradise to Earth.

“On Earth, Jesus added a nature to His nature. Jesus’ nature is divine, but to that nature he added a second nature: the human nature that had rebelled in the Garden of Eden. In doing so, he became fully divine and fully human.

“When the human nature was joined with Jesus’ divine nature, the human nature became pure and good, just as it was in the Garden of Eden before the rebellion.

“However, the human nature that was not joined to Jesus’ divine nature deserved to be kicked out of the Garden of Eden because of sin.

“Jesus was crucified. If we think of the Crucifixion as punishment of the human nature, the Crucifixion was entirely just and deserved.

“But if we think of the Crucifixion as punishment of Jesus’ divine nature, the Crucifixion was entirely unjust and undeserved.

“One Crucifixion occurred, but it had two different results. The Crucifixion pleased God because it paid the penalty for the sin of Adam and of Humankind. The Crucifixion also pleased a few Jews living at that time because it got rid of a Person they hated.

“The Crucifixion of Christ was just and unjust. The unjust part of the Crucifixion needed to be justly avenged. The just vengeance occurred with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

“The debt for Adam’s sin has been paid. No one should treat Humankind badly today because of what Adam did a long time ago. That debt was paid long ago, and no one owes it today.

“The debt for the unjust Crucifixion of Jesus has been paid. No one should treat Jews badly today because of what a few Jews did a long time ago. That debt was paid long ago, and no one owes it today.

“Of course, the Romans also played a role in the Crucifixion of Jesus. No one should plan a trip to Rome today so that they can slap a few Italians around.

“But now I see that you have another question. You wonder this: Why did God choose this way to pay the penalty owed by Humankind? Why did God become incarnate knowing that He would be crucified? Why didn’t God choose another way to redeem Humankind?

“Souls in Paradise know the answer. They have the inner sight and the love that enables them to know the answer.

“Many people still on Earth have tried to answer the question, but they aim arrows that miss the target. Therefore, let me explain why God’s way of redeeming Humankind was the best way.

“God is perfect. Among God’s perfections is omnibenevolence. God never sins. In God can be found this eternal beauty, as well as the other eternal beauties.

“God is also a Creator. What he creates directly is eternal, and it bears His mark. Among the things He creates directly are Angels, Adam and Eve, and the souls of human beings.

“The things that God directly creates have free will. God’s secondary creations have no choice but to obey the laws of physics and other sciences and nature.

“The things that God directly creates resemble Him and please Him. God has given them gifts: free will and the immortality of the soul. God creates these things without sin.

“Sin, however, takes away Humankind’s free will and Humankind’s resemblance to God. God’s glory is seen in the entire universe. In some places His glory can be seen more clearly. In some places His glory can be seen less clearly. Sin makes God’s glory less visible in Humankind.

“By sinning, Humankind loses dignity in favor of illicit joy. The only way to win back that dignity is by paying the price for sinning. This is Justice.

“When Adam sinned, Humankind lost the Garden of Eden, and it lost Paradise. Sinning results in the loss of free will; a habitual sinner becomes a slave to sin. If Adam had not sinned, he would have been able to stay in the Garden of Eden and never die. By sinning, he brought the experience of death to human beings.

“How could Humankind be able to pay the debt it owed because of sin? Through two ways.

“First, God could simply forgive the sin. No payment required. This is Mercy.

“Second, Humankind could — if possible — make amends for sinning. This would be Justice.

“Listen carefully.

“Given the limits of Humankind, human beings could not make amends for sin. Adam, full of the sin of pride, tried to exalt himself by disobeying God and eating the forbidden fruit. Humankind, no matter how humble it attempts to be, cannot go as low as is needed to make up for the height that Adam attempted to climb. Therefore, Humankind cannot atone for this sin without the help of God.

“And so God helped Humankind atone for this sin.

“God could have helped Humankind through Justice alone or through Mercy alone, but God chose to help Humankind through both Justice and Mercy.

“God’s incarnation and crucifixion is an act of omnibenevolence. It redeemed Humankind. From the first day of Creation until Judgment Day, no act can be as lofty or as magnificent.

“God helped Humankind through Mercy because He forgave the debt without requiring Humankind to pay it.

“God helped Humankind through Justice because the debt was repaid — Jesus on the Cross paid it. Jesus’ human nature was appropriately crucified to pay Humankind’s debt to God.

“Now let me explain a point that has arisen in my talk.

“You are thinking that God created the universe, and yet the things that are in the universe — things made of the elements — are perishable. They last for a while, and then they decay.

“As I have said, the things that God directly created — such as the Angels — will never go out of existence.

“However, the laws of nature act on the matter and energy that is in the universe and change them, and so these are indirect creations of God, and they are therefore not immortal.

“Remember that God directly created your soul, and so it is immortal.

“Also remember that God directly created the body of Adam and the body of Eve. This means that on the Day of Judgment, your body will be resurrected.

“Remember these things:

“Everything that God makes, such as Angels, is incorruptible and will not decay.”

“Your soul is given to you directly by God. It is therefore immortal.

“God directly made the bodies of your first parents: Adam and Eve. Therefore, your body will be resurrected.”



## Chapter 8: Venus — Charles Martel (Paradise)

The ancient Greeks and Romans believed that the goddess Venus infected Humankind with violent passion and so they offered sacrifices to her. And not just her, but also to her mother, Dione. And to her son, Cupid, who they believed had taken the shape of Ascanius, Aeneas' son, and as he lay in her lap, had infected Dido, the Queen of Carthage, with passion for Aeneas.

Therefore, the ancients took Venus' name and gave it to the planet that seems to woo the Sun as it stays close to it in Venus' guises as the Evening Star and the Morning Star.

Dante was not conscious of rising through the Heavens, but he knew that he had arrived on Venus when he looked at Beatrice and saw that she had grown more beautiful. The closer she came to God, the more beautiful she became.

Dante saw lights — souls — in the light of Venus, the bright and beautiful planet. He distinguished the lights just as he could distinguish sparks in a fire or just as he could distinguish between voices when two voices are singing the same note and one of the voices starts to sing a different note.

The lights were moving at different speeds that varied according to how each soul reflected God's glory. Lightning is fast, but each of these lights was faster than lightning as they came closer to Dante and Beatrice. The lights had been dancing in the Mystic Empyrean among the highest order of Angels — the Seraphim — but they had consented to appear before Dante and educate him.

Song and dance are present in Paradise. The souls in front sang "Hosanna" so sweetly that for years afterward Dante longed to hear it again.

One soul came close to Dante and Beatrice and said, "We are all ready to serve you and make you joyful. We have appeared together on this, the third Sphere, to serve you. You once wrote a poem that began, 'Oh, you whose intelligence moves the Third Sphere of the Heavens.'

"We are filled with love, and we will happily stop here and stay with you for a while."

Dante looked at Beatrice, who was filled with joy and who nodded at him to give him her approval of his asking the soul questions, and then he looked at the light who had spoken to him and asked, gently, "Who are you?"

The light who was a soul glowed more brightly and more beautifully because he was happy to serve Dante.

The soul said, "I lived for only a few years on Earth. If I had lived longer, I would have been able to avert much trouble that will afflict Earth.

"I know that you cannot see me. All you can see is this light that envelops me. This light is happiness. I am enveloped in it the way a silkworm envelops itself in silk.

"Although you cannot see me, you knew me when I was alive on Earth. We were friends. If I had lived, you would have seen much more of my friendship for you instead of just its beginning.

"My grandfather, Charles I, acquired Provence through marriage. My father, Charles II of Naples, would have passed it on to me. I also would have been heir to the Kingdom of Naples and the Kingdom of Apulia. I became King of Hungary in 1290. I would have been the ruler of Sicily except that the bad rule of my family — the House of Anjou — caused the Sicilians to rebel in the Sicilian Vespers of 30 March 1282. The Sicilians cried out against the House of

Anjou, 'Death, death to them!' Because of the Sicilians' uprising, the crown of Sicily passed from the House of Anjou to the House of Aragon."

Dante thought, *This is my friend Charles Martel, a French Angevin Prince. He died young at age 24 in a cholera epidemic. He visited Florence for a few weeks in 1294, one year before he died, and he and I knew and liked each other.*

*One need not spend a lot of time climbing the Mountain of Purgatory. Some souls spend centuries climbing the mountain, but Charles Martel died only five years ago and already his soul is in Paradise.*

Charles Martel continued, "Robert of Anjou, my brother, who will one day be King of Naples, needs to wise up. His rule is poor. Although his and my father was liberal, Robert is stingy. Working under him are men who care most for filling chests up with gold. My family has contained many good people and good rulers, but it has also contained many bad people and bad rulers."

Dante said, "I am happy to see you again, friend, and I am happy to see that you are in Paradise. I am also happy that you know how happy I am. As a saved soul in Paradise, you know about my happiness because you can read it in the place where all good begins and ends: the mind of God.

"You have made me happy; now I ask that you make me wise. Please answer these questions: How can a good father produce a bad son? How can good parents produce bad children? You have said that Charles, your father, was generous. Yet Robert, your brother, is not generous. It would seem that a generous father would produce a generous son. It would also seem that a greedy father would produce a greedy son."

Charles Martel replied, "I will try to explain this to you. First, let me clear up a false belief. People of our time believed that the stars and planets influenced our characters and our lives. They also believed that Providence influenced our characters and our lives through influencing the stars and planets.

"A later age will know that the stars and planets have no influence on us at all; astrology is not a science. Of course, God is important to us. For one thing, God created us and the universe, and God keeps the universe and us in existence. If not for God, nothing would exist.

"In addition, God created such things as sex, heredity, and — as a later age will learn — something called evolution. When God created the universe, He created the physical laws that govern the universe. In a later age, Catholic nuns will do things right. They will teach evolution in science class, and they will teach creation in religion class.

"God knew that human beings would be different, and He wanted them to be different. They have individual characteristics and potential capabilities. These individual characteristics and potential capabilities are needed in society. Neither God nor society wants all human beings to be exactly alike. Different human beings are capable of doing different things, and different things are needed to make a functioning society.

"Through inheriting different traits passed down from both male and female ancestors, humans are born with potentialities that can be developed — or not developed — through environment and education and the use of free will in making choices.

"It is not the case that nobility of character is always passed on from a noble father or mother to a child. The nobility of character is acquired in part through the characteristics and potential capabilities that one inherits, and in part through education and environment, but mainly it is acquired — or not acquired — through choices freely made. The most important choice that anyone can make is whether to be a good person or a bad person. A good father can have a good and/or a bad son. A bad father can have a good and/or a bad son. Good parents can have good and/or bad children. Bad parents can have good and/or bad children.

“God’s laws of heredity work well. Without them, chaos would reign. God knows what He is doing. Do I need to say more?”

Dante replied, “No. God cannot fail, and God created the physical laws of the universe.”

Charles Martel asked, “If no social order existed, would this be good for Humankind?”

Dante replied, “No. Obviously, social order is needed.”

Charles Martel asked, “Do human beings need different characteristics and different capabilities in order to have a functioning society? According to the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, different characteristics and different capabilities are necessary in order to have a functioning society.

“Many characteristics and capabilities are needed. One man is born with the potential to be a giver of laws, as was Solon, who gave laws to Athens and who was one of the Seven Sages of Greece. Another man is born with the potential to be a king and war leader, as was Xerxes, King of Persia and leader of armies. Another man is born with the potential to be a priest, as was Melchizedek, whom Genesis identified as ‘the priest of the most high God.’ Another man is born with the potential to be a mechanic, as was Daedalus, who was imprisoned with his son, Icarus. To escape, Daedalus built wings for himself and his son. But in the mythic story, Icarus flew too near the Sun, the wax melted and released the feathers, and Icarus fell into the sea and drowned.

“Nature gives potential to humans without regard to familial status. A great son can be born to a base father, and a base son can be born to a great father. The same is true for females.

“Good parents can produce bad children. Bad parents can produce good children. The children can be very different from each other even when they share the same parents.

“Esau and Jacob were twins, but they were very different. Esau was a hunter in the fields, but Jacob lived in tents.

“Look at Romulus, the co-founder of Rome with his brother, Remus. His father was not royal or aristocratic, but Romulus’ deeds were so notable that people could not believe that his father was basely born, and so they believed that Romulus’ father was Mars, the Roman god of war.

“Now that you understand this, let me make a further point. One’s characteristics and potential capabilities ought to be suitable for one’s life work. If a person has characteristics and potential capabilities that are not suited to the kind of work that person does, that person will fail.

“Society should pay attention to this. If it did, both society and individual human beings would be better off.

“Unfortunately, a person who has the characteristics and potential capabilities to be a warrior is forced to be a priest, and a person who has the characteristics and potential capabilities to be a priest is forced to be a king.

“All too often, people find themselves doing work that they are not suited to do and that could be much better done by someone else.”

## Chapter 9: Venus — Cuanza, Folquet, Rahab (Paradise)

Dante the Poet thought, *Clemence of Hapsburg, your husband Charles Martel told me prophecies of plots against you and your relatives. But he told me, "Don't reveal the specifics of what I have said. Let time pass and reveal the plots." Because I gave him this promise, I can say only that those who harm you will regret it.*

But now that soul who was Charles Martel looked at the Sun. This saved soul looked at the Eternal Good, but living human beings too often look away from the Eternal Good.

And now another light came toward Dante. This saved soul glowed with the prospect of helping him.

Beatrice looked at Dante and nodded, giving her assent to his desire to speak with the saved soul.

Dante said to the saved soul, "Blessed soul, you know my thoughts because you can see into the mind of God, and God knows my thoughts. Therefore, you know my questions. Please answer them."

The saved soul, who received joy from giving joyously to others, replied, "I lived in the March of Treviso, and my family castle was located on the hill of Romano. My mother dreamed of a burning torch before she gave birth to Ezzelino III, my brother, who was a bloodthirsty tyrant who now stands deep in the boiling river of blood in the Inferno.

"My name is Cunizza, and I appear to you here on Venus because much of my life before I repented was filled with excessive sexual desire."

Dante thought, *Cunizza, who died in 1279, is the sister of the tyrant Ezzelino, who died in 1259 and who is in the Inferno because of the blood he spilled when he was tyrant. Cunizza was the lover of Sordello, one of the late repentant in Purgatory. She left her husband for him. She had lots of husbands and lovers, and she had lots of sex. Cunizza fell in love easily. Of course, she still had free will and the ability to tell right from wrong. In later life, she was a good person and did many good deeds. Sinners can repent and end up in Paradise.*

Cunizza continued, "I had many husbands and lovers while I was alive, but I repented. I can recall my sins, but I have drunk from the stream Lethe, and I do not feel the sting of my sins. All I feel is forgiveness, both forgiveness by God and forgiveness by myself. Gladly I forgive the excessive love that I had because when I repented, my excessive passionate love became *caritas*: love for all Humankind and for God. We saved souls in Paradise do not beat ourselves up because of our sins. We know that God has forgiven us, and we forgive ourselves.

"This soul beside me has left great fame behind on Earth. His fame will last 500 years. A person who achieves excellence in the living world can achieve a fame that will remain as a second life after the person's physical body has died.

"And yet this soul's remembered excellence means nothing to the people who live between the Tagliamento and the Adige rivers in Italy. These people do not repent. Not even war and the threat of war makes them repent.

"Let me make prophecies: The blood of Paduans will flow because they refuse to do what they ought to do."

Beatrice thought, *In 1314, Can Grande della Scala will defeat the Paduans outside Vicenza. The Paduans should, but do not, have allegiance to the Empire.*

Cunizza continued, "An arrogant man reigns in Treviso; his fate has already been decided."

Beatrice thought, *Rizzardo da Camino, the arrogant Lord of Treviso, will be murdered in 1312 while he plays chess.*

Cunizza continued, “The godless shepherd of Feltro will commit a crime so great that the Malta, a papal prison near Lake Bolsena, has never held a criminal as bad as he. The Ferraran blood that he will spill would fill a vast vat. He will spill it only to prove that he is loyal to his party. Such actions will become common in that region.”

Beatrice thought, *In 1314, a group of Ghibelline refugees will become the guests of Alessandro Novella, the Bishop of Feltro, a Guef who will treacherously turn them over to their enemies, who will behead them.*

Cunizza continued, “My words may seem harsh, but they are justified by their truth.”

She then joined the other souls, and they danced.

The soul who had been beside Cunizza and whose excellence and fame she had mentioned now glowed brightly red, like sunlight shining through a ruby.

Joy makes souls in Paradise bright. Joy makes living people smile. No joy is in the Inferno, only dark minds.

Dante said to the soul who was glowing red, “God can see all, and you can see into the mind of God, and therefore you know every thought I have. Why wait, then, to answer my questions? If our positions were reversed, I certainly would quickly answer your questions.”

The saved soul replied, “I lived in a country on the Mediterranean: France. In particular, I lived in Marseilles. My name is Folquet. Some people still remember my name.”

Dante thought, *Folquet, who died in 1231, was a famous troubadour. Later in life, he became a Cistercian monk, and then he became the Bishop of Toulouse. He was a gifted poet.*

Folquet continued, “In life, I loved passionately, and so I appear to you here on Venus. My passionate love on Earth rivaled that of famous lovers.

“The passionate love I felt rivaled that of Dido, Queen of Carthage. Pygmalion, Dido’s brother, killed her husband, Sichaeus, and she fled to North Africa, where she founded Carthage. Aeneas, blown off course by a storm sent by Juno, landed at Carthage, and Dido fell in love with him although she had pledged to remain faithful to her husband. Dido and Aeneas had a love affair until Jupiter, through Mercury, reminded Aeneas that he had a destiny to fulfill in Italy: to become an important ancestor of the Roman people. Out of grief, Dido committed suicide. Dido wronged both Sichaeus, her late husband, and Creusa, Aeneas’ late wife, who had died during the fall of Troy. Dido is in the Inferno among the lustful.

“The passionate love I felt rivaled that of Phyllis, a Thracian princess who loved Demophoön, the son of Theseus. They were supposed to be married, but when he did not show up at the altar, she hanged herself.

“The passionate love I felt rivaled that of Deianira, the wife of Hercules. He fell out of love with her and pursued Iole instead. She believed that a shirt soaked in the blood of Nessus, a Centaur (who had tried to rape her, but whom Hercules killed) would restore Hercules’ love for her. Nessus had told her that, but he tricked her. His blood was like acid to Hercules, and Hercules killed himself to escape the agony that the Centaur’s blood caused him. Deianira also killed herself. Nessus is in the Inferno. He is one of the guards at the river of boiling blood.

“But I and the other saved souls you see here repented while we were alive, and so we have no need to repent here. Instead, we smile here because we know that God has forgiven us. God wants all human beings to repent on Earth so that He can forgive them.

“All of us souls appear to you here on Venus, whose Sphere is the last that the shadow of the Earth touches. According to your medieval beliefs, the Earth is at the center of the universe, and around it are the Spheres containing the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, and so on. Imagine the Sun’s rays striking the Earth. The Earth casts a shadow that is cone-shaped. The Earth’s shadow sometimes envelopes the Moon in an eclipse and is large enough to envelop Mercury and touches the Sphere in which is Venus. God is doing you a favor by

letting the universe appear to you in accordance with your medieval beliefs. A later age will know that the Sun is at the center of the solar system and that Mercury, Venus, and the Earth orbit the Sun. But God the Creator can make the universe appear to you in the way you expect it to appear. That way, you will not be overwhelmed with too much new information and will be able to retain more of the important information, such as that given to you by us saved souls who appear to you in these Spheres but who are really in the Mystic Empyrean with God.

“But now let me answer a question that I know you have. You wish to know the identity of this soul by me. This soul glows like crystal water through which sunshine streams.

“This soul was the first to rise out of Limbo when Christ harrowed Hell. This is Rahab, who was once the whore of Jericho. Joshua sent two spies to Jericho, Rahab allowed them to enter her house, and when soldiers came looking for the two spies, she hid them under bundles of flax on the roof of her house. The two spies promised that she and her family would be spared when Joshua’s soldiers conquered the city if she would hang a red cord out of a window of her house. The two spies and Jacob’s soldiers kept that promise.

“Rahab helped make possible Joshua’s first conquest in the Holy Land, an area of the world in which Pope Boniface VIII seems to have little interest.

“Your own city, Florence, was founded by Lucifer and by Mars, the god of war. Your city creates flowers of gold — the gold coins that are the Florentine florins — and these golden flowers turn priests and popes who should be shepherds into wolves that prey on the sheep that shepherds should protect.

“Those who should study the Gospel and other books of the Bible ignore them. People study Canon Law and make notes in the margins, but they engage in this study only so they can make money.

“The Pope and the Cardinals think only about making money. They do not think about Nazareth, where the Angel Gabriel opened his wings at the Annunciation to Mary.

“But the Vatican and other places in Rome where flowed the blood of martyrs who gave their lives for God will soon be free of this adulterous passion for gold.”

Beatrice thought, *Here and on the previous planets, we saw souls who were associated with a planet for negative reasons. The shadow of the Earth touched and corrupted these Spheres. First, the souls seen on the Moon did not keep their religious vows. Second, the souls seen on Mercury were excessively concerned about Earthly fame. Finally, the souls seen on Venus are those who took passionate love to an extreme. On the Sun and on the other planets we have yet to visit, the souls we will see will be associated with these Spheres for a positive reason — for something they had and have rather than for something they lacked.*

## Chapter 10: Sun — Saint Thomas Aquinas (Paradise)

God the Father is the Creator. The Son is the Word of God. Together, they breathe forth the Essence of Love, aka the Holy Ghost. Throughout the universe, signs of the Creator can be seen and felt.

God the Creator loves His creation and contemplates it.

Consider for a moment the planet Earth and the Sun. Imagine that the equator forms a wheel that extends into space. Imagine that the orbit of the Earth around the Sun (or, as Dante the Pilgrim believed, imagine that the orbit of the Sun around the Earth) forms a wheel.

The two wheels meet. Sometimes the Sun is above the equator, and sometimes the Sun is below the equator. This causes the seasons.

This relationship is absolutely correct. If the Sun were sometimes way above the equator and sometimes way below the equator, the Earth's seasons would be extreme. If the Sun stayed always above the equator and did not move, the Earth's seasons would always stay the same and would not change. The relationship of the parts and the whole is absolutely correct for seasons that will support life on Earth.

The universe is a great work of art, and we should contemplate it. God contemplates His own creation, and we should likewise contemplate it.

Pay attention to the above. It is important. What is to come is also important.

Dante was in the Sun with Beatrice. Dante had not been aware that he was rising to the Sun until he was in the Sun, just like he is not aware that a thought is coming until he has that thought.

As before, Beatrice guided their ascent, which took place instantaneously.

The Sun is the brightest thing that living human beings can see, but Dante saw saved souls on the Sun who were brighter than the Sun. In Paradise, the brightness of saved souls surpasses the brightness of the Sun.

No genius, no art, and no skill is capable of showing living human beings how bright are the saved souls of Paradise. Living people on Earth must make it to Paradise and experience this for themselves. The saved souls constantly experience God, and they constantly experience bliss.

Beatrice said to Dante, "Give thanks to God, Who is the Sun to Angels, by Whose grace you have arrived at the Sun."

Hearing Beatrice, Dante readily and willingly and enthusiastically gave thanks to God. He thanked God so strongly that he even forgot Beatrice.

This pleased Beatrice. She smiled, and Dante saw her beauty and became aware of his surroundings.

Lights who were saved souls circled Beatrice and Dante. They were like the halo of light that sometimes surrounds Latona's daughter: Diana, aka the Moon. They were like a crown for Dante and Beatrice.

The saved souls sang as they circled them, and that song is one of the delights awaiting the repentant after they die and go to Paradise.

The lights circled Dante and Beatrice three times and then stopped. They were like dancing ladies who stopped so they could listen to new notes and catch a new rhythm.

One of the saved souls spoke to Dante: "You are blessed by God, who kindles true love that increases the more it loves. You have been allowed to ascend into Paradise. From Paradise, no one descends unless they will later ascend again."

Beatrice thought, *Saint Paul was allowed to visit Paradise before he died. Of course, he returned to Paradise after he died. Dante will return to Paradise after he dies. He is saved.*

The saved soul continued, “Because God has shown His grace to you, we will of course help you by giving you information. None of us saved souls would refuse to give your thirsty soul wine from a flask; that would be like a moving stream refusing to move to the sea.

“I know that you want to know who these souls are who are the flowers in the crown around this lady who is your guide.

“I am a Dominican monk. Saint Dominic led me and many others along a path where all may be fed if they do not stray from the path. I am Thomas Aquinas.”

Beatrice thought, *Thomas Aquinas was born in 1224, and he died at age 50 in 1274. Dante was born in 1265, so he was nine years old when Thomas Aquinas died. Thomas Aquinas will become Saint Thomas Aquinas in 1323, two years after Dante will die. Thomas Aquinas is much respected now, in 1300, but he will be much more respected later. He will be the dominant Catholic theologian. He will be regarded as the greatest medieval philosopher. Saint Thomas believed in both revealed truth, such as the revelations that we have in sacred scripture, and in discovered truth, such as we find by using our reason. He argued that the two kinds of truth were compatible. Moses Maimonides, a great Jewish thinker, believed the same thing.*

*In this first circle are 12 souls, and they surround Dante and me like the numbers on a clock. All of the 12 souls are male. Later, a second circle of 12 souls will join the first circle. The number 24 is important in the Bible — for example, in the Book of Revelation there are 24 elders.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, “I will tell you about the other souls. Look at each soul as I explain who the soul is. This soul to my right is my teacher, Albert of Cologne, aka Albertus Magnus, aka Albert the Great.”

Beatrice thought, *Albert the Great died in 1280, and he will be canonized in 1931. Albert the Great is known as the Universal Doctor, a name that reflects his great knowledge. He commented widely on the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle. Like Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great was a Dominican. Thomas Aquinas went to Cologne in 1248 to study under him.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, “The next soul is Gratian, who smiles brightly. He served well in two courts of law, and Paradise is happy to welcome him.”

Beatrice thought, *Gratian is Italian. He was a Benedictine monk, and he is known as the father of canon law. Gratian sought to harmonize Church and civil laws, thereby allowing canon law to be correctly interpreted. His magnum opus is A Concordance of Discordant Regulations, or Gratian’s Decretals, which appeared between 1140 and 1150. Dante finds it interesting that he sees Gratian here. One of Dante’s criticisms of the Catholic Church is that it does not spend enough time studying scripture; instead, it spends too much time studying Church law. Yet here he sees Gratian, the great compiler of Church law. What can he learn from this? He can learn that Church law is important, but all of us have to be careful to use it well, neither overvaluing nor undervaluing it.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, “The next soul is Peter. Like the poor widow, he offered what he had to the Church.”

Beatrice thought, *Peter Lombard lived in the 12th century, and he was the bishop of Paris. He wrote Libri Sententiarum, aka The Books of Opinions, which brought together the opinions of the Church fathers on four key subjects: the Godhead, the incarnation, creation, and the sacraments. Peter Lombard called his writings his “widow’s mite,” a reference to the New Testament story (Luke 21:1-4), about a widow who brought her small offering to the temple. This is the story: “And Jesus looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the*



*treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither the small amount of two mites. And Jesus said, 'Of a truth I say to you, that this poor widow has cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in to the offerings of God: but she of her penury has cast in all the living that she had.'*"

Thomas Aquinas continued, "The fifth light is the most beautiful of all of us. His love was passionate, as can be seen in his 'Song of Songs.' Because of his passionate love, people debated whether he is in Paradise or in the Inferno. He is the wisest of all, and no one has as much wisdom as he has. A second person has never arisen with as much wisdom as Solomon had."

Beatrice thought, *This wise soul is Solomon, David's son by Bathsheba. Though Saint Augustine believed that King Solomon was damned, Solomon is the most beautiful in this group. Solomon had a dream in which God asked him what he wanted, and Solomon wanted wisdom: "an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and bad" (I Kings 3:9). God granted him that, as well as other things that Solomon did not ask for. Solomon used his wisdom to resolve a dispute between two women who both claimed to be the mother of a living baby. He ordered the child to be cut in half, and each mother to be given half of the child. One of the women spoke up and asked Solomon to give the child to the other woman. The other woman remained silent. Solomon knew that the woman who had spoken up is the real mother of the child because the real mother would not want the child killed.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, "The soul next to him knew, while he was in the living world, what an Angel is and what an Angel does."

Beatrice thought, *This soul is Dionysius the Areopagite. In the 1st century, Saint Paul converted an Athenian named Dionysius the Areopagite (Acts 17:34). People incorrectly believed that Dionysius the Areopagite had written a highly influential book about Angels titled On the Heavenly Hierarchy, aka The Celestial Hierarchy. He did not write that book, but as Thomas Aquinas said about him, while he was in the living world, he knew what an Angel is and what an Angel does.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, "Inside this light, which is tiny, is the great defender of the Christian age. Saint Augustine used his words."

Beatrice thought, *This soul is Paulus Orosius, who was a Spanish cleric and historian. He was a 5th-century contemporary of Saint Augustine. Some pagans believed that the arrival of Christianity had made the world worse than it had been, so Orosius wrote seven books opposing that belief. These books were called Seven Books of History Against the Pagans.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, "You must be eager to know who this light, the eighth, is. This soul, who is now in the realm of all good, experienced much evil on Earth. He was martyred, and his remains are now at the Church of Saint Peter in Pavia, which is in Lombardy."

Beatrice thought, *This soul is Boethius, a Roman, who wrote On the Consolation of Philosophy while he was in prison. In 524 C.E., he was executed for treason — although he was innocent — after he completed the book. After my body died, Dante read On the Consolation of Philosophy and was consoled by it. Boethius is also known as Saint Severinus; his full name was Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, "The next soul is Isidore."

Beatrice thought, *Isidore of Seville was a Spaniard who died in 636 C.E. He wrote a highly influential encyclopedia of the scientific knowledge of his time.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, "The next soul is Bede."

Beatrice thought, *The Venerable Bede, an Anglo-Saxon monk who died in 735 C.E., is known as the father of English history. He wrote the five-volume Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, “The next soul is Richard, who is known for his contemplations.”

Beatrice thought, *Richard of Saint Victor died in 1173 C.E. He was called the Great Contemplator after he wrote a book titled De Contemplatione. He was an important 12th-century mystic, and he was prior of the illustrious Augustinian monastery at Saint Victor near Paris.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, “This soul is Siger, who mourned the length of his mortal life. He taught at the University of Paris, before which was the Rue de Fouarre, aka the Street of Straw. He taught truths for which he was hated.”

Beatrice thought, *This soul is Siger of Brabant, who was a Belgian whose beliefs opposed those of Saint Thomas. For example, Siger thought that the world could have always existed. He also doubted that the soul is immortal — since he is in Paradise, he has happily discovered that he was wrong about that. He and Saint Thomas Aquinas had philosophical disagreements while they were alive, but they get along well in Paradise. Siger of Brabant was even accused of heresy, and yet we see him in Paradise. What can Dante learn from this? He can learn that many disagreements between scholars are not between good people and bad people. He can learn that people of good will can disagree. Sometimes, people are mistaken, but they are still true seekers of wisdom.*

And now the wheel of souls moved the way a clock moves, and the souls sang a song. Parts moved together, in harmony, as in the act of creation. Parts made a whole, and God’s Bride was with the Bridegroom. Joy and eternity were one.

## Chapter 11: Sun — Saint Thomas Aquinas Praises Saint Francis of Assisi (Paradise)

Dante the Poet thought, *People pursue many activities in such a way that keeps them rooted to the Earth rather than helping them to rise to Paradise. Some people seek to rise to material gain in law. Some people seek to rise to material gain in medicine. Some people seek to benefit by acquiring religious sinecures. Some people seek to rise to political power by using force or fraud. Some people plan thefts. Some people seek to rise to material gain by planning affairs of state. Some people seek the pleasures of the flesh. Some people are lazy.*

*But I did not worry about such things because I was magnificently welcomed to Paradise with Beatrice.*

The saved souls were dancing, and when each soul had returned to the place it had been before the dance started, they stopped dancing and stood still like candles in a circular chandelier.

Thomas Aquinas said to Dante, “I reflect the rays of God, and I look into God’s mind and I see your thoughts. I see that you are perplexed by some of the things I said. You want me to speak plainly and clearly and explain the things that perplex you.

“Two things perplex you. One, I said, ‘Saint Dominic led me and many others along a path where all may be fed if they do not stray from the path.’ And two, I said, ‘A second person has never arisen with as much wisdom as Solomon had.’ I must speak more clearly.

“The wisdom of Providence is so great that living human beings cannot understand it. But be aware that Providence wants the Church, aka the Bride of Christ, to be able to go to her Bridegroom, aka Christ, with her faithfulness and goodness intact, and so Providence sent two princes to reform her and make her well again.

“One reformer on Earth was like one of the Seraphim, the highest order of Angels, who are symbolic of the highest love for God. This reformer stressed repentance of one’s sins to make oneself closer to God.

“The other reformer on Earth was like one of the Cherubim, the second highest order of Angels, who are symbolic of the highest kind of wisdom. This reformer stressed getting doctrine right.

“The Church needed — and needs — to be reformed, and these two saints in different but complementary ways sought to reform it. Saint Francis stressed repentance of one’s sins to make oneself closer to God. Saint Dominic stressed getting doctrine right. Praise of one of the reformers is also praise for the other reformer because both reformers had the same goal in mind: Reform the Church to make it stronger.

“I myself will speak of only one reformer.”

Dante the Pilgrim thought, *The two great reformers of the 13th century were Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Dominic. Saint Dominic is from Spain, and Saint Francis is from France. Saint Dominic’s focus is on the gifts of the mind, and Saint Francis’ focus is on the gifts of the heart. A proper Church needs both wisdom and love. Thomas Aquinas is a Dominican monk, so I expect him to talk about Saint Dominic.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, “In Assisi was born a reformer. The name ‘Assisi’ can be interpreted as ‘A man has arisen,’ but a more accurate name would be ‘Orient,’ or ‘A Sun has arisen.’”

Dante the Pilgrim thought, *I was wrong. Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican monk, is going to speak about Saint Francis of Assisi. He has said enough that I know that he will praise Saint*

*Francis. Saint Francis was a wandering saint. He took vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. He was a missionary who visited parts of the world devoted to Islam. Thomas Aquinas is not against the Franciscans. He knows that the two orders of monks are on the same side. Down on Earth, I have seen these two orders of monks engage in a destructive kind of competition. That Saint Thomas is going to tell me about Saint Francis shows something about wisdom. Don't be afraid to learn from other sources and from traditions other than your own. Although Saint Thomas is a Dominican, he knows that studying the story of Saint Francis can lead to wisdom. In Paradise there is no jealousy between the Dominicans and the Franciscans because they know that they are on the same side.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, "This reformer, even as a youth, showed holiness. He even made his father angry, preferring doing that to leaving something undone for God.

"This reformer loved a certain lady, whom other people preferred to flee from as if she were death.

"This reformer even appeared in court, with his father present, to marry this lady. This reformer loved this lady more and more each day.

"This lady had been married before, and she remained unmarried for over 11 centuries before she married a second time. No one loved her for over 1100 years. She had been alone all that time.

"She had been alone although it was due to her that Amyclas, lying on a bed of seaweed, was able to be unfrightened when Julius Caesar, whose word could terrify the world, demanded to be ferried across the Adriatic Sea. Amyclas had no possessions, and therefore he did not worry about losing them.

"She had been alone although it was her who climbed up the Cross to be with Jesus while Mary remained at the foot of the Cross.

"No doubt you know of whom I am speaking. I am speaking of Saint Francis, who married Lady Poverty, whose first Bridegroom was Jesus Himself."

Dante thought, *When Saint Francis was still young, he decided to forego the pursuit of wealth and instead be poor. In figurative terms, he married Lady Poverty. Of course, Lady Poverty is not someone people normally choose to consort with. Saint Francis always wanted to do the right thing. In 1207, when Francis was 25 years old, he sold some possessions of his father — a horse and a loaf of bread — and he gave the money to a church. This enraged his father, who made Francis appear before the Bishop of Assisi. His father asked Francis to agree to forfeit his right of inheritance, and Francis gladly agreed, thus marrying Lady Poverty.*

*Poverty is not necessarily a good thing. Christians and everyone else should work to relieve poverty. It is much better that all people have food, shelter, and clothing than that some people be so poor that they have to do without. If poverty has any advantage, it is that a poor person is more likely to lack pride and more likely to turn to God than a rich person is.*

*But voluntary poverty can be a very good thing indeed. Saint Francis chose voluntary poverty. He renounced trying to gather as much material wealth as he could so that he could do the work that God wanted him to do.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, "The marriage of Saint Francis and Lady Poverty was fruitful. Soon other people became followers of Saint Francis. Saint Francis and Lady Poverty loved each other, and their love inspired other people. One such follower was Saint Bernard. He cast his shoes off and ran to follow Saint Francis, and even though he ran he thought he was slow. Giles and Sylvester also followed Saint Francis."

Dante thought, *Saint Francis and Giles were out walking when they came across a beggar woman. Saint Francis had nothing to give her, as he was wearing a simple, much-worn habit with a bit of rope for a belt. Giles, however, was wearing a coat. Saint Francis told him, "Give*

it to her.” Giles handed the beggar woman the coat, and he became one of the first Franciscans.

Thomas Aquinas continued, “Saint Francis had a family. He was married to Lady Poverty, and his followers were part of his family.”

Beatrice thought, *In the Inferno, Brunetto Latini was unfruitful. He did speak of Dante as his son, but Brunetto Latini’s doing so was a way for him to be remembered. If Dante becomes famous, and he will, then Brunetto Latini will be famous because he was a teacher or a mentor for Dante. A more fruitful family is one in which all do good work. Brunetto Latini wrote for fame, and his writings will perish except for scholars researching Dante. Saint Francis’ family is still doing good work. The Franciscans still do many good deeds throughout the world, and 700 years from now they will continue to do many good deeds throughout the world.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, “Saint Francis and his family wore a humble cord for a belt. He was not ashamed that his father was Bernardine, a merchant. He appeared before Pope Innocent III, who provisionally approved the order of Saint Francis. His followers grew, and in 1123, Pope Honorarius III officially approved the order of Saint Francis.

“Then Saint Francis went to Egypt to speak before the Sultan and try to convert him. Saint Francis was hoping to be martyred.”

Dante thought, *Yes, Saint Francis wanted to be martyred, but he was so likable that the Sultan treated him well.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, “Saint Francis failed to convert the Sultan, and therefore he returned to Italy. During the two years before his death, he bore the wounds of Christ. This was his final seal.”

Dante thought, *Saint Francis received the stigmata. The stigmata are the wounds of Christ. These unexplained markings are on the hands and feet and on the side of the person receiving them. In Saint Francis’ case, they are regarded as a miracle. The stigmata are Saint Francis’ final seal. A seal, of course, is used to seal envelopes. Hot wax is dropped across the folded part of the envelope and then a seal of some kind is pressed into the wax. The seal indicates that this is a genuine letter, not a fake. Saint Francis was genuine, not a fake. The seal indicates that the letter is finished and approved. Saint Francis’ life was finished and approved: He came as close to perfection as a living human being can, and he entered Paradise. Near the end of his life, Saint Francis was a fully completed work of art.*

Thomas Aquinas continued, “When Francis died, he called on his followers to love Lady Poverty. When Francis died, he loved Lady Poverty.

“What other kind of person should be a reformer like Saint Francis? Who can help the Church to keep a straight course in dangerous waters? Such a person was Saint Dominic, the leader of the order of monks to which I belong. A true follower of Saint Dominic will see riches in the hold of the ship.

“But the followers of Saint Dominic have grown greedy. They stray from the true path to untrue pastures. The farther Dominican monks get away from Saint Dominic, the less milk they bring back.

“Some Dominican monks stay close to Saint Dominic, but they are few. To make cowls for each of them would take little cloth.

“I have tried to speak plainly and to make clear to you the meaning of ‘a path where all may be fed if they do not stray from the path.’ I hope that you have understood me.”

Beatrice thought, *You are supposed to learn from this, Dante. Like Saint Francis, you will be poor. You will also be in exile. One thing that you have to do is to choose your reaction to what happens to you. One kind of reaction is to commit suicide. That kind of reaction, of course, will get you a place in the Inferno forever: Remember Pier delle Vigne. Another kind of*

*reaction is to embrace your fate. Saint Francis embraced poverty. Dante, you can choose to do your best in the face of poverty and exile.*

*You also need to learn that wisdom is about seeing things in the right relationship. The Sun and the Earth are in the right relationship to have seasons and to support life. The Franciscans and the Dominicans need to have the right relationship, which is to be on the same side and to work for the good of the Church. The Church needs to recognize the importance of both love and wisdom.*

*Scholarship and wisdom are two different things, although learned scholars can be wise. Thomas Aquinas is a very learned soul here. However, Saint Francis was not known for scholarship. Nevertheless, both Thomas Aquinas and Saint Francis were and are wise. Wisdom is a broader concept than many people assume.*

*Let's think about the way that we accumulate knowledge. One of Humankind's greatest inventions has been writing because we can now write down what we learn. A person can study and acquire wisdom, but when that person dies, those insights can be lost unless that person has written down his or her thoughts. When a person writes a book that appears in a library, that person is making his or her insights available communally — someone else can read that book and learn those insights.*

*In addition, the other people who read that book can build on its insights. They can publish their own books that contain their own insights. These insights can build up over the years. For one thing, we don't need to keep reinventing the wheel generation after generation. The wheel has already been invented. New generations can figure out better ways of using the wheel.*

*Books have a major advantage over the oral transmission of information. In Africa, storytellers, who were called griots, passed along information orally. It was said that when a griot died, a library died. It would be much better if the griots wrote down what they know. That way, a library will not die when a griot dies.*

*When a person can write a good book and does not write that book, it is as if a child has died.*

*Still, wisdom does not mean book-learning, although book-learning is important. A person such as Saint Francis is known for his love, and love can be a kind of wisdom. Love can be a way of knowing what is important.*

## Chapter 12: Sun — Saint Bonaventure Praises Saint Dominic (Paradise)

The moment that Thomas Aquinas stopped speaking, the circle of souls began to revolve and dance again. Before it had revolved in a complete circle, a second circle of souls joined it.

Beatrice thought, *Two facts about wisdom are that it is communal and it is cumulative. We see that it is communal because these souls are in groups. We see that it is cumulative because a second group of souls has joined the first group of souls. The two wheels of souls are interacting with each other. One of the things that this means is that wisdom consists of, in part, understanding parts and wholes. Wisdom is, in part, understanding the way that things fit together and the way that things interact with each other.*

The second circle of souls interacted with the first group of souls, matching motion with motion and song with song.

The two groups fit together. They were like two rainbows — the two rainbows that appear when the goddess Juno calls Iris to appear to her. One rainbow indicates that Iris is the messenger of the gods; the other rainbow indicates Iris' double splendor when she attends to the Queen of the gods. Wisdom is doubly splendid.

The two groups fit together. They were like the voice of a caller and the voice of an echo. People of wisdom magnify and complete the voices of other people of wisdom.

The two groups fit together. They were like the rainbow that God put in the sky to assure human beings that the world will never again drown under a great flood. People of wisdom can prevent calamities and reassure human beings.

The two groups danced and sang together, and the outer circle of souls responded with love to the inner circle of souls.

The two groups ceased dancing and singing at the same moment just as two eyes will open or close at the same time according to our desire. The actions of the two groups were in harmony.

One soul from the newly arrived group of souls spoke. Dante turned to that soul; Dante was like the needle of a compass that immediately points to the North Pole and the North Star.

The saved soul spoke, "The Church has two reformers who are like the two wheels of a two-wheeled chariot. Thomas Aquinas has praised one of the reformers: Saint Francis, who was my guide. I was a Franciscan monk. Now I want to praise the other reformer: Saint Dominic. One reformer should not be mentioned without the other reformer because both sought to make the Church stronger. Both fought on the same side in the same battle. The Church needed to be reformed, and these two reformers, in different but complementary ways, rose to the challenge.

"The soldiers of the Church were few and fearful and divided although Jesus had spilled His blood for them, so God the Father sent the Church two great reformers.

"In Spain one great reformer was born. He was born at Calaroga in Old Castile. There the coat of arms is quartered. On one side a lion is above a castle. On the other side a castle is above a lion, and so one lion is subject and one lion is sovereign.

"This great reformer is God's holy athlete. He was kind to friends but not to enemies. His mind was and is powerful and extraordinary. His mind made his mother dream when she was pregnant with him. Saint Dominic's mother dreamed that she would give birth to a dog — a black-and-white dog that held a flaming torch in its mouth. This dream was a prophecy. Dominicans are called *Domini canes*, or the hounds of the Lord. Black and white are the colors

of the Dominican habit — the clothing worn by the Dominicans. The flaming torch is a symbol of the zeal of the Dominican order.

“Francis of Assisi wed Lady Poverty. Saint Dominic also had a wedding; he was wedded to Christian Faith when he was baptized. Saint Dominic and Lady Faith pledged mutual salvation to each other. Because of his baptism, Saint Dominic was saved from original sin, and he devoted his life to saving Lady Faith from heresy. When he was baptized, his godmother answered for him. She had had a dream: She had dreamed that Dominic had a star on his forehead. This dream was prophetic: The star meant that Dominic would have great intelligence, and it meant that he would be a guide for Humankind just like the North Star is a guide for travelers.

“Dominic’s name reveals what he is, and it was chosen for that reason. His name means ‘belonging to the Lord.’ In my opinion, he was chosen specially by Christ to be His aide in the Church’s garden.

“From early childhood he made it known that he was a servant of Christ. He also made it known that he loved the first counsel given by Jesus: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit.’ He showed his love of voluntary poverty early. Often, his nurse would find that he had crawled out of bed and was sleeping on the floor.

“His father was well named: Felix means ‘happy.’ His mother was well named: Giovanna means ‘grace of God.’ Not everyone is well named. Some people who study so they can bear the names of Doctor or Ecclesiastical Lawyer do so because they want worldly gain — not because they want eternal gain.

“He became a remarkable theologian. Figuratively, he inspected the vineyards to make sure that the vines did not wither.

“He requested something from the Pope. At one time, Popes treated the deserving poor well, but now, in 1300, Pope Boniface VIII is corrupt.

“Saint Dominic had to plead for a long time to the Pope of his day for what he wanted. He did not want money. He did not want to disburse the Church’s money and keep two or three out of six coins for himself. He did not want a benefice. He did not want to keep the tithes that should go to help the poor. He did want to combat heresy. He did want to spread the good ideas of the souls who now surround you.

“With the permission of the Pope, he used his learning and his strong will to combat heresy. He was like a mighty torrent cleaning evil out of its path and then sending streams to water the good fields.”

Beatrice thought, *Saint Dominic battled the Albigensian heresy. The Albigensians denied the Resurrection. He worked for years to persuade the Albigensians to stop believing in heresy and instead to believe in correct doctrine.*

The saved soul continued, “He was one wheel of the two-wheeled Chariot that is the Church. He was excellent, and so is the other wheel of the Chariot — the wheel whom Thomas Aquinas told you about.

“Saint Francis formed his order in 1209, but the Franciscans have declined. At one time the order was like good wine, but now it is like bad wine. Now one sees mold in the wine barrel instead of the crust that good wine leaves.

“At one time the Franciscans walked confidently forward in the footsteps of Saint Francis, but now they have turned around and they are walking backwards, obliterating his footsteps by putting their heels on his toe.

“Soon the harvest time will arrive, and tares will be found and they will not be taken to the storehouse that is Paradise.



“Search through the order of Franciscans. You may find one who is what a Franciscan should be, but most are not. Certainly those who come from Acquasparta or from Casal are not.”

Beatrice thought, *Franciscan monks from Acquasparta want to relax the rules of the Franciscan order too much. Matthew of Acquasparta relaxed the rules so much that abuses arose. Ubertino of Casal harshly kept the rules. A Golden Mean is needed. The rules should be neither too lax nor too harsh. Having too lax an enforcement of too few rules is wrong. Matthew of Acquasparta made this mistake. Having too rigid an enforcement of too many rules is wrong. Ubertino of Casal made this mistake.*

*A later age will know Mother Teresa. When Mother Teresa founded her order of nuns, the Missionaries of Charity, she at first wanted them to eat only what the poor ate: bread and salt. However, she soon realized that that was too strict. To do good work among the poor, her nuns needed to eat more than bread and salt. However, Mother Teresa was careful not to relax the rules too much. Sometimes, in some places, she thought that her nuns were living too luxuriously, so she got rid of some of the luxuries.*

The saved soul continued, “I am Bonaventure. I always put spiritual concerns, not temporal concerns, first.”

Beatrice thought, *Saint Bonaventure was born in Tuscony in 1221, but he was named John. He received his new name when he became ill, then recovered. Saint Francis heard of John’s remarkable recovery, and he exclaimed, “O buona ventura,” which means, “O good fortune.” Saint Bonaventure became the superior of the Franciscan friars, and he died in 1274. This is the same year that Thomas Aquinas died.*

*Just as Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican, tells the story of Saint Francis, so Saint Bonaventure, a Franciscan, tells the story of Saint Dominic. This is a way of showing respect for a great founder who did not found one’s own order.*

*Again, we see that the Franciscans and the Dominicans in Paradise are not jealous of or competitive in a bad way with each other. They know that they are on the same side.*

Saint Bonaventure continued, “Here in this wheel with me are Illuminato and Augustine, both of whom wore the cord that Franciscan monks wear.”

Beatrice thought, *Illuminato is an early Italian Franciscan who joined Saint Francis in 1210. Augustine is another early Italian Franciscan who joined Saint Francis in 1210. Augustine was from Assisi, like Saint Francis.*

Saint Bonaventure continued, “Here is Hugh of Saint Victor.”

Beatrice thought, *Hugh of the Abbey of Saint Victor near Paris lived in the 12th century. He was an influential mystic and theologian whose students Richard of Saint Victor and Peter Lombard are also known as sages.*

Saint Bonaventure continued, “Here is Peter Mangiador.”

Beatrice thought, *Peter Mangiador was known as Petrus Comestor, or Peter the Eater, because he metaphorically consumed books. He was born in French Troyes. In 1147, he became Dean of the Cathedral in Troyes, and later he became Chancellor of the University of Paris.*

Saint Bonaventure continued, “Here is Peter the Spaniard, who wrote 12 books that Humankind studies on Earth.”

Beatrice thought, *Peter the Spaniard was actually from Lisbon, Portugal. He was the only Portuguese Pope: Pope John XXI. He served less than a year as Pope. The falling ceiling of a cell killed him; the cell had been hastily built so that he could continue his scholarly pursuits there. He wrote a 12-part book on logic that was widely used.*

Saint Bonaventure continued, “Here is Nathan the prophet.”

Beatrice thought, *This Hebrew prophet spoke truth to power and criticized King David for arranging the death of Bathsheba's husband. Nathan appeared before David and said, "There were two men in one city; the one was rich, and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished. The lamb grew up together with him, and with his children; it ate the food he gave it and drank the drink he gave it, and it lay in his lap, and it was like a child to him. A traveler appeared before the rich man, and the rich man provided food for the traveler, but the rich man did not butcher any of his own flock or of his own herd to provide meat for the traveler. Instead, the rich man took the lamb that belonged to the poor man and butchered it."*

*Hearing the story, David was angry and said, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this thing shall surely die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Nathan said to David, "You are the man. The Lord God of Israel said, 'I anointed you King over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. And I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives to your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given to you much more. Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.'"*

*David was the rich man, and Uriah the Hittite was the poor man. To his credit, David repented.*

Saint Bonaventure continued, "This is Chrysostom."

Beatrice thought, *Saint John Chrysostom, who died in 407 C.E., was a famed preacher who was called the "golden-mouthed" patriarch of Constantinople; he was noted for his honesty, self-denial, and preaching. He spent time in exile.*

Saint Bonaventure continued, "This is Anselm."

Beatrice thought, *Saint Anselm lived from 1033-1109 C.E. He was an Italian archbishop of Canterbury, and he made the famous ontological argument for God's existence.*

Saint Bonaventure continued, "This is Donatus, who studied the first art."

Beatrice thought, *Donatus was the 4th-century C.E. Roman author of a famous Latin grammar. Grammar is the first art of the seven liberal arts.*

Saint Bonaventure continued, "This is Rabanus."

Beatrice thought, *Rabanus was abbot and archbishop of his native Mainz from 847 to 856 C.E. Like many of the other sages in this circle, he was a great scholar.*

Saint Bonaventure continued, "At my side is the Calabrian Abbot Joachim, a prophet."

Beatrice thought, *Thomas Aquinas has his in-the-living-world adversary Siger of Brabant on his left, and Saint Bonaventure has his in-the-living-world adversary the Abbot Joachim of Flora on his left. The Abbot Joachim of Flora was a Cistercian monk who predicted an approaching final age of history, which he believed would be the age of the everlasting gospel. Saint Bonaventure strove to combat this belief. Once again, we see that two scholars who were rivals on Earth are side by side in Paradise. Once again, we learn that two people of good will can disagree over what is to be regarded as truth. Once again, we see two people of good will who strove to know the truth on Earth. We see that two people of good will can both be sincere seekers after truth even if they arrive at different conclusions.*

Saint Bonaventure continued, "Thomas Aquinas praised Saint Francis, and in his spirit I have praised Saint Dominic. Thomas Aquinas' glowing words moved this wheel of souls to appear here."

Beatrice thought, *Both Saint Francis and Saint Dominic wanted the Church to be healthy, but they emphasized different things.*

*Saint Francis emphasized repentance and coming back to God. Christianity, according to Saint Francis, involves more than simply attending church on Sunday morning. Saint Francis emphasized making Christianity a part of your life. Saint Francis emphasized experiencing Christ rather than simply reading the Bible.*

*Saint Dominic emphasized thinking correctly about God. You must believe the correct doctrine, not an incorrect doctrine that will lead you astray. Saint Dominic wanted preachers to preach the right things.*

*Of course, both Saint Francis and Saint Dominic are correct. We need repentance. We also need correct doctrine. Without both of those, we can be led astray. Without both of those, we can go wrong.*

*A healthy Church must emphasize each of these things: repentance and correct doctrine. The Church needed to be reformed, and Saint Francis and Saint Dominic emphasized two things that would make the Church strong.*

## Chapter 13: Sun — Saint Thomas Aquinas Discusses Solomon (Paradise)

To imagine what Dante saw next, think of the 15 brightest stars in the night sky. Now think of the seven stars that make up the Big Dipper. That makes 22 stars. Add to them the two bright stars of the Little Dipper's mouth for a total of 24 stars, matching the total of 24 bright souls who formed two constellations around Dante and Beatrice. Imagine that the 24 stars form two moving circles around Dante and Beatrice. That will give you some idea of what Dante and Beatrice were seeing.

The two circles of souls whirled and danced, and this sight outstripped a living person's ability to understand in the same way that the fast-moving Primum Mobile outraces the sluggish stream of the Chiana River as it flows through swamps.

Beatrice thought, *In a later age, the Chiana River will flow much faster because the swamplands will have been drained. Of course, the Primum Mobile will still be much, much faster.*

As the souls moved and danced, they sang. They did not sing a hymn to Bacchus. They did not sing a song to Apollo. They sang of the three natures in a triune God, and they sang of the two natures of a Jesus Who was fully human and fully divine.

When the souls had finished their dance and their song, they, rejoicing, turned to Dante and Beatrice.

Thomas Aquinas said, "Two things perplexed you. One, I said, 'Saint Dominic led me and many others along a path where all may be fed if they do not stray from the path.' This I have explained to you. And two, I said, 'A second person has never arisen with as much wisdom as Solomon had.' This still perplexes you. Let me explain what I meant.

"You know that God directly created Adam, from whose rib Eve was created. Eve was lovely, but she sinned, and she tempted Adam to sin.

"You also know that Jesus became fully human in order to save Humankind. That happened as a direct creation of God. Jesus saved Humankind by being crucified and by being wounded with a lance. Jesus paid the price for the past, present, and future sins of Humankind.

"You know that God's light shone brightest in Adam, the first man, and in Jesus Christ.

"And so you are wondering what I meant when I said that no one has ever arisen with as much wisdom as Solomon had.

"Listen carefully. Both you and I believe correctly. What you believe and what I believe are not contradictory.

"Jesus is never parted from the Father or from the Holy Spirit, Who is Love. All creation reflects God. God both created all things and keeps all things in existence as long as they exist. In each moment, God is engaged in the act of creation. If God were to stop His act of creation, all of the universe, including space and time, would go out of existence. God's glory is seen in the entire universe. In some places His glory can be seen more clearly. In some places His glory can be seen less clearly.

"Creation can be direct, or it can be indirect. When God works through nature, which He created, and through the laws of nature, which He also created, the creation is indirect. The creation is also contingent. It can go out of existence. In our everyday existence, we see things go in existence and we see things go out of existence. Things are born, and they die.

"Indirect creation is not as good as direct creation. Human souls are direct creations of God and do not go out of existence. Human bodies are indirect creations of God (using the physical

laws of nature, which He created) and human bodies can and do die and go out of existence (although they will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment).

“What is indirectly created is inferior to what is directly created. When God acts directly, as when he created Adam and as when Christ acquired His human nature, the result is perfect. Love (Holy Spirit) and Vision (God’s Son) and Power (God the Father) work together to infuse spirit into matter, and the result is perfect. Therefore, the wisdom of Adam and of Jesus was and is perfect. The same is true of Angels. Human wisdom in the material world can never be as perfect as the wisdom of Adam.

“Of course, now you need an explanation of why I stated that a second person has never arisen with as much wisdom as Solomon had.

“To understand what I meant, consider the context of the historical situation. Ask yourself, Who was Solomon? Ask yourself, What did Solomon ask for when God said to him, ‘Ask for whatever you want’?

“Of course, Solomon was a king, and he asked God for the wisdom that would make him a good king.

“Solomon did not ask for theological wisdom so that he could answer this question: How many Angels exist?

“Solomon did not ask for logical wisdom so that he could answer this question: Can an absolute premise together with a contingent premise yield an absolute conclusion?

“Solomon did not ask for scientific and philosophic wisdom so that he could answer these questions: Is there a First Mover? Can a motion exist without a cause?

“Solomon did not ask for mathematical wisdom so that he could answer this question: Can a triangle without a right angle using the semicircle’s diameter as a base be made to fit in a semicircle?

“What did Solomon ask for? He asked for the practical wisdom that would enable him to be a good and a wise king. Solomon was without equal in the particular gift of wisdom that he received from God. Solomon asked for wisdom to rule well as a king, and he received it.

“In addition, I said that a second person has never *arisen* with as much wisdom as Solomon had. Adam and Jesus did not arise in the sense that Solomon and other human beings arise. Solomon and other human beings arose from the physical matter of the universe in conjunction with the laws of nature that govern matter and energy. God directly created Adam and Jesus.

“Solomon was the wisest of all Kings. Unfortunately, few Kings are good Kings.

“Be wary when you make judgments. Wisdom is difficult to acquire. You can see this in your perplexity when I stated that a second person has never arisen with as much wisdom as Solomon had.

“Fools make judgments quickly. Fools do not consider the evidence.

“Judgments quickly made without evidence are often wrong, and human beings can be so proud that they will not correct a wrong judgment that they have made.

“Sometimes, human beings try to make judgments that they are not ready to make. The ancient Greek philosopher Parmenides believed that the Moon is the source of all things and that all things return to the Moon. His disciple Melissus believed that no motion exists — only the appearance of motion. Bryson of Heraclea, another Greek philosopher, tried to square the circle — something that is impossible.

“Errors of judgment in theology, aka heresies, also occur. Sabellius denied the doctrine of the trinity. He believed that the terms ‘Father,’ ‘Son,’ and ‘Holy Ghost’ were simply different names for the same single God. Arius believed that Jesus was created after the Father and was inferior to the Father. Arius created the Arian heresy.

“No one should trust his or her judgment too quickly.

“Do not be like a farmer who counts his ears of corn before he has harvested them.

“After all, a brier can be prickly for months and then produce a rose.

“And a ship can safely cross the sea and safely return to outside its harbor and then sink in the harbor.

“People should not think themselves so wise that when they see one human being steal and another human being donate money to charity that they know who will end up in Paradise and who will end up in the Inferno. A once-bad person can repent at or near the end of life. A once-good person can sin and not repent at or near the end of life.”

Beatrice thought, *When we judge a life, we need to judge an entire life. An evil man can repent at the last minute, just as a brier can eventually produce a rose. A good person can become evil at the end of his life, just as a ship that has made a long voyage can end up sinking back home in its own harbor. Aristotle said that in order to determine whether a man was happy, we need to look at the whole of that man's life. After he has died, we will be able to tell if he was happy. God sees the whole picture — we don't. God knows the end of a person's life and whether or not they repented. Chances are, most or all people will be surprised by some of those who make it to Paradise, and by some of those who end up in the Inferno.*

## Chapter 14: Sun — Solomon; Mars — Symbolic Cross (Paradise)

When Thomas Aquinas spoke in his circle of souls, words rippled inward to the center, where Dante and Beatrice stood. Now Beatrice spoke, and words rippled outward to the circles of souls.

Beatrice was such a good guide and such a good teacher that she anticipated the questions that Dante would have even before he formulated them in his mind.

Beatrice said to the two circles of souls, “This man has another question, although he has not formulated it yet in his mind and therefore cannot ask it. He needs to know about the radiance that clothes you.

“Will you souls retain your brilliant light eternally?

“If you will retain your brilliance, then when you are reunited with your bodies at the Day of Judgment and begin again to see with your eyes, how will your eyes be able to withstand such brilliance of your own body and of the bodies of other souls?”

Joy can make dancers dance more quickly and can make singers raise their voices. Much like that, the souls in the circle showed their increased happiness in their dance and in their song. They were happy to be able to enlighten Dante.

People on Earth are afraid of dying. If they are right with God, they ought not to be afraid of dying. If they could witness the joy that awaits saved souls in Paradise, they would no longer regret the fact that they must one day die.

The souls sang of the Three that make One: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost that make one omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God. This God is enclosed by nothing; instead, it encloses everything.

The souls sang the song three times, and this beautiful song is one of the rewards of Paradise.

Then the brightest of the stars in the circle of Thomas Aquinas — the star that is Solomon — began to speak. Although Solomon’s star is the brightest, he spoke with a modest tone: “We will wear this brilliance as long as Paradise lasts: forever. Our love, our *caritas*, gives us this brilliance, and our brilliance is in proportion to the amount of love we have and are capable of experiencing.

“On the Day of Judgment, we will be reunited with our bodies, and then we will be more complete and more perfect and therefore more pleasing to ourselves and to God. Our brilliance will increase.

“Our vision of God will increase. We will be able to see more clearly, and we will be able to love even more. Our radiance comes from our love of God.

“Our bodies, which have long been buried, will be even brighter than the brilliance that clothes us now.

“This new brilliance will not be hard to bear. God will strengthen our eyes so that we are able to withstand the radiance of each other. God wants us to be able to bear all that will give us joy.”

The souls in the two circles cried, “Amen!” Clearly, they looked forward to being reunited with their bodies, and they looked forward to mothers, fathers, and other loved ones to also get their bodies back. Those things — including bodies — that made you and your loved ones distinctive on Earth are not taken away in Paradise.

And now a third ring of lights appeared. These lights encircled the other two rings of lights, and they glowed as brightly as all those other lights. Dante’s eyes were overwhelmed.

Beatrice smiled at Dante, and he was able to raise his eyes again. He saw that Beatrice and he had ascended to another Sphere. This Sphere glowed red, and Dante made a silent prayer of thanks and devotion and gratitude. Dante knew that his prayer was accepted.

Dante and Beatrice were in the Fifth Sphere, which is that of Mars. In the Sphere that was Mars appeared two rays of light of such brilliance that Dante cried out, “O Helios, who adorns the sky!” Helios is both the Sun and a symbol of God.

The two rays of light formed a Cross. The Symbolic Cross is the Cross of the Crusaders. It is a Greek Cross — the two parts that make up the Cross are of equal length. The Symbolic Cross was made up of the saved souls who are associated with Mars, which is the planet that we associate with courage and especially with courage during times of war.

Within the Symbolic Cross, Dante saw an image of Christ.

When Dante the Poet tried to write about this later, after returning to Earth, he found himself unable to describe what he had seen. What he remembered defeated his art as a poet. But anyone who reaches Paradise will be able to see the Symbolic Cross and will forgive Dante for what he was not able to write about it.

The lights that made up the Cross moved from arm to arm and from top to base. The lights sparkled, and they were brilliant.

Humankind makes things such as blinds and curtains to keep out the light, but sometimes a streak of light makes its way through shade, and our eyes see specks floating in the air. Some specks move in a straight line. Some specks move in a slanted line. Some specks move swiftly. Some specks move slowly. The specks create a scene that changes constantly. The lights that made up the Cross were like those specks.

Humankind also creates musical instruments such as the viol and the harp. They have many strings, and the notes they make sound sweet.

The souls who made up the Cross sang a song that entranced Dante the Pilgrim so much that he did not even look at Beatrice. He heard a hymn that contains the words “Arise” and “Conquer,” but other than that he knew only that the song sang the highest praise.

Dante felt love as he listened to that song. He thought that nothing could be sweeter than that hymn.

But then he thought, *I may be too rash when I think that nothing could be sweeter than that hymn. Since I have reached the planet Mars, I have not yet looked at Beatrice’s eyes. As we ascend the Spheres and we grow closer to God, Beatrice and her eyes become more and more beautiful.*



## Chapter 15: Mars — Cacciaguida (Paradise)

The love of others — *caritas* — has an opposite: self-serving love. *Caritas* is always magnanimous, and self-serving love always leads to inequity.

These souls who appeared on Mars have the love that loves others, and the music and the song stopped because these souls knew that Dante wanted to ask questions and to learn things.

These souls felt joy in being able to help Dante. Other souls who had self-serving love have lost forever the joy that is felt in Paradise. They traded joy that is eternal for things that bring joy briefly. Souls who had self-serving love mourn forever in the Inferno — as is right.

Sometimes in the night sky a star seems to fall, but it is actually a meteor. Now a light came from the Cross and approached Dante. The light started from one of the arms and then went to the vertical part of the Cross and down it so that it was as close as possible to Dante.

The light was like fire behind a white screen. The white screen was bright, but within it was a brighter light. The saved soul within was brighter than the brilliant light that clothed it.

The light moved quickly — as quickly as Anchises, Aeneas' father, moved to meet Aeneas when Aeneas went to the Land of the Dead.

Beatrice thought, *The story of Aeneas' journey to Elysium, aka the good part of the Land of the Dead, is told in Virgil's Aeneid. Aeneas was in exile, and he was discouraged. He needed a reason for going on, and Anchises gave him that reason by showing Aeneas his illustrious descendants. With renewed vigor, Aeneas went to Italy and accomplished his destiny of becoming an important ancestor of the Roman people.*

*Similarly, Dante will be in exile, and he will be discouraged. He will need a reason to go on. He will need to find the right way to react to his exile. Now he will have a meeting with an ancestor who can give him a reason to go on.*

The saved soul spoke to Dante in Latin, “*O sanguis meus, O superinfusa gratia Dei, sicut tibi, cui bis unquam celi ianua reclusa?*”

Translating the Latin was not a problem for Dante or for Beatrice, both of whom knew that the saved soul had said, “O blood of mine, O grace of God, has the gate of Paradise ever opened twice for anyone as it has for you?”

Beatrice thought, *The words “O sanguis meus” are quoted from Virgil's Aeneid. Anchises spoke these words to Aeneas when Aeneas visited Elysium. Aeneas visited Elysium twice: once while alive, and once after he died. But Elysium is not Paradise. Dante is visiting Paradise now, and he will enter Paradise permanently after he has died.*

Dante looked at the saved soul, and then he looked at Beatrice, who was smiling. Dante also smiled, and it seemed to him that he felt the deepest joy that Paradise offers.

Beatrice thought, *I am very happy that Dante is able to meet this soul. He will be very happy when he finds out who this soul is. He will be much more joyful than he is now.*

The saved soul spoke to Dante, but what the saved soul said was too deep for Dante to comprehend. The saved soul was not being deliberately obtuse. The things that the saved soul was saying were not simple, and difficult language had to be used to express them. In Paradise, such language is understood.

Once the saved soul had stated things that were important although they were not understood by Dante, the saved soul said a few words that Dante could understand: “Blessed be You, God, Three Persons in One Being, Who has shown such grace to one of my descendants!”

The saved soul continued, “I have read the Book of Fate, whose words can never change, and I knew that you were coming. Your being here now has made me happy. Thank you, Beatrice, for all that you have done to bring my descendant to me.”

Then the saved soul spoke to Dante, “You believe that I know your thoughts because I can see them in the mind of God, which knows everything, including every thought before it is expressed. You are correct. Because you correctly believe that, you do not ask me who I am and you do not ask why I am so happy to see you.

“But even though I know your thoughts and I know your questions, please use your own voice to express your questions confidently and boldly. I want to hear your voice. You already know that I will answer your questions.”

Dante turned to Beatrice, and she smiled to let him know that he ought to speak to the saved soul.

Dante said to the saved soul, “All of you who are saved have no imbalance in your faculties. You can find the proper words to say what you want to say. I, however, am still living, and now I cannot find the proper words to say what I want to say. Only with my heart and not with my words can I thank you for your familial welcome to me here. Also, I would like to know, please, the answer to this question: What is your name?”

The saved soul replied, “I am the root of your family tree. You are one of its branches. I have eagerly anticipated your visit here. The man from whom you have received your family name — Alighieri — is on the first ledge of the Mountain of Purgatory. For one hundred years, he has been carrying a heavy stone to purge his sin of pride. This man is the father of your grandfather: He is your Great-Grandfather. He is my son. I am your Great-Great-Grandfather. You should offer prayers in order to reduce the amount of time he spends on the First Ledge.

“Like you, I am from Florence, but the Florence of my day — the early and mid-1100s — was different from the Florence of your day. Florence was much smaller in my day. Its population still fit behind the ancient walls. Its citizens were at peace then. Its people were pure, and they were temperate. The citizens in the Florence of your day engage in destructive factionalism.

“Women did not dress in clothing that was more beautiful than the woman wearing it. Women did not wear necklaces or tiaras or fancy gowns or fancy belts.

“In the Florence of my day, fathers did not need to fear falling into poverty because of the birth of a daughter. The daughter would be married at an age at which she was mature. She would not be married too young. The dowries were reasonable and could be paid. In the Florence of your day, a man with one daughter is impoverished and a man with two daughters is bankrupt.

“The houses in Florence were smaller then, and people actually lived in them. In the Florence of your day, many large houses are empty. Sometimes, the houses are built to display wealth instead of to be lived in. Sometimes, the houses are empty because the owners have lost their money through riotous living and can no longer afford to maintain them. Sometimes, the houses are empty because the owners have been forced into exile.

“In the Florence of my day, Sardanapalus was not regarded as a role model. In the Florence of your day, this depraved King of Assyria is regarded as setting a standard of debauchery that ought to be imitated, especially in the bedroom.

“The Florence of my day had not surpassed Rome. The Florence of your day surpassed Rome in its ascent, and it will surpass Rome in its fall.

“In the Florence of my day, I saw the nobleman Bellincion Berti wearing a simple leather belt with a simple bone clasp. In the Florence of your day, noblemen wear ornamented belts and jeweled clasps.

“In the Florence of my day, I saw Bellincion Berti’s wife in public with a face that was free of makeup. In the Florence of your day, women’s faces are painted.

“In the Florence of my day, leading citizens Nerli and Vecchio wore plain leather, and their wives worked with a spindle all day. Such is not the case in the Florence of your day.

“In the Florence of my day, the wives were happy. They knew that when they died, they would be buried in Florence. In the Florence of your day, often people are exiled and so when they die they will be buried elsewhere.

“In the Florence of my day, the wives were not alone in bed — their husbands were with them. In the Florence of your day, many wives sleep alone because their husbands are in France, engaging in trade and making money.

“In the Florence of my day, a wife might be tending a baby in a cradle and speaking baby talk. Another wife might tell her children stories as she worked at a spinning wheel. The stories might be about the Trojans or about Rome or, more locally, about Fiesole.

“In the Florence of my day, stories about the luxuriant excesses of the poet and lawyer Lapo Salterello would have amazed and dismayed the citizens, as would have the sharp tongue, extravagance, and sluttishness of Cianghella.

“In the Florence of your day, citizens would be amazed by stories about the goodness of Cincinnatus, who stopped being a farmer in order to lead Roman troops to victory and then relinquished power and became a farmer again. And they would have been amazed by stories about the goodness of Cornelia, the daughter of the hero Scipio Africanus. Cornelia gave birth to Tiberius and Gaius Gracchi, who tried but failed to save the Roman Republic.

“My mother gave birth to me in Florence, a place of serenity and sweetness and citizens who got along with each other, and in Florence, at the ancient Baptistery, I became a Christian, and I was christened Cacciaguida.

“My brothers were Eliseo and Moronto. My wife came from the valley through which the Po runs, and she brought with her the name ‘Alighieri’: your name.

“I served the Holy Roman Emperor Conrad III so well that he knighted me, and I fought during the Second Crusade. The Saracens cut me down in battle, and because I was a martyr, I immediately entered Paradise.”

## Chapter 16: Mars — Cacciaguida's Florence (Paradise)

Dante the Poet thought, *Having pride in the noble blood of ancestors is trivial, but I will no longer be amazed that men on Earth take pride in the noble blood of ancestors. After all, on Earth people are weak, and when I was in Paradise, where no one can desire the wrong thing, I gloried in the noble blood of my ancestor Cacciaguida!*

*But there is a right way and a wrong way to have pride of family. A wrong way to have pride of family is to think that having special ancestors makes you special. It doesn't. When your ancestors do something special, they deserve credit for doing that special thing. You do not deserve credit for doing something special unless in fact you do something special.*

*A right way to have pride of family is when you regard good ancestors as being role models to emulate. If you have an ancestor who did something especially good, and you try to emulate that ancestor, that is a good thing. Having ancestors like that is valuable because they show that it is possible to do something especially good.*

*Of course, having an especially good ancestor does not mean that you get a Get-Out-of-Hell-Free card. It doesn't work that way. You still have to sincerely repent your sins and try to do good things with your life.*

*Nobility of character is like a coat. The coat will wear out unless it is added to and repaired. Nobility of character needs to be acquired through good thoughts and good actions day by day or it will wear out.*

Dante the Pilgrim prepared to speak to Cacciaguida, and he knew that he wanted to be sure to call him "sir," a word that he had not used when speaking to him previously. The word "sir" was used more often in earlier times than it is used now.

Beatrice smiled at Dante. Seeing the smile, Dante knew that she knew that he was feeling pride of family, and he was reminded of the moment when Guinevere first began to sin with Lancelot — seeing them together, the wife of Malehaut coughed deliberately so that they would know that she was seeing their weakness.

Dante said to Cacciaguida, "Sir, you are my ancestor. Sir, you make me confident enough to speak. Sir, you make my heart rise so that I feel that I am more than myself. My soul is joyful, and it rejoices more than I thought would be possible. Please tell me about your ancestors. Who are they? What famous events happened when you were young? Tell me about Florence. What was its size in your day, and who were the highest citizens?"

The light who was Cacciaguida grew brighter with pleasure at being able to answer Dante's questions. The brightness was like that of glowing coals bursting into flames when a breeze blows over the coals.

Cacciaguida grew more beautiful, and with a sweet voice that was more refined than the voices of the Florentines of Dante's day, Cacciaguida said, "From the Annunciation in which the Angel Gabriel told Mary 'Ave' to the day that my mother, who is now a saint in Paradise, gave birth to me, the planet Mars made 580 orbits. In other words, I was born in the year 1091 C.E.

"The house I was born in lies in the path taken by the runners in the annual race that takes place on June 24: the Feast of Saint John. To be exact, I was born at Porta San Piero.

"About my ancestors we need not talk. We need not mention their names or where they came from. I wish to avoid boasting about my ancestors.

"Florence in my day was much smaller than it is now. Two important boundaries of Florence were the statue of Mars on the Ponte Vecchio and the baptistery of St. John. Those

Florentines able to bear weapons in my day numbered 6,000, which is about one-fifth of those who are able to bear weapons in the Florence of your day.

“The people who lived in the Florence of my day were actually Florentines. In the Florence of your day, many people who live in Florence originally came from Campi, Certaldo, and Figline. They brought their small-town, impoverished, backwoods ways into what should be a great city. Florence made a mistake by growing and incorporating these small towns.

“It would be much better for Florence if it were smaller, and its boundaries reached only as far as Galluzzo and Trespiano. That way, Campi, Certaldo, and Figline would be outside the territory controlled by Florence. If Florence had not grown, then its citizens would not include the yokel who is Baldo d’Aguglione. He is a rip-off artist who stole salt.”

Beatrice thought, *Baldo d’Aguglione will be a personal enemy to Dante. After Dante and other Guelfs are banished into exile from Florence, Baldo d’Aguglione will rescind the banishment of many Guelfs and allow them back into Florence, but he will make sure that Dante remains banished from Florence.*

Cacciaguida continued, “If Florence had not grown, then its citizens would also not include Fazio de’ Morubaldini of Signa, a lawyer whose more accurate job titles include swindler, barrator, and grafter.”

A barrator engages in graft.

Cacciaguida continued, “if only the Pope and the Cardinals had not hated the Holy Roman Emperor so much and had not treated him the way a bad stepmother treats someone she does not consider a son, but had instead treated him the way a good mother treats a good son, then a newly minted Florentine who wheels and deals in your city and whose name I will not mention would be back in Semifonte, the place where his grandfather begged for scraps.

“In addition, if things were right in the world, then Florence would never have bought the castle of Montemurlo from the Counts Guidi. Also, the parish of Acone would still have as citizens the Cerchi, who are White Guelfs in the Florence of your time and who have caused civic disturbances by feuding with the Donati family. And Valdigueve would still have as citizens the family Buondelmonti, who have caused much trouble in Florence.

“Florence followed an aggressive policy of expansion after my day, and it has resulted in a mixed population: some Florentine, and some unassimilated. Food not properly digested is bad for you, and a population not properly digested is bad for Florence.

“A large size need not be a good size. It is better to have a small, well-governed city than a large, badly governed city. The Florence of my day was small but well governed. The Florence of your day is large but badly governed.

“Imagine people with swords. One well-trained swordsman is much more effective than five amateur swordsmen.

“Cities do not always remain healthy. Luni and Urbisaglia and Sinigaglia and Chiusi are either dead or dying and almost extinct.

“Families also do not always remain healthy. A city can die out, and so can a family.

“The works of Humankind — such as a city — must come eventually to an end. To individual human beings, whose life is so short, it may seem as if a city will last forever, but the city will not. And so with families.

“Let me mention some formerly great families who are not great now. They were noble in my day, and they are nonexistent or weak in your day.

“The Wheel of Fortune turns, and its turning affects Florence and the families of Florence.

“I knew many illustrious families: the Ughi, the Catellini, the Greci, the Filippi, the Aberichi, the Ormanni. Even when these families were declining, their members were

illustrious. These were good families in the Florence of my day, but the citizens of the Florence of your day do not know them.

“I also knew the families that were both great and old: the dell’Arca, the Sannella, the Soldanieri, the Ardinghi, the Bostichi.

“The good Ravignani family once lived near the Gate at the Porta Dan Piero, which is now controlled by a family who is bringing much destructiveness to Florence. The Ravignani family birthed Guido the Count and the good people bearing the name Bellincione.

“The della Pressa family knew how to govern well in the Florence of my day, and the Galigaio family were noble.”

Dante thought, *Both families declined. The della Pressa family, who were Ghibellines, betrayed Florence at Montaperti. In 1260, five years before I was born, the Ghibellines fought the Guelfs in the Battle of Montaperti. The Ghibellines defeated the Guelfs and stained the Arbia River red with Guelf blood. In the Florence of my day, the Galigaio family is no longer noble.*

Cacciaguida continued, “In the Florence of my day, the great families included the Galli, the Sacchetti, the Giuochi, the Fifanti, and the Barucci, and the family whose members blush in the Florence of your day because they committed fraud and stole salt.

“Another great family in the Florence of my day was the Calfucci, which is extinct in the Florence of your day but from whom sprang the Donati family. Other great families in the Florence of my day were the Arrigucci and the Sizii.

“These families were great, but they were proud, and pride ruined them. One such proud family was the Lamberti, whose arms bore golden balls against a field of blue. Mosca, who is now in the Inferno, was a member of this family.

“These families have descendants who let livings remain vacant so that they can benefit from the income. Those livings ought to be filled by religious who can help the people.

“In my day, a family that became notorious for greed and cowardice in your day was beginning to rise, although it was of such a lower class that Ubertino Donati was not pleased when his father-in-law married Ubertino’s wife’s sister to a member of that family. That family is like a dragon to anyone who is weak, and it is like a lamb to anyone who is strong.”

Beatrice thought, *That family includes a person who will take possession of Dante’s property when Dante is exiled. That person will oppose Dante’s being allowed to return to Florence. After Dante is exiled, he will never again see Florence.*

Cacciaguida continued, “Other families who were notable in my day but have declined in your day include some Ghibelline families: the Caponsacchi, the Guidi, and the Infangati. The della Pera family — incredible! — were once so well known in Florence that a city gate was named after it.

“Hugh of Brandenburg honored six Florentine families by conferring knighthood upon them. All of these families adopted coats of arms that were variants of Hugh’s own coat of arms. Giano della Bella, a descendant of one of these families, however, tried to reform the nobles in 1293 and was banished in 1295. All of these great Florentine noble families should support the Holy Roman Emperor.

“In my day the Gualterrotti and the Importuni were great families, but their new neighbors were the Buondelmonti, who created great strife in Florence.

“I wish that the Buondelmonti family had never come to Florence because it is the family whose coming started the factionalism in Florence.

“Buondelmonte of the Buondelmonti family was engaged to be married to a woman of the Amidei family, but he had a chance to make a better marriage to a woman of the Donati family, so he jilted his bride-to-be on the wedding day. This was, of course, a major insult to her and

her family, and members of her family murdered Buondelmonte — Mosca instigated the murder. This led to factionalism in Florence, and the split of its citizens into the Guelf and the Ghibelline groups.

“If only Buondelmonte had died by drowning in the Ema River before he came to Florence, Florence and its citizens — and you — would be much better off.

“The first Guelf is Buondelmonte, and the first Ghibelline is his murderer.

“Buondelmonte, who is the founder of your own political party, did the wrong thing by jilting the woman he was engaged to. Of course, the man who murdered him also did the wrong thing. The main point is this: Political factionalism can be a very bad thing.

“Buondelmonte was murdered at the foot of the statue of Mars in Florence on Easter morning in 1215 C.E. — a fitting sacrifice to the god of war because of all the blood that was shed then and in the years following.

“Because of the action of Buondelmonte, a Florence that was peaceful in my own time is now filled with civic strife for no good reason.

“When the good families of my day ruled Florence, I saw only glory and justice.

“I did not see the civic strife of your day. I did not see the wars between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines. I did not see the Ghibelline standard of a white lily against a red field. I did not see the Guelf standard of a red lily against a white field. I did not see the victor drag the standard of the loser in the dust. I did not see the civic strife that plagues the Florence of your day.”

## Chapter 17: Mars — Cacciaguida’s Prophecy (Paradise)

Phaëthon had heard rumors that he was the son of Apollo, and he went to Apollo to see if the rumors were true. Apollo assured him that the rumors were true, but Phaëthon demanded that his father allow him to drive the chariot of the Sun to prove that he was his father. Apollo allowed him to do this, but the result was disastrous: Phaëthon could not control the horses that pulled the chariot, and Jupiter killed him so that he would not burn up the Earth. For that reason, fathers are wary in granting what their sons request.

Like Phaëthon, Dante wanted to know whether the vague things he had heard were true, and if so, he wanted to try to get some benefit from having that knowledge. Dante felt that he was with the two people — Beatrice and his ancestor Cacciaguida — who would be best able to enlighten him.

Beatrice knew what Dante was thinking, and she knew that Dante ought to know about his upcoming exile, but she felt that it would be better that Dante’s ancestor Cacciaguida tell him and so she said to Dante, “I know that you have questions burning inside you. Go ahead and ask them. Of course, we already know what your questions are, but you should learn to ask for what you want: This is a skill that will be necessary for your future survival.”

Dante said to Cacciaguida, “Cherished ancestor in Paradise, you have special knowledge. Human beings in the living world have some knowledge. We know that a triangle cannot contain two obtuse angles. A triangle has three angles that add up to exactly 180 degrees. An obtuse angle has more than 90 degrees, so two obtuse angles equal more than 180 degrees, and so whatever geometric figure is formed will not be a triangle.

“As clearly as human beings in the living world know that, so clearly do you know the past, the present, and the future because you can see into the mind of God. Whatever contingent being — a being that is capable of existing and of not existing, although not at the same time — will come into existence, you know that it will come into existence before it comes into existence. Contingent existence is different from necessary existence, which has always existed and always will exist. God has necessary existence.

“While I was still with Virgil and was climbing the Mountain of Purgatory and descending the circles of the Inferno, many souls made vague but ominous statements about my future life.”

Beatrice thought, *During his journey throughout the Inferno and the Mountain of Purgatory, Dante has heard hints of his future exile.*

*In the Inferno, Ciaccio prophesied to Dante, “After much more fighting, one party will drive out the other party. Then within three years the positions will be reversed, and the party that was victorious will be defeated, and the party that was defeated will be victorious.”*

*In the Inferno, Farinata revealed that Dante will soon be sent into exile — within 50 months.*

*In the Inferno, Brunetto Latini prophesied hard times for Dante. Brunetto’s prophecy stated that both political parties will regard Dante as an enemy.*

*In the Inferno, Vanni Fucci predicted coming trouble for Dante and for Florence. Vanni told Dante of the coming troubles, including the expulsion of the White Guelfs from Florence by the Black Guelfs, and he added that he was telling Dante this bad news so that Dante would suffer.*

*On the Mountain of Purgatory, Dante talked with Conrad Malaspina, who made a prediction: Within seven years Dante will have need of the generosity of the Malaspina family.*



*On the Mountain of Purgatory, Oderisi of Gubbio prophesied that Dante will learn the humiliation of begging.*

*On the Mountain of Purgatory, the poet Bonagiunta Da Lucca prophesied that a woman from his city, which is reviled, will make Dante praise his city.*

Dante continued, "Because of these prophecies, I am better prepared to withstand bad fortune. I would like to know in more detail what bad fortune is coming. If I know what bad fortune will happen to me, I may be able to blunt its force."

Dante had done as Beatrice had wished, and now Cacciaguida answered him. His reply was not vague, like the ancient, tricky oracles whose words can mean more than one thing.

Oracles that existed before Christ's crucifixion could be misleading, and they could lead people astray. Some prophecies were deliberately ambiguous. For example, Croesus, the King of Lydia, was thinking about attacking Persia. He sent an emissary to the Delphic Oracle to ask whether he should do that. The Delphic Oracle responded that if he attacked Persia, "A mighty empire will fall." Croesus regarded the oracle as propitious, and he attacked Persia. A mighty empire did fall; unfortunately, the mighty empire that fell was his own empire.

Cacciaguida replied to Dante with clear, easily understandable words. Cacciaguida was happy to enlighten Dante.

Cacciaguida said to Dante, "God knows all about the existence and the nonexistence of all contingent things. God knows the past, the present, and the future. But this does not take away from free will. God exists outside of space and time, and God sees the past, the present, and the future all at the same time. God sees human beings use their free will either for good or for ill. A human being may watch a boat going down a stream. Watching the boat does not mean that the human being is controlling the actions of the boat.

"From the vision that the mind of God has, I can see what will happen to you in the future.

"Hippolytus' stepmother fell in love with him and tried to seduce him. Hippolytus resisted, and his stepmother lied and said that Hippolytus had tried to force himself on her. Therefore, Hippolytus, although innocent, was banished from his city: Athens.

"You, also, although innocent, will be banished from your city: Florence. You will be exiled. A Pope who each day engages in simony and sells Christ is now planning the events that will lead to your exile.

"As is usual, the public will blame the one who is innocent and will praise the one who is guilty. And yet, in the long run, the truth shall be known.

"You will have to leave Florence and everything that is valuable to you. You will have to leave behind your family. This is the first of the evils that await you.

"You will learn how salty the bread of other people is, and you will learn to walk down steps that belong to other people and to walk up steps that belong to other people."

Beatrice thought, *Dante will have to eat different kinds of food than what he is used to getting in Florence. Dante will be in unfamiliar places. He will eat the food of other people, and he will stay at the homes of other people. Of course, when he does that, he is not at home. He is not in control. To an extent, he will have to do what other people want him to do.*

*In addition, people in Florence do not put salt in their bread, and so when they travel outside of Florence and eat bread, they notice how salty the bread is.*

*Bread is important. The Bible calls bread the staff of life. Bread is also an important part of the Eucharist — a Christian sacrament in which bread represents the body of Christ and wine represents the blood of Christ.*

Cacciaguida continued, "What will be worse will be the company you fall in with. The people you will be around will be despicable and senseless."

Beatrice thought, *By 1300, the Guelfs had defeated the Ghibellines in Florence. However, the Guelfs divided into two factions: the White Guelfs and the Black Guelfs. The White Guelfs will throw the Black Guelfs out of Florence. Corso Donati will persuade Pope Boniface VIII to send Charles of Valois and his troops to Florence. Charles of Valois, working with Pope Boniface VIII, will pretend to be a peacekeeper, but actually he will be working to have the Black Guelfs take control of Florence and expel the White Guelfs. This will happen while Dante, a White Guelf, is away from Florence in the fall of 1301. On 1 November 1301, Charles of Valois will enter Florence and give control of the city to the Black Guelfs. Cante de' Gabrielli will issue a proclamation on 27 January 1302 that will falsely charge Dante with barratry and will give him three days to return to Florence to reply to the charges and to pay a huge fine. Dante wisely will stay away from Florence. On 10 March 1302, Cante de' Gabrielli will issue another proclamation that will condemn Dante to be burned to death if he ever returns to Florence. The reason for the death sentence will be that Dante failed to show up to reply to the charges against him.*

*For a while after he is exiled, Dante will think that he will return to Florence in a few weeks, but that will not happen. For a while after he is exiled, Dante will plot with other White Guelfs about how they can return to Florence. Their plots will fail. Dante will never return to Florence after he is exiled.*

Cacciaguida continued, "The company you fall in with will turn against you and hate you. They will be ungrateful, but history and their own deeds will show that they, not you, are in the wrong.

"Instead of being in a party with others, you will gain honor by being in a party of one: yourself."

Beatrice thought, *One thing that Dante has been learning during his journey through the afterlife is to avoid extreme factionalism. The people he will meet with after his exile will turn out to be extreme factionalists of the type that Farinata was in the Inferno.*

*Eventually, Dante will do the right thing and become a party of one. He will rightfully criticize both the White Guelfs and the Black Guelfs, and he will rightly criticize both the Guelfs and the Ghibellines.*

*After his exile, Dante will be tempted to work very hard to get back into Florence. One way to do that is to raise an army and go to war. Of course, if you do that, lots of people will die, and lots of people will be hurt. Soldiers will die, and their families will be without breadwinners.*

*Eventually, Dante will stop plotting with other people about how to get back into Florence. He will stop engaging in bad factionalism. He will learn that other things are important. We should not say, "My political party, right or wrong."*

*Farinata is a person who put himself and his political party first, and look where he ended up.*

Cacciaguida continued, "You will also meet and enjoy the hospitality of good people. After leaving the bad people, you will find refuge first with the great Lombard, Bartolommeo della Scala of Verona, whose coat of arms shows an eagle and a ladder. He will give you what you need even before you ask for it.

"With him will be his younger brother, Can Grande della Scala, who will win great renown. Right now, in 1300, he is not known because he is only nine years old, but he will quickly make his merit known — even before the Gascon tricks Henry by first supporting him and then withdrawing that support."

Cacciaguida thought, *In 1312, Pope Clement V, aka the Gascon, will trick Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII.*

Cacciaguida continued, “Can Grande della Scala will scorn the pursuit of wealth and will not be afraid to work. His generosity will be so widely known that even his enemies will acknowledge it.

“Look at him and expect great things from him. Because of him, many deserving beggars will be raised high and many undeserving wealthy men will be brought low.”

Cacciaguida then told Dante about some of the things that Can Grande della Scala would accomplish, but he forbade him to talk or write about them.

Then Cacciaguida continued, “You see your future. You know the snares that lie ahead. Do not envy Corso Donati or Pope Boniface VIII. Your future is brighter than their futures despite the pain that they will inflict on you.”

Cacciaguida had answered Dante’s question, and Dante was able to add what he had learned to the web of knowledge that he had already acquired.

Dante sought reassurance and advice from his virtuous ancestor who knew the future and loved him: “Father, I see the hardships that lie ahead of me — hardships that do much damage to those who are unprepared.

“I know that I will not be able to live in Florence, the place I hold most dear. I do not want to lose the ability to live elsewhere because of what I can write.

“I have traveled down the Inferno and up the Mountain of Purgatory and from heavenly Sphere to heavenly Sphere with the help of Beatrice, and I have learned much. If I write the truth about what I have learned, I will make enemies.

“And yet, if I do not write the truth about what I have learned, what I write will not last. People of the future will not read what I write.”

Beatrice thought, *Dante will be able to bring good out of exile. He will be exiled from Florence, but he will be able to learn from the experience, and he will be able to pass on what he learns to other people when he writes his Divine Comedy.*

*Dante will be like an Old Testament prophet who speaks truth to power. His exile will become a kind of pilgrimage.*

*In doing this, Dante will make many, many people very, very angry at him. Many, many powerful people will appear in the Inferno part of his Divine Comedy. Their families will still be alive.*

*Dante will be in exile, which means that he won’t have much to lose. Because he won’t have much to lose, he will have a certain amount of freedom. Not having much to lose means that he can tell the truth. What will someone do if they become angry at him: exile him? He will be already in exile.*

*Dante is worried. If he is going to tell his story, he has to tell it the right way if his message will endure.*

*Brunetto Latini wrote for the wrong reasons. He wanted to become famous, and so he wrote to become famous. It worked, but not for long. Brunetto Latini was well known when he was alive, but unless Dante puts him in the Inferno Brunetto Latini will be forgotten.*

*What Dante needs to do is to tell the truth. The Old Testament prophets are remembered because they told the truth. Dante knows that it will take courage to tell the truth. In order to be remembered, Dante must tell the truth, even though the truth will make other people angry.*

*Dante will make the right choice and write the truth about what he has learned. People 700 years from now will read what he writes — and people 700 years after that will read what he writes.*

Cacciaguida’s light grew brighter because he was joyful at being able to give Dante advice that was exactly right.

Cacciaguida said, "Some people have dark consciences, and yes, they will be angry at what you write. But do not lie. Tell the truth. Everything you have learned, write. If some people are wounded by what you write, let them bind their wounds.

"What you write may seem bitter at first, but it will be good medicine. Although some people will sting from the words; nevertheless, the words will be beneficial to them.

"Your words will hit hard at bad Popes and bad politicians, but these are the people who most need to read what you write.

"During your journey through the afterlife, you have met and seen many prominent people. Use them in what you write. Readers will pay attention to what you write if you write about prominent people. Readers will know about the prominent people, and they will know that you are writing the truth. They will learn from these examples. Use clear examples, and make clear arguments."

Beatrice thought, *Dante will engage in much criticism in The Divine Comedy, but his purpose will be ultimately creative rather than destructive. If a building is a wreck, tear it down and then build another one in its place. If you have bad habits, get rid of the bad habits so that you can substitute good habits in their place. If the Church needs to be reformed, criticize it so that it can be reformed and become both better and stronger.*

*Dante's words will be hard to hear, but they can provide much-needed nourishment.*

*Cacciaguida was a Crusader with a sword, and he has let Dante know that he must be a Crusader with a pen.*

## Chapter 18: Jupiter — Lovers of Justice (Paradise)

Cacciaguida was happy because he knew that Dante would eventually write *The Divine Comedy*.

Dante was silent for a while as he thought about the exile that awaited him.

Beatrice said to Dante, “Think about other things than the bad things. Think about Paradise, where I dwell with God, Who is able to lift the weight of every insult and every bad thing.”

Dante turned and faced Beatrice. Her eyes were beautiful, and they were filled with love. They were filled with more love than can be experienced on Earth — that amount of love is reserved for Paradise. For Dante to be able to experience so much love on Earth, he would need divine help.

But as he looked at the love in Beatrice’s eyes, he knew that he longed for nothing except to continue looking into her eyes, through which God’s joy was shining.

With a dazzling smile, Beatrice said, “Turn around and listen to Cacciaguida. Paradise can be found in his eyes, too.”

Faces and eyes reveal the deepest wishes of a person, and Dante saw that Cacciaguida wished to speak to him.

Cacciaguida said, “Mars is the fifth Sphere. Think of the Spheres as resembling a tree. This tree would get nourishment from the crown, not the roots, because the crown of the tree would be the place where God dwells: the Mystic Empyrean. This tree would always bear fruit in every season, and it would never lose its leaves.

“Here on Mars dwell souls who were so famous on Earth that they would inspire every poet to write better.

“Look up. Look at the horizontal arms of the Cross. I will name some souls, and you will see them flash across the arms as quickly as lightning flashes through a cloud. The naming and the flashing-by will occur simultaneously.”

As Cacciaguida pronounced each name, Dante saw a light flashing across the arms of the Cross. In all, Cacciaguida pronounced the names of eight holy warriors.

Joshua flashed across the arms of the Cross. Moses never made it to the Holy Land. Joshua was the successor of Moses, and he was the conqueror of the Holy Land. Joshua conquered Jericho, and he allowed Rahab, the whore of Jericho, and her children to remain alive. Joshua conquered Canaan.

Judas Maccabaeus flashed across the arms of the Cross. Judas Maccabaeus, a Jewish general, fought the Syrians in the 2nd century B.C.E. because King Antiochus of Syria was persecuting the Jews. He restored and purified the temple at Jerusalem, but later the Syrians defeated and killed him. When Dante saw this light flash by, he thought of a child’s top that spun and was powered by its own joy.

Charlemagne flashed across the arms of the Cross. Charlemagne was the restorer of the Western Roman Empire. He was the Holy Roman Emperor.

Roland flashed across the arms of the Cross. Roland, Charlemagne’s nephew, fought the Saracens, aka Muslims, in Spain. Roland was famous for his ivory horn and the sound it made. He was Charlemagne’s paladin.

William of Orange flashed across the arms of the Cross. William of Orange fought the Saracens in southern France, and he was the living ideal of the Christian knight. William of Orange was the hero of the Old French epic titled the *Aliscans*.

Renouard flashed across the arms of the Cross. Renouard was a huge Saracen who converted to Christianity and fought on the side of William of Orange; in addition, he was William's brother-in-law. William found him working as a slave in a royal kitchen and freed him. In late life, they lived as monks in the same monastery.

Duke Godfrey flashed across the arms of the Cross. Duke Godfrey was the leader of the First Crusade. He fought the Saracens in the Holy Land, and he became the first Christian King of Jerusalem. He died in 1100 C.E.

Robert Guiscard flashed across the arms of the Cross. The 11th-century Robert Guiscard fought the Saracens in Sicily and in southern Italy, and he founded the Norman dynasty there. He died in 1085 C.E.

Having recited the names of the holy warriors, Cacciaguida rejoined the other souls who made up the Cross, and he sang.

Dante turned to Beatrice to find out what he should do next, and he saw that she had grown brighter and more beautiful. A human being can do good deeds and take joy in doing good deeds and can realize that he or she has grown more virtuous by doing good deeds. Much like that, seeing that Beatrice had grown brighter, he realized that he was in a Sphere that was further away from Earth and was making a bigger orbit around Earth than Mars had done.

He also noticed that the color in Beatrice's face had changed like a blush leaving the face of a lady. Before, it had been reddish with the glow of Mars and now it was white with the glow of Jupiter, which was named after the Roman god who was the king of gods and of men.

Beatrice thought, *The virtue that is associated with Jupiter is justice, and the souls found here are the souls of the just.*

The souls of the just were lights who moved and formed visible speech. Just like birds rise from the edge of water as if they are celebrating an abundance of food, the souls flew together, sometimes in a group and sometimes in a line.

These souls formed letters: First a D, and then an I, and then an L. They sang while forming a letter, but having formed the letter, they stopped singing and allowed Dante enough time to see and remember the letter, and then the souls sang and formed another letter.

Dante thought, *Please, Muses, help me to remember the letters so that I can show them later to other people.*

He remembered. The souls spelled out this message: *DILIGITE IUSTITIAM QUI IUDICATIS TERRAM.*

Dante thought, *Translated from the Latin, the message means "LOVE JUSTICE, YOU WHO RULE THE EARTH." This is the beginning of the first chapter of the book titled "Wisdom of Solomon": "Love justice, you who rule the Earth: think of the Lord with a good heart, and in the simplicity of your heart seek him."*

The souls had formed in the shape of the final M. The letter was gold, and Jupiter in the background was silver. More souls joined the M, and they sang.

Dante thought that they sang about Ultimate Good — perhaps. He was not able to understand some things in Paradise.

When a fire is stirred, sparks rise up. At one time, people thought — incorrectly — that they could foretell the future by examining these sparks.

The souls — it seemed that there were more than a thousand of them — rose to various heights and formed a new shape: that of an Eagle.

Beatrice thought, *The Eagle is a symbol of Empire, and it is a symbol of justice. Roman law is to be greatly respected.*

Guiding the souls was God, Who also guides birds as they build their nests. God is the Creator, and God needs no one to guide His hand, but He is able to guide others.

Dante the Poet thought, *Justice can be found on Earth, and many souls who had the quality of being just while on Earth are present here. Our idea of Justice comes from Paradise, and we can see Justice more clearly when our eyes are not blinded by greed for money.*

*God's wrath is rightfully directed against those who try to turn a temple into a marketplace for buying and for selling. The walls of a temple are built with miracles and martyrs, not with greed for money.*

*May just souls in Paradise pray for those who are misled on Earth by people who provide bad examples although they should provide good examples.*

*At one time, warriors fought wars with swords. Now, bad Popes fight wars by excommunicating people and denying them what God the Father would deny to no one. For example, Pope Gregory VIII, who died in 1085 C.E., excommunicated Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV twice. A later pope, Pope John XXII, wrote excommunications simply so he could make money by canceling the excommunications.*

*Excommunication can be used ethically, but to use it for political and monetary purposes is to misuse it.*

*Popes who use excommunications unethically should remember that Peter and Paul are still alive in Paradise after having died to save the Church.*

*Popes who use excommunications unethically say, "My heart is set on John the Baptist, who lived alone in the wilderness and who died after Salome danced for Herod and then asked for John the Baptist's head on a platter. I know nothing of Peter the Fisherman or of Paul."*

*Yes, the heart of these popes is set on John the Baptist. This sounds good at first, but it is actually bad. The image of John the Baptist is stamped on the gold coins of Florence.*

*Popes who use excommunications unethically are more concerned with collecting gold coins than with doing the will of God. Popes who use excommunications unethically know a lot more about John the Baptist — or rather, John the Baptist's image on gold coins — than they do about Saint Peter or Saint Paul.*

## Chapter 19: Jupiter — Symbolic Eagle (Paradise)

Before Dante's eyes was the figure of the Eagle, a figure that was formed by the joyful souls of the just.

Each soul of the just was like a ruby through which a ray of the Sun was passing and then striking Dante's eyes.

And what Dante saw was something that no other living person else has ever spoken or written about, or even imagined.

Dante saw the beak of the Eagle move, and the Eagle spoke. The Eagle used the singular — "I" and "Mine" — but because all the souls of the just were speaking as one, it could have used the plural — "We" and "Ours."

The Eagle said, "On Earth I was just and pious, and so I am in Paradise and I am appearing before you on this Sphere. I feel as much glory as it is possible for me to feel. On Earth, the memory of me is such that even evil people praise me although they will not follow my example."

Many burning coals produce one glowing heat, and the many souls of the just produced one voice.

Dante said, "You are like many flowers whose fragrances produce one perfume; please breathe forth more words and satisfy my craving to have my questions about justice answered. You are able to directly see the justice that is within the mind of God.

"You know that I am eager to hear you answer my questions, and you know what my questions are that I have wished for a time to have answered."

A falcon that is freed from the hood covering its eyes will stretch its neck and beat its wings in its eagerness to take flight. The Eagle moved similarly and sang a hymn to God.

The Eagle then said to Dante, "God is the One Who created the universe and marked its limits and brought order out of chaos, but even God cannot create something that has His perfection. All that God creates is less perfect than God.

"This is shown with the first Prideful Power, Lucifer, who, although he was the most beautiful and he was the closest to God, used his free will to rebel against God. Lucifer should have waited for grace from God to ripen his understanding. Instead, Lucifer wanted to immediately become God's equal, and he plunged to Earth green and unripe."

Beatrice thought, *If God's greatest created creature can rebel and fall, then it is possible for all of God's other created creatures to rebel and fall. Any creature who rebels against God lacks understanding.*

The Eagle continued, "Humankind has knowledge, but the knowledge of Humankind is only a small fraction of the knowledge that God has. Although Humankind lacks the knowledge that God has, Humankind does have enough knowledge to know how much knowledge Humankind lacks.

"Humankind cannot comprehend the mind of God any more than it can see the deep bottom of the ocean. Yes, Humankind can see the bottom near the shore, but further out into the ocean, Humankind cannot see the bottom of the ocean. But even though Humankind cannot see it, it still exists.

"Truth and light come from God; all else is falsehood and darkness. The answer you seek is hidden in the mind of God.

"The questions that you want to have answered are these: 'Consider a human being who is born in a country in which no one knows about Christ. No one can speak or write about Him



because no one knows Him. This human being, as far as human reason can tell, always acts correctly and always desires correctly. This human being, who has never been baptized, dies. This human being is then denied Paradise. Is it just for this human being to be denied Paradise? Is this human being at fault for never having known Christ?

“Who are you to condemn God’s judgment? It is as if you can barely see beyond your nose and you want to pass judgment on something that happened a thousand miles away!

“Human reason cannot know many things, but fortunately, reason has holy scripture to use as a guide to aid its understanding.

“Humankind needs to remember that God is all-good. What God desires is always just. What God does is always just. If something is in accordance with the will of God, it is just.”

Dante thought, *Our finite human minds are simply unable to understand God’s infinite mind. We underestimate God’s mind if we assume that we can understand the things that God knows. Some things are a mystery. A mystery is something that human reason cannot understand and cannot explain. All we can do is to accept mystery because we cannot explain it. God created Limbo, and He created the rest of the Inferno. We have to assume that He had a good reason for doing this.*

After feeding its young, a stork will fly around the nest, and its chick will raise its head to look at it. Much like that, the Eagle took flight — the souls who made up its wings worked together — and Dante raised his head to look at it.

Circling around Dante, the Eagle sang, “What I sing cannot be understood by human beings on Earth: the harmonics and language are too difficult for them to understand. And so it is with Eternal Judgment.”

The souls stopped singing, and then, still in the form of the Eagle, they said as one, “In Paradise, everyone has had faith in Christ, whether they had faith before He was crucified or after.

“But many people who cry ‘Christ! Christ!’ frequently and loudly on Earth will not be as close to God on the Day of Judgment as will many people who have never heard of Christ.

“Pagans in Ethiopia and elsewhere will condemn such Christians who are Christians in name only.”

Dante thought, *Being Christian is enough to get you into Paradise, but just saying that you are Christian is not enough to get you into Paradise. To know this, all you have to do is look into the Inferno and see all the Popes there. Many of the unrepentant sinners in the Inferno said that they were Christian. Guido da Montefeltro attempted to scam God into thinking that he was a Christian, but Guido’s scam did not work.*

The Eagle continued, “On the Day of Judgment, souls will be divided into two groups. One group of souls will be rich forever after; the other group of souls will be poor forever after.”

Dante thought, *In Matthew 25:31-46, we read about the Day of Judgment:*

*31: When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy Angels with Him, then shall He sit on the throne of His glory:*

*32: And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats,*

*33: And He shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.*

*34: Then shall the King say to them on His right hand, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

*35: “For I was hungry, and you gave me food: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in.*

*36: “I was naked, and you clothed me: I was sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to visit me.”*

37: *Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, "Lord, when saw we You hungry, and fed You, or thirsty, and gave You drink?"*

38: *"When did we see You as a stranger, and took You in, or naked, and clothed You?"*

39: *"Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and came to visit You?"*

40: *And the King shall answer and say to them, "Truly I say to you, Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these My brethren, you have done it to Me."*

41: *Then shall He say also to them on the left hand, "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his Angels."*

42: *"For I was hungry, and you gave Me no food: I was thirsty, and you gave Me no drink."*

43: *"I was a stranger, and you took Me not in: naked, and you did not clothe Me: sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me."*

44: *Then shall they also answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or as a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to You?"*

45: *Then shall He answer them, saying, "Truly I say to you, Inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to Me."*

46: *And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.*

Beatrice thought, *What is the right thing to do? The right thing to do is to feed the hungry, give something to drink to the thirsty, give clothing to the naked, visit those who are ill, and visit those in prison.*

The Eagle continued, "What will the pagans in Persia and other countries say to the Kings of Christian countries when the pagans see the Book of Judgment that God keeps and read about the bad deeds of 'Christian' Kings?"

"Holy Roman Emperor Albert the First is on the verge of committing the evil deed of invading Bohemia and devastating Prague. The pen is over God's book as it waits to record the evil deed. War kills many people, including innocent people.

"Philip the Fair will be in God's book because he brought misery to France. To finance his wars, Philip will inflate French currency and ruin many people. A sound currency is necessary to avoid misery. Philip will be thrown from his horse when a wild boar startles his horse during a royal hunt. Philip will die of the injuries incurred during the fall.

"The English and the Scots warred often, venturing into each other's territory. The Scottish leaders should stay in Scotland, and the English leaders should stay in England. Edward I and Edward II fought with William Wallace and Robert the Bruce.

"Charles II of Naples, aka Charles the Lame, aka the Cripple of Jerusalem — he was the titular King of Jerusalem and had no power there — will have his virtues and vices marked in the Book of Judgment. The Roman number I — for 1 — will be by 'Virtues' and the Roman number 'M' — for 1,000 — will be by 'Vices.'

"Frederick II of Sicily is so paltry a man that he will be allotted little space in the Book of Judgment, but the Recording Angel will need to write in shorthand in order to fit in the tiny space the records of his numerous evil deeds.

"Also recorded in the Book of Judgment among the bad Kings will be Frederick II's brother and uncle: King James of Majorca and King James II of Aragon. Both Kings disgraced their family and their kingdoms.

"Also recorded in the Book of Judgment among the bad Kings will be Orosius II of Rascia, another debaser of the coinage.

"A good king now rules in Hungary, and Hungary will be happy if it continues to escape evil.

"Navarre is happy now, and it will continue to be happy if it uses its mountains as a barrier to keep out the French."

Beatrice thought, *This will not happen. Navarre will become a part of France and will suffer under French rule just as the two principal cities of Crete suffer under Henry II, who is from a French family and who has many debaucheries that make citizens suffer. He is evil, but he is small fry. He does not run in the midst of the pack of evil beings; instead, he runs outside and beside the pack.*

## Chapter 20: Jupiter — Two Pagans in Paradise (Ripheus and Trajan) (Paradise)

When the Sun sets, the stars become visible.

When the Eagle had been speaking, it had spoken as one. Now, it fell silent, and Dante became aware again of the individual lights who made up the Eagle.

The lights sang, and the lights grew brighter, and although the song was sweet, Dante was unable later to remember it.

The souls who were the lights loved God, and they expressed their love through their light.

A voice began to speak. The sound started in the body of the Eagle, and it sounded like the murmur of a stream. The sound then took shape in the neck of the Eagle just as music takes shape in the neck of a lute or the opening of a flute.

The sound became a voice, and the Eagle spoke through its beak: “A mortal eagle is able to look directly into the Sun. Look now at my eye. Many lights give me form, but the lights who make up my eye are the brightest and the worthiest.

“The light who makes up the pupil of the eye is David, who was a poet. He also danced before the ark of the covenant. This ark — a sacred chest — contained two tablets: On the two tablets were written the Ten Commandments. David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant is one of the exempla of humility on the first ledge of the Mountain of Purgatory.

“Now he knows the value of his poems. He contributed to them, but the Holy Spirit also contributed to them through David, whose bliss is equal to what he contributed to his poems.

“Five lights form my eyebrow. The light closest to my beak is the Emperor Trajan, who was not proud. He was just. Instead of going to war right away, he first helped a widow whose son had been killed. This story is one of the exempla of humility on the first ledge of the Mountain of Purgatory.

“Now he knows what is the penalty for failing to follow Christ. He learned that during the time that he spent in Limbo before he was permitted to enter Paradise.

“Next in the eyebrow is King Hezekiah of Judah. He learned that he was going to die of illness, but he prayed to God, ‘I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before You in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Your sight.’ God heard his prayer and allowed him to live for fifteen more years. God told him, ‘And I will add to your days fifteen years; and I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the King of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for My servant David’s sake.’

“Now he knows that God’s eternal laws never change — not even when God delays events because of a worthy prayer.

“The next light is the Emperor Constantine, who moved the capital of the Roman Empire east to Constantinople in 330 C.E. His doing this left the popes in charge of Rome and the Western part of the Roman Empire. This move by Constantine was disastrous because it made the popes greedy, although Constantine himself had good motives when he made his donation.

“Now he knows that the evil consequences of his action do not harm his soul because his motive was good when he acted. The evil consequences of an action — as long as one’s motive is good — will not harm one’s soul even if the entire world is destroyed by that action. Good motives will help people get into Paradise, and the bad consequences of actions that people do with a good motive will not keep them out of Paradise.

“The next soul in the eyebrow is King William II the Good, King of Naples and Sicily. He is a son who is better than his father: King William I the Bad. King William II was good to

religious institutions and to his people, who mourned his death in 1189 C.E. The Kings who followed him — Charles II of Naples, aka Charles the Lamé, aka the Cripple of Jerusalem, and Frederick II of Sicily — were bad.

“Now he knows how much Paradise loves a righteous king.

“The final light in the eyebrow is Ripheus of Troy, whom no one in your world would expect to be here. Ripheus is pre-Christian. He is mentioned very briefly in Book 2 of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, which recounts the fall of Troy. Ripheus fought with Aeneas against the conquering Achaeans, and he died defending Troy. Ripheus was the most just of all the Trojans, and he was keenest for what was right. People would not expect to see Ripheus in Paradise because he lived centuries before the time of Christ, and he was not a Jew.

“Now he knows more about God’s grace than any living man, although, even he, who is in Paradise, cannot see to the bottom of the depths of the mind of God.”

The Eagle then sang like a lark singing in the sky, and then it fell silent, happy with the last notes of its beautiful song. The Eagle was happy to reflect God’s glory.

Dante was perplexed. These souls included two Jews, two Christians, and two pagans — or at least they seemed to be pagans. How could two pagans be in Paradise?

Dante asked, “How is this possible?”

The lights flashed, happy with the opportunity to enlighten Dante.

The Eagle said to Dante, “I see that you believe that Trajan and Ripheus are in Paradise. You believe that because I told you that. But you do not see how this is possible. You do not understand the cause of their being in Paradise. To you, the truth is hidden.

“You understand the fact, but not the cause or reason. You need to have the cause or reason explained to you.

“The Kingdom of Heaven can be defeated by fervent love and by vibrant hope. In fact, God wants to be defeated in that way. By suffering defeat, God shows mercy, and by showing mercy, God achieves victory. Defeat suffered on an Earthly battlefield is very much different.

“You do not understand why Trajan and Ripheus, whom you believe to be pagans, can be here in Paradise. Actually, when they left their bodies, they were Christians. Trajan had faith in the feet that had already suffered in the Crucifixion, and Ripheus had faith in the feet that would suffer in the Crucifixion.

“The Roman Emperor Trajan lived after the time of Christ. He died in the year 117 C.E., and he did not prosecute Christians.

“Pope Gregory the Great, who died in 604 C.E., was so impressed by the story of Trajan and the woman whose son had been killed that he prayed so fervently for Trajan that the Roman Emperor was brought back to life and taken from Limbo. While alive for the second time, Trajan accepted Christ, and he then died a Christian.

“After the first time he died, the pagan Trajan went to Limbo, but after the second time he died, the Christian Trajan went to Paradise.

“Ripheus, over a thousand years before Christ, so believed in and loved justice that he received God’s grace, which is so deep that no man can see its bottom.

“Because Ripheus so loved righteousness, God opened his eyes and he became a Christian. He hated the pagan gods and tried to warn the people who worshipped them that they were doing wrong.”

Beatrice thought, *The pagan gods were not worthy of being worshipped. The pagan gods were powerful, but they were not omnipotent. The pagan gods knew a lot, but they were not omniscient. The pagans were far from being good. They simply did not care much for human beings. Story after story in ancient mythology recounts the gods raping mortals. If a god is to be worthy of being worshipped, that god must be omnibenevolent, and the pagan gods were not*

*even benevolent. The one true God is omnibenevolent and is worthy of being worshipped. Ripheus realized how bad the pagan gods were and how all-good the one true God is.*

The Eagle continued, “Ripheus was baptized more than a thousand years before baptism existed. Those three ladies who were at the right wheel of the chariot — Faith, Hope, and Love — were his baptism. Ripheus believed in faith, hope, and love — the theological virtues — so much that his belief was his baptism. Of course, Ripheus’ culture did not know about baptism.

“Predestination exists. From before the beginning of the existence of the universe, God knew who would be saved and who would not be saved. This does not negate free will. God sees the past, the present, and the future all at the same time, and God sees people use their free will to make decisions freely. To people, predestination is a mystery because they do not see as God sees.

“God exists outside of time and space, and so God knows our every action: past, present, and future. God sees us using our free will to either do the right thing or do the wrong thing.

“Be slow to judge, people who live on Earth. Even we saved souls in Paradise do not know who will be saved. We see into the mind of God, but we do not see so deeply that we know that.

“We are not bothered by our lack of this knowledge. We will what God wills, and we are happy with what God wills.”

And so the eagle responded to Dante’s questions with as much information as he was able to understand.

And the two lights who were Trajan and Ripheus quivered as the Eagle sang a song.

Dante the Poet thought, *We have limitations. We are unable to explain the mystery of predestination. We are unable to tell who will wind up in the Inferno and who will wind up in Paradise.*

*None of us can make up a list of 10 things we have to do in order to get a Get-Out-of-Hell-Free card. This doesn’t mean that we don’t know lots of things we ought to do and lots of things we ought not to do if we want to make it to Paradise. But we would be arrogant if we were to tell God that we did such-and-such, and therefore God has to let us into Paradise.*

*One person who did make a list of things to do in order to get into Paradise is Guido da Montefeltro. His list included Repent and Give Up Sin, but of course he failed miserably at sincerely doing these things. Even though Guido metaphorically made his list and checked off all the items, God knew that Guido was trying to scam Him, and therefore Guido ended up in the Inferno.*

*Of course, Paradise does have good surprises:*

*A pagan from the Trojan War is in Paradise!*

*Someone’s earnest prayer helped save a pagan who was already dead!*

*And since we can’t figure out such things as Salvation and Predestination, perhaps other excellent surprises are in store for us.*

Beatrice thought, *God is merciful and omnibenevolent: He is an all-loving God. We have a hard time understanding eternal punishment. Interestingly, some Christian mystics, including Julian of Norwich, and some Christian theologians, including Origen, believe in apocatastasis. They believe that all will be well for everybody in the end. In other words, everybody will make it to Paradise in the end. The word apocatastasis means an upset verdict — someone may have been sentenced to eternal damnation, but if that verdict is upset, then that person will make it to Paradise.*

*I am in Paradise, and I cannot see deeply enough into the mind of God to know everything that will happen in the future, but if everyone, including the worst sinners of all time, eventually makes it to Paradise, it would be a triumph for Unconditional Love.*

## Chapter 21: Saturn — Symbolic Ladder; Saint Peter Damian (Paradise)

Dante looked at Beatrice. Beatrice did not smile.

She explained, “Were I to smile in this new Sphere — Saturn — you would be incinerated because you are not yet able to withstand such beauty. You would be incinerated like Semele was when the Roman god Jupiter appeared to her the way he appears to the other gods.”

Dante thought, *One should not be temperate in some things. One is Love. Unconditional Love is not temperate. However, even though Beatrice’s beauty is not temperate — she becomes more and more beautiful the closer she rises to Paradise — she demonstrates temperance in how she handles her beauty. For example, she does not smile at me because she knows that if she were to smile, her beauty would blast me to ashes, the way that Semele was blasted to ashes when she asked Jupiter to reveal himself to her in all his glory. In ancient mythology, mortals cannot look at gods in all their glory and survive. This may be why the gods and goddesses so often disguise themselves as mortals when they come among Humankind.*

*Beatrice and I have risen to the next Sphere: Saturn, which is the planet of temperance. Temperance means moderation; it means not going to extremes. Temperance is one of the cardinal virtues. The four cardinal virtues are wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance.*

*Saint Thomas Aquinas regarded temperance as the disciplining of our instincts toward pleasure.*

*He was right.*

*Eating is pleasurable, but a temperate person will not be obese. Sex is pleasurable, but a temperate person will not be a rapist or engage in other kinds of immoral sex. Drinking wine is pleasurable, but a temperate person will not drink excessively.*

*Temperance is very important, as is shown by the fact that the planet devoted to temperance is the closest to Paradise of the planets devoted to the four cardinal virtues. Other people of my time probably regard wisdom as being more important than temperance, but I, Dante, believe differently.*

Beatrice continued, “My beauty grows greater the closer I am to God. If I did not temper my beauty now, you would not be able to withstand it. Without being tempered, my beauty would hit your eyes in the same way that a lightning bolt hits a tree.”

Beatrice asked Dante to look up.

Dante loved looking at Beatrice’s beauty even though she was not smiling, and he loved even more obeying her. He turned his eyes away from her face and looked up.

Saturn is the name of the ancient Roman god who ruled during a Golden Age. Dante saw a Ladder. It was gold, and Saturn was silver, and the Ladder stretched so far that Dante could not see its end.

Coming down the Ladder were many lights — so many that Dante wondered whether every star in the night sky was coming down the rungs of the Ladder.

Dante thought, *Four planets are devoted to the cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance. Each planet has a symbol.*

*The Sun is devoted to wisdom. Its symbol is the Circle, which is a symbol of Divine Infinity: Infinite Power, Infinite Knowledge, and Infinite Benevolence.*

*Mars is devoted to courage. Its symbol is the Cross, which is a symbol of Human Salvation.*

*Jupiter is devoted to justice. Its symbol is the Eagle, which is a symbol of Earthly Order.*

*Saturn is devoted to temperance. Its symbol is the Ladder, which is a symbol of Spiritual Vision.*

Sometimes, crows will flock together as they warm up in the Sun after dawn. After warming up, they will move separately. Some will fly away and not return. Some will fly away and then come back to where they started. Some will fly in the same area where they warmed up.

Some contemplatives will leave their religious house and return to the world. Some contemplatives will make brief trips to the world and then return to their religious house. Some contemplatives will never leave their religious house.

The souls on the Ladder reached a certain rung, and then they stopped.

But one soul nearby glowed brightly, and Dante said to himself, "From your glowing, I can see the love you bear me, but Beatrice, who bids me when to speak and when not to speak, is quiet, and so I am not asking this soul anything, although I would like to."

Beatrice, who knew Dante's thoughts, said to him, "Satisfy your desire to ask questions."

Dante said to the bright soul, "I am not worthy to receive an answer from you, but for the sake of Beatrice, who gives me permission to ask questions, please tell me the answers to two questions. First, why did you come so close to me? Second, why are no souls singing here although souls have been singing in the Spheres below Saturn?"

The bright soul replied and answered Dante's second question first, "Because you are mortal, your hearing is limited just as your seeing is limited. The souls do not sing here for the same reason that Beatrice does not smile here. You are unable to withstand such beauty."

Then the bright soul answered Dante's second question, "I have come so far down the rungs of the Ladder simply so that I can welcome you. I am not here because I love more than other souls — you can see brighter souls on the rungs of the Ladder.

"But God's love makes us want to serve others and assigns us deeds to do. This is my assigned deed."

Dante said to the bright soul, "I understand that saved souls freely serve God and God's omnibenevolence, but how is it that you alone out of all these souls have been the one predestined to answer my questions?"

The bright soul spun around in joy at being able to speak to Dante, and the bright soul said, "God's love shines on me and joins my sight, and I can see a vision of God. From this vision of God comes my joy.

"By as much as my spiritual vision is clear, my light will be bright.

"But I cannot explain to you the answer to your question. Even the most enlightened of the Seraphim, who are the highest order of Angels and the order of Angels closest to God, cannot answer your question. The explanation you seek is hidden deep in the mind of God — so deep that no human being should seek its answer.

"A mind that is bright in Paradise is dull on Earth. How then could a human being on Earth discover an answer that a soul in Paradise cannot find?"

Dante knew that the bright soul could not answer this question, and so he humbly asked who the bright soul was.

The bright soul answered, "In Italy is the monastery of Santa Croce di Fonte Avella. In my time, it devoted itself to praising God. I served God there, and I ate nothing but plain foods prepared with inexpensive olive oil. I welcomed both heat and cold, and I contemplated God.

"This monastery produced many souls who are in Paradise, but now this monastery is decadent.

"At this monastery I was known as Peter Damian, but at Santa Maria in Porto I was known as Peter the Sinner.



“Not many years on Earth were left to me when Pope Stephen IX made me wear the hat of a cardinal — a hat that seems to pass from bad people to worse people.

“In the early days of the Church, Simon became Cephas, aka Peter. He was lean, and he was barefoot, and he ate whatever food was offered to him. Saint Peter was temperate.

“But modern popes and cardinals need help from many people to push their big butts — grown huge from too much food — up on horses. Modern popes and cardinals are so big-butted and so big in body that when they are on a horse their clothing covers the horse so that it looks like one being is under the clothing.

“God endures so much!”

When Peter Damian said these words, many souls joined him, and all the souls cried out. No one on Earth has heard such an outcry, and the outcry was so loud that Dante could not make out the words of the outcry.

Dante thought, *On Saturn, the planet of temperance, we find contemplatives such as Peter Damian. On Earth, the contemplatives contemplate God, and they may occasionally enjoy a direct experience of God.*

*Peter Damian was a great contemplative who was called away from the contemplative life. He lived in the 11th century C.E., and he was a contemplative who was forced to become a cardinal although he did not want to; instead, he wanted to remain a contemplative.*

*Pope Stephen IX made Peter Damian a cardinal because the Pope wanted a contemplative such as Peter Damian to help him reform the Church. Contemplatives have the ability to reform. Both Peter Damian and Pope Stephen IX supported the Gregorian Reform.*

*Because Pope Stephen IX wanted to reform the Church, he found the best man for the job, and he made him a cardinal. (Of course, other reformers existed.) A Simonist pope such as Pope Boniface VIII would have made cardinal whoever offered him the greatest amount of money.*

*Compare the people who are made cardinals in the two systems. A Simonist wants to be made cardinal but is not qualified to be a cardinal. Peter Damian is qualified to be a cardinal, but he resists being made cardinal until he is convinced that he can do a lot of good as cardinal.*

*Why are contemplatives so often a good choice for reforming the Church?*

*Contemplatives are temperate. They do not overindulge in food, sex, or wine.*

*Why is temperance so important? Temperance is important if we are to develop and use our other virtues. Temperance is a foundation for the other cardinal virtues.*

*Let’s say that you are addicted to food, sex, and wine. Will you be wise, brave, and just?*

*If you are drunk all the time, you won’t read books or study or think much.*

*If you eat way too much, you won’t be able to rescue a child from a burning house because you will be too fat to climb in the window so you can rescue the child.*

*If you are addicted to sex, you won’t be a just judge because all a pretty (or handsome) defendant has to do to get a verdict of “innocent” is to sleep with you.*

*Contemplatives, being temperate, avoid these pitfalls, and they keep their eye on the prize.*

Beatrice thought, *Peter Damian is a model for Dante to follow. Peter Damian was a contemplative who was able to experience God, but he left the contemplative life because the Pope needed him to help reform the Church. Similarly, Dante is going to be able to experience God. This will be his own kind of contemplative experience. However, like Peter Damian, Dante is going to have to leave. He is not ready to stay in Paradise. Instead, Dante has work to accomplish on Earth: He has to write The Divine Comedy. Later, after his death, is the time for Dante to stay in Paradise permanently. Like Peter Damian, Dante will be a reformer.*

## Chapter 22: Saturn — Saint Benedict (Paradise)

Shocked by the cry of the souls, Dante turned toward Beatrice the way a little boy runs to his mother when he is startled.

Beatrice calmed Dante just like a mother would calm a son.

She said to him, “You are in Paradise, and here every act is correct. You have heard a cry of righteous zeal. Think now of what would have happened if these souls had sung or if I had smiled — all these souls did was to give a single cry of righteous zeal, and you are shaken.

“You were unable to make out the words they cried, but if you had you would know the vengeance that God will wreak against the religious who are unworthy. But I will tell you that you will witness that vengeance while you are still alive.

“God’s vengeance arrives at exactly the right time, although the guilty think it arrives too early and the innocent think it arrives too late.

“But now look at the souls again. Let me speak to you and guide your eyes so that you see many remarkable souls.”

Dante turned and saw hundreds of bright globes of fire; each globe was a soul. Dante restrained himself and did not speak. He wanted to speak, but he did not want to risk offending Beatrice or anyone else. He was like a Benedictine monk who would not speak until spoken to.

Then the largest, most brilliant light came forward and spoke to Dante. This light knew that Dante wanted information, and this light was willing to help Dante.

The light said to Dante, “If you knew the love we souls have for you, you would speak to us and share your thoughts. I know you have a question. Let me answer it without your asking it so that I do not cause you delay and so that you may continue your journey through Paradise.

“Monte Cassino in Italy was filled with pagans while I was alive. I was the first to be a missionary to them and teach them about Jesus Christ and the One True God.

“Grace shone on me, and I was successful as a missionary. I reclaimed for God many towns in the region. I converted the pagans to Christianity.

“The flames — the lights — around me were all contemplatives. They experienced the Divine Love that brings forth good thoughts and good deeds.”

Dante thought, *This soul is Saint Benedict, and he was a sixth-century Italian monk. He is a contemplative; in fact, he is known as the founder of Western monasticism. He founded a monastery at Monte Cassino. Lots of pagans were around Monte Cassino when Saint Benedict founded his monastery there, and so Saint Benedict acted as a missionary, converting pagans to Christianity. In the Rule of Saint Benedict, which most Western Catholic monks follow, the monks are contemplatives, they live in a cloister, and they pray in a group many times a day.*

Saint Benedict continued, “These two souls here are Saint Macarius the Younger of Alexandria, who died in 404 C.E. and is known as the founder of Eastern monasticism, and Saint Romuald, who died in 1027 C.E. and helped reform Benedictinism in the 11th century. He is known as the founder of the order of Reformed Benedictines.

“And here are my brother monks who stayed in cloisters and kept a good heart.”

Dante said to Saint Benedict, “Thank you for the love you have shown me by speaking to me, and thank you for all of your good intentions. You make me feel confident enough to ask you a question: Do I have enough grace to be able to see your face instead of this light?”

Saint Benedict replied, “Your desire will be fulfilled, but not in this Sphere. In the Mystic Empyrean you will be able to see my face and the faces of the other saved souls. At that time and in that space — in the Mystic Empyrean that is beyond time and space — all wishes are

good and all wishes are fulfilled. Only in the Mystic Empyrean are all wishes perfect, ripe, and whole.

“Only in the Mystic Empyrean are no space and no time. The Ladder reaches to the Mystic Empyrean, and so you cannot see the end of the Ladder. Jacob is the one who dreamed about the Ladder reaching to the Mystic Empyrean and about Angels climbing it.”

Dante thought, *The Ladder is a symbol of communication between God and Humankind. We read the story of Jacob’s Ladder in Genesis 28:12-16. Jacob dreamed, and he saw a Ladder set up on the Earth, and the top of it reached to Paradise. He saw the Angels of God ascending and descending on it. The Ladder is also a symbol of Spiritual Vision. Each rung of the Ladder represents knowledge of the Divine that the contemplative has achieved.*

Saint Benedict continued, “But these days no one attempts to climb the Ladder. To do so would require lifting a foot from off the Earth, and this is something that people these days regard as asking too much.

“I wrote the *Regula Monachorum* [*Rule for Monks*], but since no one follows these rules, they are not worth the parchment they are written on — and neither is my Order.

“The cells that used to be for monks in my Order are now stalls for beasts.

“The cowls that monks in my Order used to wear are now rotten bags of rotten meal.

“The sin of usury is a serious sin, but even worse in God’s eyes is the desire for money that makes monks insane. The monks desire money that is supposed to be used for the poor; the monks want to use the money for the monks’ illegitimate children and mistresses.

“Many monks start out well but are soon corrupted. To flourish, monks must have the proper conditions. Their good beginning must last longer than it takes an oak tree to form an acorn.

“Look at how people build faith. Peter built faith without silver and gold. I built faith with praying and fasting. Saint Francis built faith with humbleness.”

Dante thought, *Saint Benedict was a great missionary. Why? He was a contemplative. Contemplatives pray, and they have discipline. They have roots in spiritual discipline.*

*It is a good idea for us to be also rooted in spiritual discipline. If we want to make positive changes in the world, we need to have good roots.*

*We can build on the work of others. People in different historical eras need different things, but we can build on the good work that has been done before us. Saint Peter did not want silver and gold. Saint Benedict stressed praying and fasting. Saint Francis was humble.*

*In Saint Francis’ day, what was needed was humility, and so he was humble. However, he also prayed and fasted, just as Saint Benedict recommended. He also did not need silver and gold, just as Saint Peter recommended.*

*Did Saint Francis build a new church? No. He reformed the old church. He built on the foundations that had been made by others.*

*Throughout the universe are things that can lead us back to God. The founders of religious orders that I see on Saturn are people who have found things that lead us back to God.*

*We need to use the wisdom of other people. These contemplatives have found things that can lead us back to God, so why shouldn’t we be aware of and make use of them? One of the good things that we can do in our lives is to investigate different religious orders and see what truth we can find in them.*

Saint Benedict continued, “The Church needs intervention to be saved. Divine interventions have occurred before. God made the Jordan flow backwards, and he parted the Red Sea so that the Jews could escape from Egypt. These Divine interventions are much greater than the intervention that is now needed to save the Church.”

Saint Benedict then withdrew, and he and the other souls swept up the Ladder like a whirlwind.

Beatrice made a gesture, and she and Dante swept up the Ladder. Her gesture made Dante's body light.

Their movement up the Ladder was fast, much faster than the speeds achieved by Humankind on Earth.

As quickly as you can remove a finger from the heat of a fire, Dante and Beatrice had risen to the next Sphere: that of the Fixed Stars. The planets move around the night sky, but the Fixed Stars are fixed into position and do not move relative to each other.

Dante and Beatrice entered the constellation of Gemini. In Dante's time, the stars and planets were thought to influence those born in their sign. Dante was born a Gemini. The people of Dante's time thought that Geminis are inclined to pursue the arts and intellectual endeavors.

Dante was happy to enter his own sign when he entered the Sphere of the Fixed Stars. He knew that soon he would pass beyond this Sphere into the Mystic Empyrean.

Beatrice said to him, "You are very close now to your destination. You will see the final blessedness, so work now to keep your vision clear.

"Look back now at the distance we have traveled. We have crossed the universe. Look back now, and soon you will know much joy."

Dante looked back, and he saw all of the Spheres that he and Beatrice had visited, and he saw the Earth, which looked so paltry that he smiled.

He thought, *In the grand scheme of things, the Earth is not worth much. The best minds will not value it highly, and the wisest men will think about things other than the Earth. The Earth is our abode for now, but it is not the center of value of the universe. The center of value of the universe is actually beyond the universe, in the realm in which God dwells.*

Dante looked at the Moon; on this side, the side not facing the Earth, it had no spots. He looked straight at and into the Sun without hurting his eyes. He saw Mercury and Venus, which were very close to the Sun. He saw Jupiter, which was temperate in between the heat of Mars and the coolness of Saturn. He was able to see how these planets moved.

He saw all seven planets that were known by medieval people. He saw that they were vast. He saw that they spun swiftly. He saw the distance between their Spheres.

He saw the Earth: a patch of dust on which Humankind commits sins.

And then he turned and looked at the eyes of Beatrice.

## Chapter 23: Gemini — Christ, Mary, and the Saints (Paradise)

A mother bird will eagerly await dawn so that she can go forth and find food for her nestlings — this is a task that she joyfully performs.

Much like that, Beatrice looked eagerly upward, awaiting something good that she knew was soon to happen. Looking at her, Dante also became filled with eager anticipation.

Quickly, what Beatrice was awaiting arrived. She said to Dante, “Look at the Angels of Paradise who celebrate the triumphant Christ, and look at the saved souls who are the fruits of Christ’s triumph.”

Dante saw how bright Beatrice’s face was. He saw how happy her eyes were. But the brightness and the happiness were so high in degree that he knew that he would not be able to describe them.

On a night with a full moon, nymphs surround the virgin goddess Diana. Dante saw a Sun — Jesus Christ — that outshone the other lights — the Angels and the saved souls — much like the way that our Sun that shines on the Earth outshines the stars in the night sky.

The Sun Who was Jesus Christ was so bright that Dante was not able to look at Him.

Beatrice said, “The Light Who blinds you now is so strong that nothing is or can be a defense against Him. Within that Light is wisdom and power that created a way for Humankind to go to Paradise.”

Lightning springs into existence and suddenly strikes. Dante’s mind swelled with the vision of Christ, and it was as if his mind were lightning, exploding and breaking boundaries. What happened to his mind Dante could not explain, except to say that it had expanded.

This kind of expansion of the mind is preparation for the experience of Divine Revelation.

Beatrice said to Dante, “Open your eyes. Look at me. What you have just witnessed has expanded your mind, and you can now look at my smile without being incinerated.”

Later, back on Earth, Dante the Poet thought about this moment: *Now, trying to remember, I am like a man who has just woken from a deep sleep and has forgotten what he dreamed. But I do remember Beatrice’s invitation, and that is something that I will never forget.*

*But still, even if Polyhymnia, the Muse of Song, and all the other Muses were to assist me, I would not be able to describe Beatrice’s smile and the glow of her holy face.*

*These are descriptions that I have to skip. These descriptions are ineffable.*

*But readers, please remember what I am trying to do in my poem Paradise. My poem has a mighty theme, and my shoulders are mortal, and when I try to carry this theme, I stagger.*

*Imagine that I am in a boat trying to cross this particular stretch of sea. This is no place for a small boat or for a boat captain who wishes to take it easy.*

Beatrice said to Dante, who was still looking at her smile, “Why are you looking so intently at my face? You can see much more here. Look at the Angels and the saved souls with Jesus Christ. They are like flowers in a garden.

“And look at the Rose — the Mother Mary, in whose body the incarnation of God took place. And look at the lilies — the Apostles. The fragrance — the good words and good actions — of the Apostles led many souls to salvation.”

Dante, who was eager to please Beatrice, looked at the lights.

On a sunny day, the sunshine will light a field of flowers and make colors vibrant. Dante saw many lights who were filled with love from the Light Who was brightest. This Light — Jesus Christ — had withdrawn from Dante’s sight because Dante’s eyes were not ready for so strong a Light.

Christ had ascended, but many other splendid lights remained. Because his mind had been transformed, Dante could now look at the many splendors who were still before him. The brightest of all these splendors was Mary, the mother of Christ, to whom Dante prayed daily. This light — a living star — Dante was able to see.

The Angel Gabriel descended, circled Mary, and sang words of praise to her.

Dante saw a ring of fire — the Angel Gabriel — spin around Mother Mary as if the Angel were a fiery crown. Gabriel sang, and the sweetest music that Humankind hears on Earth sounds like thunder compared to Gabriel's singing for Mother Mary.

Gabriel sang, "I and the other Angels love you, Mother Mary, in whose womb Jesus Christ dwelt, and I will circle you as you follow your Son to the Mystic Empyrean and make it more divine with your presence."

The other souls sang Mary's name.

Mary then left, following in the path of Jesus.

The Primum Mobile is the Sphere beyond the Sphere of the Fixed Stars. It moves the fastest of all the Spheres and is the closest to the Mystic Empyrean. Dante knew it existed and he looked for it, but it was so far away that he could not see it. Because Dante's eyes were not strong enough to see the Primum Mobile, he was unable to watch Mother Mary and the Angel Gabriel for very long as they rose higher and further away.

After an infant is finished sucking milk from his mother's breasts, the infant will raise his arms to his mother, glowing with love.

Much like that, the lights stretched their flames in appreciation of and love for Mother Mary.

And with their flames stretched, the lights sang the "*Regina Coeli*":

"Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia.

"For He Whom you deserved to bear in your womb, alleluia.

"Has risen, as He promised, alleluia.

"Pray for us to God, alleluia.

"Rejoice and be glad, O Virgin Mary, alleluia.

"For the Lord has truly risen, alleluia."

These souls who are in Paradise did much good while they were alive on Earth. When they were on the Earth, they scorned gold, but now they have the grace of God.

And here, beneath the Son of God and beneath Mary and among the saved souls who lived in Old Covenant times and the saved souls who lived in New Covenant times is a victorious and triumphant soul — Saint Peter — who holds glorious keys.

## Chapter 24: Gemini — Saint Peter Examines Dante’s Faith (Paradise)

Beatrice said to the lights, “O saved souls who feast at the banquet, help this man. With God’s grace give him a few crumbs that fall from the table. Consider his great thirst, and give him a few drops. Your needs are entirely satisfied.”

The souls spun in circles. They were synchronized the way that wheels in clocks are synchronized. They moved in harmony, although some spun in circles quickly and others spun in circles slowly. The speed of their movement revealed to Dante the degree of their bliss.

The soul who was brightest and who spun fastest circled Beatrice three times while music played that was so beautiful that it was ineffable and Dante could not remember it later.

After finishing three circles, the soul said to Beatrice, “Holy sister of mine, I have heard your prayer to us, and I am happy to grant it.”

Beatrice said to the soul, “Eternal light of the man to whom Our Lord gave the keys that open the doors to Paradise, test this man. Ask him questions about faith — the faith that enabled you to walk on water.

“You know that he has love and hope and faith, but it is fitting for him to show his knowledge of and glorify faith because the citizens of Paradise are citizens of the true faith.”

Beatrice thought, *Dante will be examined on his knowledge of the virtues faith, hope, and love. The first three Spheres that Dante visited were concerned with those virtues. Moon: faith. Mercury: hope. Venus: love.*

*The souls in these first three Spheres incorrectly practiced or lacked in some way the virtue associated with the Sphere they were in.*

*Afterward, the Sun and the Spheres beyond the Sun were beyond the shadow cast by the Earth. The souls on these Spheres (including the Sun) did not lack the virtue associated with the Sphere they were in; instead, they were outstanding examples of that virtue.*

*One purpose of the examination is to see what changes his journey has wrought in Dante. What has he learned by taking this journey?*

*Three apostles will examine Dante in the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Saint Peter: faith. Saint James: hope. Saint John: love.*

*Dante’s examination will be similar to a medieval university exam for a bachelor’s degree. The examination involves discussion, not final answers. The bachelors taking these examinations in the Middle Ages discuss whatever topic the masters examining them propose. This examination is a case of engaging oneself in a dialogue from which one can learn.*

*Taking an examination such as this can be a good thing. The people examining Dante are on Dante’s side, and they hope that Dante does well.*

*Saint Peter will examine Dante in the virtue of faith. This is the same Peter who before the rooster crowed denied three times that he knew Jesus after the Romans took Jesus prisoner. Peter sinned, but he repented, and he became an effective spreader of Christianity, with the result that he knows a lot about faith and that he is now in Paradise.*

Dante thought about faith while he waited for Saint Peter’s first question.

Saint Peter said to him, “Good Christian, speak up. What is faith?”

Defining important words to show that you know their meaning is often a good idea. Dante glanced at Beatrice, who wanted him to do well in the exam, and then he defined faith.

Dante replied to Saint Peter, “The grace of God allows me to be questioned by you. May God’s grace help me to express my answers well.

“The pen of your brother, Saint Paul, who with you set Rome on the path to Christianity, wrote in Hebrews 11:1 that faith is the substance of the things we hope for, and it is argument for those things that are not seen. In my opinion, that is the essence of faith.”

Beatrice thought, *Dante has done his reading for the examination. Saint Peter is the author of 1 Peter and 2 Peter in the New Testament; these books are letters. Dante has read these books, as well as the writings of Paul, including Hebrews.*

Saint Peter replied, “You are right, but do you understand why faith is substance first and argument second?”

Dante replied, “The things that are clearly evident in Paradise are not clearly evident on Earth.

“The things we hope for are the happiness and love that come from residing eternally in Paradise. Our hope for these things rests on faith, and so faith is the substance of these hoped-for things. Faith is the foundation on which our high hopes stand.

“Once we have this faith, we can use it in argument. Faith gives us the unproven (on Earth) but true (everywhere at all times) axioms or starting points from which we can gain further knowledge.”

Saint Peter was pleased by Dante’s answer and said, “If all mortals on Earth understood faith so well, the faulty reasoning of flawed thinkers would be ignored.”

Filled with love, he added, “You understand the definition of faith. My next question is this: Do you have faith?”

Dante replied, truthfully, “Yes, I have faith of an excellent quality. If faith were a coin, my coin would not be counterfeit.”

Saint Peter then asked Dante, “The other virtues, including hope and love, rest upon faith. My next question is this: From where did you get your faith?”

Dante replied, “I got my faith from the Old Testament and from the New Testament, both of which were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Any proof compared to this proof is unconvincing.”

Saint Peter then asked, “What is the evidence for the truth of what we read in the Bible? How do you know that the Bible is God’s holy word?”

Dante replied, “I know that the Bible is true because of the miracles recounted in it. Nature cannot perform these miracles; miracles are in opposition to the laws of nature. Miracles are the proof of the truth of faith.”

Saint Peter then asked Dante, “How do you know that the miracles recounted in the Old Testament and the New Testament actually occurred? You can’t simply assume that they occurred. You need to have an argument that concludes that they occurred.”

Dante replied, “I look at the Earth, and I see that much of it is Christian. If the miracles actually occurred, that is a good reason for Humankind to turn to Christianity. But if Humankind were to turn to Christianity without the existence of miracles, then that would be an even greater miracle than the miracles recounted in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

“The conclusion of my argument is that it is much more likely that the miracles recounted in the Old Testament and the New Testament occurred than it is that Humankind became Christian without the occurrence of the miracles recounted in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Therefore, I believe that the miracles recounted in the Old Testament and the New Testament really occurred.

“In other words, miracles occurred, and people became Christians. Suppose that the miracles did not occur. If people became Christians without witnessing the miracles that spurred them to become Christians, that would be even more of a miracle than the miracles we read about in the Bible!



“Thank you, Saint Peter, for spreading Christianity on Earth. Unfortunately, the vines that you planted are now thorns because many clergy are corrupt.”

Dante’s answer pleased the saved souls. They knew that Dante was correct about the corruptness of the present clergy, and so they sang, “*Te Deum Laudamus*” — “Let Us Praise You, God.” The music they sang to is heard only in Paradise.

Saint Peter was reaching almost the last of his questions. He asked Dante, “The grace of God has helped you to answer all these questions correctly, and I am pleased by what you have said. But now tell me your creed. What do you believe? What do Christians believe? And what is the source of your belief?”

Dante replied, “Saint Peter, you entered the tomb of Jesus Christ first although younger feet than yours — the feet of Saint John — arrived at the tomb first. You are now in Paradise, and your faith has now been confirmed.

“You ask what I believe and why I believe it.

“I believe in the One True God. This God moves all the Spheres although He is Unmoved; He is the Unmoved Mover. The One True God created the universe and was not Himself created. This God has necessary existence while the universe has contingent existence. This God loves.

“I know this because of physics and metaphysics — because of the Book of Nature and philosophical and theological reasoning. I know this because truth falls from Paradise to Earth. I know this because of scripture — through Moses, aka the first five books of the Bible, and through the prophets and through the Psalms and through the Gospel and through your own letters that you wrote under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

“And I believe in the Trinity. I believe in three eternal Beings. I believe in an Essence that is both One and Three. I believe that the words *is* and *are* apply equally well to this Essence.

“Why do I believe in this Essence? The teachings of the Gospel have educated me.

“And now you know the source of my belief and why I believe the way I do.

“The source of my belief is like a spark that catches fire and shines like a star in Heaven and enlightens my mind.”

Saint Peter was delighted by Dante’s answer, and he sang benedictions for Dante and flew three times around him.

Dante the Pilgrim had passed this examination.

Beatrice thought, *Dante has learned much not only from holy scripture (Moses, aka the first five books of the Bible; the Prophets; the Psalms; the Gospel, and from Peter and Paul), but also from philosophers such as Aristotle. When Dante refers to God as an Unmoved Mover, he is using Aristotelian language. A combination of creed and philosophy is found in Dante’s answers.*

*Dante has two sources of knowledge: reason (as in logic and the study of nature, including the heavenly bodies) and revelation (as in scripture).*

*Humankind can learn some things through reason, and Humankind can learn other things through revelation. The two kinds of knowledge do not conflict. God created the universe, and God created the physical laws of the universe, including those that guide evolution.*

*Importantly, by using reason, Humankind can learn some things about God. The same is true of revelation.*

## Chapter 25: Gemini — Saint James Examines Dante's Hope (Paradise)

Dante the Poet thought, *I am writing a divine poem: The Divine Comedy. Both Heaven and Earth have played a part in my writing of it, and I have grown thin through the effort of writing this poem.*

*I hope that the people who exiled me from Florence will read this poem and allow me back into Florence. I grew up there. I was a foe to the people who rule Florence now.*

*I would return as a different kind of poet. No longer am I a writer of love poetry. I am now a writer of sacred poetry about God. I am now fully mature. I would like to be crowned as a poet in my own city.*

*I became a Christian in Florence, and I was baptized there. I hope to return there one day.*

In Paradise, Beatrice thought, *Dante hopes that his poem will allow him to return to Florence and be crowned as a poet there. Dante will never make it back to Florence. The Church of Santa Croce in Florence will have a tomb for Dante, but the tomb will be empty. Dante's body will be in a tomb in Ravenna.*

In Paradise, a light started to move toward Dante the Pilgrim and Beatrice. It came from the Sphere from which the light who is Saint Peter came.

Beatrice saw the light, and ecstatic, said, "Look! Here is Saint James! On Earth, he draws souls to Galicia!"

During the Middle Ages, many people traveled to visit Saint Peter's tomb at Santiago de Compostela, which is located in Galicia in northwestern Spain.

On Earth, a dove will settle by its mate, and the dove will coo its love for the other dove and circle around it.

Much like that, Saint James greeted Beatrice, and the two sang praises for the goodness of Paradise.

After the two souls had exchanged greetings, they stood before Dante. They were so bright that Dante could not look at them.

Smiling, Beatrice said to the light, "Illustrious soul, you are the author of the Epistle of James, in which you wrote about divine benevolence and generosity. You know about hope. You, Peter, and John were the disciples in whom Jesus placed special trust. You three are proper representatives of faith, hope, and love."

Dante thought, *Saint James spent a lot of time away from home. He is known as the great Pilgrim Saint.*

Saint James said to Dante, whose eyes were lowered because of the brilliance of the lights who were Saint James and Saint Peter, "Lift up your head and look at us. The light in Paradise will strengthen you, not harm you."

Dante lifted up his eyes.

Saint James said to him, "You have been blessed by God in being allowed to visit Paradise before you die. So that Humankind may understand what hope is, answer these questions:

"What is the definition of hope?

"To what degree do you possess hope?

"What is the source of your hope?"

Dante's guide in Paradise, Beatrice, spoke up and answered the second question for Dante — very positively. She did not want Dante to answer the question because it could seem as if he were proud.

Beatrice said, “No son of the Church Militant — living Christians — has greater hope than Dante. You can see into the mind of God, and so you know that what I say is true. Dante’s hope is why he has been allowed to travel to Paradise before his living days on Earth are done.

“You asked two other questions so that Dante may educate Humankind still on Earth. He can answer these questions without self-praising himself. So let us allow Dante to speak, and may God’s grace help him to answer well.”

Dante was like a student who has studied hard and knows his subject. He said to Saint James, “Hope is being sure of future bliss in Paradise. The future bliss will come from the grace of God and from the good that one has done or attempted to do on Earth. Because of these things, we hope for salvation.

“I have received my hope from many sources, but I received my hope first from David, the singer of the Psalms. David sang, ‘They who know Your Name will have hope in You.’ All who have faith as I do know that Name.

“And in your own epistle, Saint James, you taught me to hope.”

Dante the Poet thought, *Hope is important in Christianity because all of us have sinned. The Old Testament has 613 laws, and all human beings who reach the age of reason break many of those laws. And even if we believe that many of the laws do not apply to Christians today, we have broken many of the laws that remain and that we think still are applicable to our lives.*

*If we focus too much on our sins, we can lose hope. We can think that we have sinned so much that we will never make it to Paradise. Faith is important to hope. If we have faith in a merciful God, then we can retain our hope.*

Within the light who is Saint James repeatedly flashed a flame like strikes of lightning.

Saint James said, “Love always was inside me, and it hoped. Love was with me when I was martyred and when I left the Militant Church and joined the Triumphant Church. This love leads me to ask you this: What is the goal of hope? What do you hope for?”

Dante replied, “The goal of hope is written about in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jesus promised something to the souls who were His friends.

“The goal of hope is eternity in Paradise. Isaiah said that saved souls will wear a double raiment in Paradise: soul and body. Paradise is a place of eternal bliss.

“Your brother, Saint John, in Revelation, writes about the white robes that denote saved souls. He makes clear the object of hope.

“I hope for my soul to be immortal and for my body to be resurrected.”

The souls above Dante’s head were happy with his answer, and they sang, “*Sperent in Te,*” aka “They Trust in You.”

Dante the Pilgrim had passed this examination.

One of the lights above Dante’s head became very bright. If the Constellation of Cancer the Crab had just one star as bright as this light, then winter — a time when the constellation is visible all night — would have a month of all days and no nights because the star would be as bright as the Sun.

Much like a young girl who rises and dances to honor a bride and not to draw attention to herself, the brilliant light rushed to join Saint James and Saint Peter.

They all danced and sang, and Beatrice watched them.

Beatrice said to Dante, “This soul lay upon the breast of the Pelican, and Jesus Christ on the Cross told him to take care of Mary after Jesus died. This soul is Saint John.”

Beatrice thought, *In the Middle Ages, believers sometimes referred to Jesus Christ as the Pelican because the pelican was thought to allow its young to feed upon its blood. The pelican shed its blood for its young, and Jesus Christ shed His blood for Humankind.*

As Beatrice said these words to Dante, she continued to look at the lights who are Saint Peter, Saint James, and Saint John.

Dante had heard a tradition — which was disputed — that Saint John's body had gone to Paradise along with his soul. He stared at the light who is Saint John.

Saint John said to them, "Why blind yourself by looking for something that is not there? My body is on Earth and not yet in Paradise. My body lies with other bodies until such a time as the allotted seats in Paradise are filled and Judgment Day arrives."

Dante thought, *The rest of the souls in Paradise will be given their bodies on the Day of Judgment. Of course, this is also true of the souls in the Inferno. The souls on the Mountain of Purgatory will also receive their bodies, and they will go to Paradise.*

Saint John continued, "Only two Lights are at present allowed to have both soul and body in Paradise: Jesus and Mary. Be sure to tell this to Humankind when you return to Earth."

The dance of the lights had stopped with his words, and the song had stopped. Similarly, oars rowing in water stop at the sound of the whistle of their leader, who sounds the whistle when danger is present or when necessary to prevent exhaustion.

Dante turned to Beatrice, and he discovered that he was blind. He could not see her, although the two were close to each other and they were in Paradise!

## Chapter 26: Gemini — Saint John Examines Dante’s Love; Adam (Paradise)

Dante was blind because he had looked so intently at the bright light who is Saint John to see if he had a body. Saint John said to him, “Until you regain your sight, let us talk. Answer this question, please: On what is your soul set? And please do not worry about your sight. Your eyes are merely temporarily dazzled and are not permanently blind. Beatrice, your guide through Paradise, can restore your sight as Ananias restored Saul’s sight.”

Dante thought, *Love is blind, and so am I — temporarily. Beatrice will soon restore my sight as Ananias restored Saul’s sight. While Saul was on the road to Damascus on his way to persecute Christians, he was struck blind, and he heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Saul asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The voice replied, “I am Jesus Whom you are persecuting.” Saul, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Jesus Christ said, “Arise, and go into the city, and you shall learn what you must do.” The men with whom Saul traveled took him into Damascus, where he was blind for three days and did not eat. To Ananias, a disciple at Damascus, came a vision in which Jesus Christ told him to go to Saul of Tarsus. Ananias said, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man and how much evil he has done to Your saints at Jerusalem.” But Jesus Christ said, “Go to him, for he is a chosen vessel to me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and Kings, and the children of Israel.” Ananias went to Saul, put his hands on him, prayed, and cured his blindness. And Saul changed his name to Paul and started doing the work needed for him to become a saint.*

Beatrice thought, *Dante is being examined in three things: faith, hope, and love. Love — appropriately — is presented as an experience. Dante need not define love the way he defined faith and hope.*

Dante replied to Saint John, “Whenever Beatrice wishes, whether quickly or later, she can restore my sight. I saw her, and I loved her. My eyes are the gates through which I began to love her.

“You ask on what is my soul set. I love the Supreme Good. I love God. I love the Being that gives full contentment in Paradise and that is the Alpha and the Omega.”

Saint John encouraged Dante to answer with more detail: “You love God. Why have you aimed your bow at this mark? What and who encouraged you to aim your bow? What and who made you set your soul on God?”

Dante replied, “I learned to love God through philosophic arguments and through revelation. Reason and revelation lead to the same conclusion. Reason is philosophical arguments, and revelation is sacred scripture. These are the things that have stamped me with the heavenly seal.”

Beatrice thought, *When Saint Francis received the stigmata, he was marked with a final seal. The seal indicates many things.*

*The seal indicates that Saint Francis is the genuine article. The article has not been forged. Saint Francis’ Christianity has not been faked.*

*The seal indicates that the article is in a finished state. No more work needs to be done. Saint Francis achieved Paradise. He came as close to perfection as a human being who is not also divine can.*

*The seal indicates that the article has been approved. If it were not approved, the seal would not be applied to it. God approved Saint Francis’ life.*

*Saint Francis is officially sealed. He is a fully completed work of art. On the Mountain of Purgatory, the souls of the proud were bent over like the works of art known as corbels. They were being formed into works of art. Near the end of his life, Saint Francis was a fully completed work of art.*

*Dante's love of God means that he is stamped with a seal much like Saint Francis of Assisi.*

Dante continued, "Goodness is love, and love engenders love. The more goodness that exists, the more love that exists. The more we understand goodness, the more we are able to love. God is both the Supreme Good and the Supreme Love. Once Humankind correctly understands goodness and love, Humankind seeks and loves God.

"I have learned these things from the philosopher Aristotle, who taught me about the Unmoved Mover Who is the object of desire. I have also learned these things from Exodus 33:17, in which God said, 'I shall now show you all of My goodness.' I have also learned these things from the beginning of your own Gospel in which you write about the mysteries of Paradise."

Saint John said, "Reason proves that the highest love is God. Revelation agrees with reason. But what else draws you to love God? God is your primary love, but what are the secondary loves that draw you to love God?"

Dante knew the correct answers to the question: "I love God because God's love created the universe and myself, because Jesus Christ shed His blood on the Cross so that I might live in Paradise, and because of the hope that all the faithful and I have. All of the things, and the reason and revelation I mentioned previously rescued me from false love and directed me to True Love.

"I love each soul in Paradise. Each soul is loved in Paradise and shines with the proper measure of the brightness of this love."

Dante stopped speaking, and immediately music sounded as the souls and Beatrice all sang, "Holy! Holy! Holy!"

Dante the Pilgrim had passed the final examination.

Dante regained his sight like one who is waking from sleep. All specks in Dante's eyes were gone, and he saw better than he had ever seen before. He saw Beatrice's brightness that reached a thousand miles — and more!

He also saw a fourth light who had joined Saint Peter, Saint James, and Saint John. He asked who was the fourth light.

Beatrice replied, "The fourth light is Adam, the first man. His was the first human soul created by God."

Dante was so amazed that he bent over and nearly fell. It was if a huge gust of wind had bent him over the way it blows against the tops of trees and bends them.

Dante straightened up and said to Adam, "You are the only one who was created as an adult and was not born as a baby."

Beatrice thought, *Eve may be thought of as another human being created as an adult and not as a baby, but Dante is thinking of her as part of Adam because she was made from one of Adam's ribs.*

Dante continued speaking to Adam, "You are the father of the entire human race. I beg you to speak to me and answer those questions that you know I want to ask you."

Adam was glad to answer Dante's questions. His light trembled. He said to Dante, "You do not need to tell me your questions because I know them better than you know whatever seems most self-evident to you. I see your questions reflected in the mind of God. It reflects all things, but nothing can reflect it perfectly.

"You wish to know the answers to these questions:

“How long ago was it that I was put in the Earthly Paradise?

“How long was I without sin in the Earthly Paradise?

“Why was I banished from the Earthly Paradise?

“What language did I invent for myself to speak?

“I will answer your questions in the order of their importance.

“Why was I banished from the Earthly Paradise? The tasting of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is not what got me banished from the Earthly Paradise. What got me banished was disobeying God’s orders. Eventually, Eve and I would have been allowed to eat the fruit of this tree — is not such knowledge a good thing to have, provided that it is used to do good and to avoid doing evil? — but we pursued it too hastily. Some kinds of wisdom must be acquired at the right time.

“How long ago was it that I was put in the Earthly Paradise? I was 930 years old when I died. I spent 4,302 years in Limbo before being released by Jesus Christ during the Harrowing of Hell. I was created 5,200 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. I have been in Paradise for 1,266 years. Now, in the year 1300, I am 6,498 years old.

“What language did I invent for myself to speak? I spoke a language that became extinct before the attempt by Nimrod and his followers to build the Tower of Babel. The creations of the human mind are variable and do not last forever. The same is true of the things in nature. Humankind does communicate through speech, as it is part of human nature, but Humankind can choose which way to communicate through speech. The particular kind of language used is up to different groups of human beings. Language and words change. Until I descended into Limbo, the first circle of Hell, God was called by one name, and then God was called by another name.

“How long was I without sin in the Earthly Paradise? Not long. I came into existence at 6 a.m. By 1 p.m., God banished me from the Earthly Paradise.”

NOTE by David Bruce: Adam, the first human being, says, “I was created 5,200 years before the birth of Jesus Christ.” We know in the 21st century that *Homo Sapiens* probably came into existence between 200,000 and 300,000 years ago. Dante, of course, lived in the late Middle Ages.

## Chapter 27: Gemini — Heaven’s Wrath at the Sinful Church; The Primum Mobile (Paradise)

All the souls sang, “Glory to Father and Son and Holy Spirit!” This song gladdened Dante. The entire universe seemed to smile, and it seemed as if Dante were drunk with happiness. Dante thought, *O joy! O ecstasy! O life completely filled with love and peace! O wealth without cease and without want!*

Beatrice, who always knew what Dante was thinking, thought, *That is practically a definition of Paradise.*

The four lights in front of Dante — Saint Peter, Saint James, Saint John, and Adam — blazed, and then the light who is Saint Peter grew more intense.

Saint Peter’s white light grew red. It was as if the whiteness of Jupiter had changed to the redness of Mars. It was as if a white firebird and a red firebird had exchanged feathers.

Providence then silenced all the other souls, and Saint Peter said to Dante, “Do not wonder at my change of color. The other souls will soon change color, too, as they hear my words.

“Pope Boniface VIII is called pope on Earth, but his corruptness means that the papal seat is in reality vacant. Pope Boniface VIII is a usurper of the place that is mine. He has turned Rome — the resting place of my body — into a sewer of stink and blood. Lucifer rejoices at what Pope Boniface VIII has done.”

At dawn and in the evening, clouds are colored red. The souls in the Sphere of the Fixed Stars turned red. Even Beatrice turned red, just like a virtuous lady blushes with shame when hearing of the moral failings of another.

Colors also changed when Christ was crucified and the Earth darkened.

Saint Peter — his complexion colored red with anger — spoke, “I did not nourish the Bride of Christ — the Church — with blood from my martyrdom so that the Church could pursue money. The other early popes such as Linus and Cletis did not suffer so that the Church could pursue money. We endured this suffering — as did Sixtus, Pius, Calixtus, and Urban — so that we could live in Paradise.

“We early popes did not want the Church to be divided — some supporting the pope, and some supporting the Holy Roman Emperor.

“I never intended for my keys to be displayed on a pope’s war banners carried by an army who war against Christians.

“I never intended for a likeness of my head to be put on a papal seal used on indulgences and on paid-for reinstatements after excommunication.

“I am both angry and ashamed when I think of these things. I and the other early popes did not engage in hurtful political practices, and we did not covet gold.

“From our place in Paradise, we look down at the Earth and we see shepherds’ clothing, inside of which are greedy wolves.

“God, why do You restrain Your power and not immediately punish these evil people?”

“A man from Gascony and a man from Cahors will soon drink our blood and fill your court with greedy men.”

Saint Peter thought, *I am referring to Pope Clement V from Gascony and Pope John XXII from Cahors.*

Saint Peter continued, “But God will save the Church, I know, the way that He saved Rome through the hero Scipio Africanus and made it safe so that the papacy could be in Rome.

“You, Dante, when you return to Earth, make sure that you tell people what I have said.”



And now the lights of the saved souls rose in the Sphere like a reversing snowfall. Dante watched them as long as he could, and eventually they had risen so high that he could no longer see them.

Beatrice said to him, “Look down, now, and see how far you have traveled.”

While Dante had been in the Sphere of the Fixed Stars, time had passed and the Sphere had moved. He saw the Mediterranean. He saw Cadiz in Spain, and he saw the route that mad Ulysses had taken to the Mountain of Purgatory. He also saw Phoenicia on the Eastern coast, where Zeus, in the form of a bull, had found Europa and had then taken her to Crete on his back.

Because of the movement of the Sphere, part of the Earth was in darkness, or he could have seen more of this tiny patch of dust.

Dante, in love as ever with Beatrice, wanted to look at her. He glowed as he looked at her — nothing in nature or art could compare to her smiling face.

She smiled at him, and he rose from the constellation of Gemini, which features Castor and Pollux, the twin sons of Leda and Zeus.

They entered the Primum Mobile, but Dante could not say at what point because the Primum Mobile is uniform and undifferentiated. Dante was at the outermost of the physical universe. Beyond it — although ‘beyond’ and ‘outside’ are words that apply only to the physical universe — is the Mystic Empyrean, which lies outside time and space.

Happiness was in Beatrice’s smile, and the joy of God shone on her face.

She said to Dante, “The rest of the universe derives its movement from this Sphere, which derives its movement from the mind of God, which is motivated by Love. God’s mind encompasses all the Spheres, including this one. It also encompasses the Earth. Only God understands the workings of this Sphere. Humankind measures time by using the movement of heavenly bodies such as planets and stars; their movement comes from this Sphere, as I hope is clear to you.

“Saint Peter criticized greedy Popes. I will now criticize greedy people.

“Humankind is greedy today. People sink and drown in greed, and they cannot keep their head above the waters of greed.

“The will of a human being is always good at first, when the human being is very young, but the will becomes corrupt from the waters of greed just like plums become rotten when drowned by too much water.

“Little children have true faith and true innocence, but their true faith and true innocence are gone by the time a boy enters puberty and begins to grow facial hair.

“A child who still lisps will observe a religious day of fasting, but when he grows a little and can speak clearly, he stuffs his face even on religious days of fasting.

“A child who still lisps will love his mother and obey her words, but when he grows up, he prefers to see her in her grave.

“An innocent person becomes corrupt when exposed to the corruption of the Church, an institution that ought to be pure and innocent.

“Why do the sheep go astray? Because they lack good shepherds.

“My words should not surprise you — you know that you have no proper leaders on Earth. When no proper leaders exist, the people will go astray.

“But in less than 90 centuries — when January is no longer a winter month in the inaccurate Julian calendar established by Julius Caesar — a storm shall make all to rights again.”

## Chapter 28: Primum Mobile — The Hierarchy of Angels (Paradise)

Dante the Poet thought, *At this time Beatrice and I were in the Primum Mobile, the outer edge and end of the material universe. What lay ahead of us? The Mystic Empyrean!*

*The Mystic Empyrean lies beyond the Primum Mobile. Actually, “lies beyond” is misleading, as the Mystic Empyrean does not exist in space and time. However, because we are human beings who exist in space and time, we have to use language metaphorically when we speak of the Mystic Empyrean.*

*The Mystic Empyrean is the goal of Dante the Pilgrim’s journey. It is also the goal of every Christian. It is the place where God dwells. Of course, here again “place” is a word that is used metaphorically.*

*Here in the Primum Mobile, Dante the Pilgrim was able to look at the places he has been, and now he will be able to look ahead to where he is going.*

Beatrice had finished her criticism of corrupt Humankind, to which Dante the Pilgrim had paid close attention.

Just like a person can first catch sight of a candle in a mirror and then turn to see the candle, so did Dante catch sight of something in Beatrice’s lovely eyes — the eyes that had made him love her — before he turned to see that sight directly.

In the Primum Mobile, anyone who looks deeply — as do the contemplatives — will see what Dante the Pilgrim saw.

Dante saw a Point of brilliant light. The Point was like a mathematical point in that it was immaterial and nonspatial. The Point’s light was so brilliant that Dante was forced to shut his eyes. Because the Point of brilliant light is immaterial and nonspatial, the smallest star that we can see on Earth looked like a Moon compared in size to the Point of brilliant light.

At times, a halo seems to surround Earth’s Moon. As close as the halo is to the Moon, a ring of fire is around the brilliant Point. This ring of fire moved fast — faster than the Primum Mobile, which is the fastest of all the Spheres, moves.

A second ring of fire circled the first ring of fire. A third ring of fire circled the second ring of fire. A fourth ring of fire circled the third ring of fire. A fifth ring of fire circled the fourth ring of fire. A sixth ring of fire circled the fifth ring of fire. A seventh ring of fire circled the sixth ring of fire.

The seventh ring of fire was so large that if the rainbow of Iris, the messenger of the gods, were to be extended into a full circle, it would not be big enough to encompass the seventh circle.

An eighth ring of fire circled the seventh ring of fire. A ninth ring of fire circled the eighth ring of fire.

The further each circle of fire was from the Point, the slower it moved. The first ring of fire, which was closest to the Point, was also the brightest ring of fire. It was the closest to God: the Pure Spark of Being.

Beatrice thought, *What Dante sees now is the opposite of the “reality” that Dante thinks he sees on Earth. In that “reality,” the Spheres move faster the further they are from the Earth.*

*Why the difference?*

*Dante is now seeing Ultimate Reality, which is God-centered. Ultimate Reality is much different from the “reality” that Dante thinks he sees on Earth. That “reality” is centered on the Earth, not on God. God is at the center of Ultimate Reality. The Earth is at the center of the “reality” that Humankind sees. At the center of the Earth is Lucifer’s place in the Inferno.*

Beatrice helped Dante to understand what he was seeing: “You see the Point on which the heavens and nature depend.

“Look at the circle — the ring of fire — closest to the Point. It spins so fast because it is motivated by the love that comes from the Point.”

Dante replied, “If the universe I see from Earth were ordered like what I see here, I would not be puzzled. But in the universe I see from Earth, the Spheres that are furthest from Earth are more Godlike and move faster. But here I see that the Sphere that is closest to the Point is most Godlike and moves fastest.

“Please explain why the two sights — the one from Earth and the one from here — are different.”

Beatrice said, “The relationship between the physical world and the spiritual world is not easy to understand. If you do not understand it, it is in part because no one has seen what you are seeing here and therefore no one has tried to explain what you are seeing here.

“If you wish to be enlightened, listen carefully.

“In the material world, the course of a Sphere is wide or narrow according to how close it is to God and therefore according to how much virtue courses through it.

“A Sphere that is close to God — and the Primum Mobile is the closest Sphere to God in the material world — will have more goodness and therefore will have a greater size, and so the Primum Mobile is the largest of all the Spheres in the material world.

“The Primum Mobile in the material world corresponds to the circle that is closest to God in the spiritual world. In the spiritual world, do not look at the size of the circle; instead, look at the power of the circle. In the spiritual world, the smallest circle is the circle closest to God — the Point — and so it is the circle that has the most power.

“Nine rings of fire surround the Point. The closer a ring of fire is to the Point of brilliant light, the faster it moves. The nine whirling rings of fire are the nine orders of Angels.

“The Point of brilliant light is God, Whom you are seeing from a distance.

“This seems to you to be the reverse of what you living human beings see in nature. Living human beings in the Middle Ages see the Earth as the center, and the Spheres around the Earth become more and more divine the farther they are from Earth. Here, however, the Point of brilliant light is divine, and the rings of fire whirling around are holier the closer they are to the Point of brilliant light.

“What you are seeing now is Ultimate Reality, and not the inside-out version of reality that living human beings see on Earth.

“Of course, Ultimate Reality has God at the center — not the Earth. Circling around God are the orders of Angels.”

In Italy, the wind that is thought to be the mildest sent by the god Boreas is the wind that comes from the Northeast and blows the clouds away. Beatrice’s words were like a wind that blew the clouds from Dante’s mind. He knew, of course, that she had spoken the truth.

And now Dante saw what seemed to be sparks in the nine rings of fire. How many sparks? A chessboard has 64 same-sized squares. Imagine that the first square is associated with the number 1, and imagine that the second square is double that: 2. Imagine that the number keeps doubling for all the remaining squares. The number arrived at that way is over 18 quintillion — a quintillion is a 1 followed by 18 zeros. The number of the Angels of the various orders in Paradise is much more than 18 quintillion — mortals cannot conceive of the actual number.

Dante heard them sing “Hosanna” to the Point Who is God, who had appointed each Angel to the Angel’s position in Paradise.

Beatrice knew that Dante was confused by what he was seeing, and she explained the orders of Angels to him.

She said, “Each order of Angel is associated with a heavenly Sphere. The circle closest to the Point is the order of Angels who loves God most and has the most understanding. In the first two rings closest to the Point are the Seraphim and the Cherubim. They spin swiftly and they see God most clearly and they seek to grow closer to God. The Seraphim are associated with the Primum Mobile, and the Cherubim are associated with the Fixed Stars. The third order of Angels in the first Triad is the Thrones, who are associated with Saturn and contemplation.

“All of these nine orders of Angels have bliss equal to the depth that they are able to see the mind of God. First they see God, and then they love God. Merit determines how deeply they see into the mind of God.

“The second Triad of Angels can be visualized as flowers in bloom. Here in Paradise no frost will ever harm a flower. The second Triad of Angels sings ‘Hosanna’ eternally. The Dominions are associated with Jupiter and justice. The Virtues are associated with Mars and courage. The Powers are associated with the Sun and wisdom.

“The third Triad of Angels consists of the Principalities, who are associated with Venus and love; the Archangels, who are associated with Mercury and hope; and the Angels, who are associated with the Moon and faith. The orders of Angels dance, and the Angels are jubilant.

“All of the orders of Angels look toward God.”

Dante the Poet thought, *When Beatrice names the orders of the Angels, she does so in threes:*

*The Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones.*

*The Dominations, Virtues, and Powers.*

*The Principalities, Archangels, and Angels.*

*Three is an important number of Christianity because of the Trinity.*

*Of course, we can put all the Angels in three groups:*

*1) The good Angels in Paradise.*

*2) The bad Angels who rebelled with Lucifer.*

*3) The neutral Angels who did not take a stand and who are now in the Vestibule of Hell, rejected by both Paradise and the Inferno.*

Beatrice continued, “Pope Saint Gregory the Great had a different way of listing the orders of Angels, but he was mistaken. When he reached Paradise, he realized that he had been mistaken — and he smiled! The person who listed the Angels correctly was Dionysius the Areopagite, who converted to Christianity because of the preaching of Saint Paul, who traveled to Paradise and taught Dionysius about the orders of Angels.”

Beatrice thought, *Dante the Poet, as you write these lines, you are smiling, too. When you wrote The Banquet, you followed Gregory’s incorrect arrangement of the orders of Angels, not the correct arrangement of Dionysius.*

## Chapter 29: Primum Mobile — The Creation and Fall of Angels (Paradise)

Briefly and silently, Beatrice looked at the Point of brilliant light and the nine rings of fire circling it. Upon that Point balanced the universe. Imagine the Earth at the time of the vernal equinox when the Moon and the Sun are opposite each other: One rises, and the other sets. The universe as seen from Earth at that moment is like giant scales balanced by God.

Beatrice was able to look directly at the Point of brilliant light. At this time, Dante could not.

Beatrice said to Dante, “I will tell you what you want to know. I know what you want to ask because I see it in the place where is centered every *where* and every *when*: the mind of God.

“Why did God engage in the act of creation? He did not do it to increase His goodness. God is already infinitely good. He did it so that His creations might experience existence and share in His goodness. God created the Angels in the Mystic Empyrean; God also created all other beings and things.

“God was not idle before His act of creation because time did not exist before He created the universe: Before the creation of the universe, no ‘before’ or ‘after’ existed.

“In addition to the Angels who are pure spirit, God created pure matter and a mixture of spirit and matter. Pure matter is what makes up the Earth; it lacks spirit. The heavens are made up of a mixture of spirit and matter.

“By creating the various orders of Angels, God created reflections of Himself. When God created the Angels, He also created the heavenly Spheres and the Earth. Each order of Angels is associated with a heavenly Sphere.

“God’s creation is orderly and hierarchical.

“At the top are the various orders of Angels, at the bottom is the Earth, and in between are the heavens. God’s threefold creation occurred all at the same time.

“Saint Jerome was mistaken when he wrote that the Angels were created centuries before God created anything else. If you read sacred scripture carefully, you will see evidence that Saint Jerome was wrong.

“I have answered some of your questions already.

“Although God created the Angels as perfect beings, they had free will, and before you can count from one to twenty, some of the Angels, including Lucifer, rebelled against God.”

Dante thought, *Interestingly, Adam took longer to sin than the fallen Angels.*

Beatrice continued, “The other Angels who were loyal to God remained in the Mystic Empyrean, and they whirl in the rings of fire.

“The reason for the Angels’ rebellion was Lucifer, whom you saw at the bottom of the Inferno.

“The Angels you see here were loyal to God, and they realized that their great intelligence came from the goodness of God.

“God rewarded the loyal Angels with greater vision and greater intelligence. God gave them the light of glory so that the Angels have a direct vision of God. They received the light of glory as a gift of God, a gift that God gave them because of their merit.

“A creature who receives God’s grace and lovingly accepts it is worthy of it.

“If you have understood all I have said so far, you should be able to learn much more without my help.

“But because teachers on Earth partially err when they say that Angels have understanding, memory, and will, I shall say more and correct their error.

“From the moment that the faithful Angels were created, they turned toward God and have never turned away from Him. They look into the mind of God, where all things are known, and so the Angels do not have — or need — memory, although they have understanding and will.

“Angels do not have memories because they have no need of memories. They get their knowledge directly from God, so they have no need to memorize things.

“Humans often say that the Angels have memory. Some humans say this and believe it; some humans say this and do not believe it. All who say this are mistaken, but those who say it and do not believe it are more greatly at fault.

“Humans try to philosophize and sometimes they get things wrong; by trying to show off, they get off the true path.

“Philosophy can be used correctly, and it can be misused. It is misused when it is used simply to score points against someone else. It is used correctly when it is used to find out the truth.

“Arguments can be made sincerely, but bad arguments can be used deviously to mislead others.

“Philosophy is very useful. It can be used to understand whatever can be understood by human reason.

“Being an intellectual can be dangerous unless you use your intelligence and knowledge to seek the truth that can be understood by human reason. If you use your intelligence and knowledge to score points against others or to put on a show of how smart you are, then you are misusing your intelligence and knowledge.

“Even worse than engaging in bad philosophy is to ignore or misinterpret sacred scripture.

“Bad philosophy and bad theology lead to bad preaching. Bad thinkers and preachers teach incorrect things about God.

“Today, living human beings do not care about the blood that was shed to spread sacred scripture. They don’t care about the happiness that comes from correctly interpreting sacred scripture.

“They try to impress other people by making up falsehoods that they call ‘truths’ — they ignore the Gospel and do not mention it.

“For example, some of these bad preachers say that the Moon wandered from its natural course and caused an eclipse when Jesus Christ died on the Cross.

“These bad preachers lie! The truth is that the light hid itself, and so darkness was everywhere on Earth and not just on the part of the Earth that would have been affected by an eclipse. The darkness affected Spain and India as well as Jerusalem.

“Bad preachers shout such fables from the pulpit. More such fables are shouted in one year than the number of people named Smith and Jones in a city.

“The sheep want to be fed real food, but bad preachers feed them air. The sheep know no better, and the preachers’ ignorance is no excuse.

“Christ did not tell his disciples, ‘Go and preach ignorant garbage to the world.’ Christ wanted His disciples to teach the truth and build on it.

“Christ’s disciples went forth and preached the Gospel, but today bad preachers try to be comedians and get laughs. As long as their audience laughs, bad preachers are satisfied with and proud of their bad preaching.

“But the people they are preaching to should not be satisfied. If they knew what the truth was, they would know that a bad preacher is selling goods that are like the false indulgences

that bad monks carry in the long hanging tip of their hoods and sell to the ignorant. The black bird that hangs around such bad monks is Lucifer.”

Beatrice thought, *Dante will know what I mean. In his medieval world, Lucifer is often depicted as a black bird that has the wings of a fallen Angel.*

Beatrice continued, “Human beings tend to be gullible, and others sometimes innocently and sometimes not so innocently take advantage of them. Saint Anthony’s emblem is a pig, and people used to allow the pigs of monks to fatten on public land. Sometimes, monks gave these people pardons to show gratitude, but pardons must be given for a better reason. Sometimes, monks sold false pardons so that they could give the money to their concubines and illegitimate children.

“But enough. This is a digression from the topic of Angels. Let us return to that topic.

“Mortals cannot count the number of the unfallen Angels. Mortals cannot conceive such a number. What does Daniel 7:10 in the King James Version say about the numbers of the unfallen Angels? This: ‘*A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.*’ A specific number is not intended in these ‘thousand thousands’ and ‘ten thousand times ten thousand.’

“Each Angel is different. God shines His light on each of them. Each Angel receives God’s light in the Angel’s own way. Each Angel has a capacity for loving God, and each Angel’s capacity is different from that of the other Angels.

“Each Angel is a mirror that reflects God’s light.”

## Chapter 30: Mystic Empyrean — The River of Light; The Mystical Rose (Paradise)

When the Sun is over India, dawn arrives in Italy. As the Sun rises, the stars disappear. The faintest stars disappear first, and the brightest stars disappear last. Much like that, the ring of fire furthest from the Point of brilliant light disappeared, and finally the ring of fire closest to the Point of brilliant light disappeared.

When the nine rings of fire had disappeared, Dante looked at Beatrice with love.

He had often seen and described her beauty, but if he were to gather up all his praises into a poem, the poem would not come close to giving her present beauty the praise it deserved.

Beatrice was at her most beautiful; she and Dante were now in the Mystic Empyrean: the dwelling place of God, Who outshines all other lights. Her beauty was ineffable; the only One Who could properly describe it would be the One Who made it.

Dante the Poet thought, *I am defeated. I cannot describe Beatrice's beauty. No poet — whether writing in a common style or in a lofty style — has ever been so defeated as I am at this moment.*

*Sunlight can make weak eyes blind, and my memory of Beatrice's beauty and her smile defeats my attempt to describe them.*

*I have been able to describe in poetry Beatrice's beauty from the first time I ever saw her on Earth throughout much of our journey through the heavenly bodies, but now I am forced to give up trying to describe her beauty in my poetry. If any poet can do it, that poet will have to have a far greater talent than mine.*

*I now need to use my poetic talent to bring the great theme of The Divine Comedy to an end.*

Beatrice, Dante's guide, said to him, "We have reached the end of our journey. Before, we were in the greatest Sphere: the Primum Mobile. Now, we are in the Heaven of Pure Light: the Mystic Empyrean. Here, we have the light of intellect, which is never-ending Love. Here, we have Love of the True Good and the True God, and we feel bliss — a bliss that transcends all other blisses.

"Here, you will see the two hosts who dwell in Paradise: the Angels and the saved human beings. And you will see the saved human beings not as points of lights, but in their human shape, as they shall appear on Judgment Day when you will see them again."

Dante thought, *I am saved. I will return to Paradise. Beatrice has told me the wondrous things that I will see when I die and return to Paradise.*

Lightning can strike and stun our eyes. Much like that, living light enveloped Dante, and he saw nothing but light.

Beatrice said to him, "God in His Love is preparing you so that you may see properly in the Mystic Empyrean."

Dante heard Beatrice's words, and suddenly he was aware that all his senses, including sight, were supernaturally improved. Now he could see — really see. No light, no matter how bright, could blind him.

Dante saw a flowing river of light in between two banks on which were flowers bathed in the colors of Spring. From the flowing river of light, sparks of light flew upward and outward to the flowers that resembled rings of gold set with rubies.

After reaching the flowers, the jewels of light — seemingly drunk with fragrance — returned to the river of light. As one jewel entered the river, another jewel flew upward and



outward.

Beatrice said to Dante, “I see in you the urgent desire to understand what it is that you are seeing. The more urgent your desire to understand, the more pleasing it is to me.

“In order to understand what you are seeing, you need to drink from the river of light — drink from it with your eyes. Only then can your thirst for understanding be satisfied.

“You see a stream of light, and you see moving jewels and a host of flowers. They approximate reality, but true reality is within your grasp. Your sight is still defective, but it can be amended by drinking from the stream.”

Dante bent down to drink with his eyes from the stream of light as eagerly as an infant who has slept a long time seeks his mother’s milk.

As soon as Dante’s eyes had drunk from the stream of light, it changed. It used to be a straight river, but now it was round. People at a masquerade are hidden until they take off their masks. Much like that, the river revealed its true reality, as did the sparks and the flowers.

Dante saw the two hosts of Paradise. He saw that the flowers were the saved souls of human beings, and he saw that the sparks were Angels.

God had given Dante the gift of seeing the Mystic Empyrean, and now Dante prayed to God to help him describe what he was seeing.

In Paradise the light of God shines, and by the grace of God, the Angels and the saved humans are able to see that light.

The light of God reaches and is reflected from the Primum Mobile. That light of God moves the Primum Mobile, which then imparts motion to all the other Spheres.

The reflection of light is circular and vast.

On Earth, a lake can reflect a hillside with flowers and grass. Much like that, within the light of God are reflected saved souls, who sit in tier after tier — more than a thousand of them reaching upward — in the Mystic Empyrean.

The laws of nature do not apply in the Mystic Empyrean, which is not material. Dante’s eyes were able to clearly see vast distances. He saw every soul in every tier, and he knew the degree of bliss that they were enjoying according to their merit. Distance did not matter. In the Mystic Empyrean, God does not use agents such as the laws of nature: God rules directly.

The tiers upon tiers were a Celestial White Rose of saved souls.

Beatrice took Dante into the golden center of the White Rose — into the circle of light, around which the petals, aka saved souls, of the Rose praise God.

Beatrice said to Dante, “Look at the saved souls in their white robes. Look at how vast is our City. Look at the seats that are filled in the tiers, and see how few seats are left empty.

“Look at this empty seat: It has a crown above it. You are able to look at it even before you die and enter Paradise for good. That seat is reserved for Henry, a great man. He will go to Italy to set things right, but the time for setting things right will not yet have arrived.

“Italy will be like a stupid child who is hungry but pushes the wet nurse away. Henry will want to do great things for Italy, but he will not be allowed to do them.

“In public, the pope of that time will pretend to be on Henry’s side. But in private, he will undermine Henry.

“God will not permit the pope of that time to remain in the Holy Office. The pope will quickly end up in the Inferno among the Simoniacs, and he will push Pope Boniface VIII deeper underground!”

Dante the Poet thought, *These were Beatrice’s last words to me in Paradise. Her words were bitter.*

Beatrice thought, *Henry is Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII. Of course, now, in 1300, he is still alive; therefore, he is not in the Rose right now. When Henry VII becomes Holy Roman*

*Emperor, he will go to Italy, something that Pope Clement V will not like. A power struggle will go on over who will control Italy.*

*In a perfect Italy, the Holy Roman Emperor would control secular matters in Italy, while the pope would control religious matters in Italy.*

*Unfortunately, Henry VII will die in 1313. Henry VII would have done good things for Italy had he lived.*

*Pope Clement V, who opposed Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII, will end up in the Inferno, in the circle devoted to punishing the Simoniacs.*

## Chapter 31: Mystic Empyrean — Saint Bernard (Paradise)

Dante looked and saw the White Rose, and making up the White Rose was the host of the saved souls: those whom Christ had made His own with the Cross. Some of these souls had made appearances to Dante in the physical Spheres, although they had been and were really in the Mystic Empyrean.

And he saw the other host: the Angels who soar between God and the saved souls. The Angels celebrate God Who made them, Who loves them, and Whom they love. The Angels were like bees who go to flowers and then return to the hive of Paradise. They visit the host of saved souls and then return to God: the source of love.

The faces of the Angels were red, their wings were gold, and their bodies were whiter than the snow that falls on Earth.

The Angels go back and forth from the souls and from God. They bring graces from God to the souls, and they bring praises from the souls to God.

The Angels did not block the light of God from Dante's eyes. On Earth, if a body comes in between a person and the Sun, the light of the Sun is blocked. Such laws of nature are not found in the Mystic Empyrean.

God's glory is seen in the entire universe. In some places His glory can be seen more clearly. In some places His glory can be seen less clearly. Merit determines whether God's glory is seen more clearly or less clearly in human beings. This applies to the physical universe, and it applies to the Mystic Empyrean, but in the Mystic Empyrean, God's glory is very clearly seen in all souls, although it is more clearly seen in some souls than in others.

In this kingdom of joy, the saved souls, whether from Old Testament times or from newer times, all looked upon the same goal: God. This Sole Light was also a Triune Light. This Light is the source of joy, and this Light is needed now on Earth.

Imagine barbarians coming to Rome for the first time and looking at its splendors and monuments and art. Such barbarians would be amazed. Imagine how much more amazement struck Dante — who had come to Paradise from Earth. Imagine how much more amazement struck Dante — who had come to Paradise, a place filled with sane people, and had left Florence, a place not filled with sane people.

Dante was stupefied by what he was seeing, and he was joyful because he was seeing it. He was happy that no one — not even Beatrice — was speaking to him until he had a few moments to stare.

Dante was like a pilgrim who had reached the end of his journey and was standing in the temple, and he was trying to fill his memory so that he could describe what he had seen to the people back home.

Therefore, Dante tried to look everywhere. His eyes sought to see all the saved souls; his eyes went from tier to tier, up and down, and from side to side and back again. He saw faces that were filled with love and clad in white robes and light and smiles.

Dante had seen the major parts of Paradise, but not its details, and wanting to ask questions, he turned to his side, expecting to see Beatrice, but she was not there!

Instead, he saw an elder who wore the white robes of the saints of Paradise. He had the love of a father, and he had the joy of a saved soul.

Dante asked him, "She — where is she?"

The elder replied, "Beatrice asked me to leave my seat in the Rose and help you complete your journey by making sure that you see everything that you need to see. You can see Beatrice

in the Rose; she is in the third from the highest tier. That is the place that her own merit deserves.”

Dante did not speak; instead, he raised his eyes and looked at Beatrice in all her glory. Beatrice was far away, but Dante clearly saw her. Such clarity of vision at such a distance is not possible on Earth.

Dante thanked her in his thoughts, knowing that Beatrice would learn his thoughts by looking into the mind of God: “Lady, thank you for going into the Inferno to talk to Virgil and leaving your footprints there so that I might be saved. Because of your good deed, I have seen Paradise, and I recognize the excellence of all things here.

“You have led me from bondage to freedom, from exile to home. To do so, you have done everything that you are able to do. I hope that I can be as generous as you have been so that when I return to Paradise, my soul may please you.”

Beatrice looked at Dante and smiled, and then she looked at God.

The elder said to Dante, “The final stage of your journey is at hand; your final lessons must be learned. To bring this about, sacred love and prayer have sent me. You still have not seen everything that you need to see. You still are not seeing God directly; you are seeing a reflection of God.

“You will receive help from Mary, the mother of Jesus and the Queen of Paradise. I know that this is true. I am devoted to Mary. I am Bernard.”

Dante the Pilgrim thought, *My new guide is Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. He lived in the 12th century, and he was a member of the Cistercian religious order. Saint Bernard was a contemplative. He was a reformer. As a reformer, he wrote the pope. He advised the pope to focus on spiritual things and to cease his focus on political things. He was a preacher, and he was a poet.*

*Bernard called for the Second Crusade. In that crusade, Cacciaguida, my ancestor, died a martyr.*

*Twenty-one years after his death, Bernard was canonized.*

Dante the Poet thought, *Saint Bernard is the final guide of Dante the Pilgrim — a younger me. Each of the guides helps prepare me — that is, the Pilgrim — either for the next guide or for my final vision. Virgil got me ready to be guided by Beatrice. Beatrice got me ready to be guided by Saint Bernard. Saint Bernard will get Dante the Pilgrim ready to see God.*

*Each of my three major guides — Virgil, Beatrice, and Saint Bernard — has important knowledge. Virgil knows Human Reason. Beatrice knows Revelation. Saint Bernard knows Mystical Contemplation. Saint Bernard will prepare Dante the Pilgrim to see God more clearly. Only Mystical Contemplation can do that. Saint Bernard himself had a vision of God during his lifetime.*

A fervent Christian from a faraway place like Croatia may go as a pilgrim to see the Veil of Veronica: a piece of cloth on which Christ wiped the blood and sweat away from His face as He walked to be crucified on Calvary. That cloth bears the true image of Christ, and the pilgrim from Croatia looks at it, amazed at seeing how Jesus looked.

Dante felt much like that as he looked at Saint Bernard, who — while still living — had seen a vision of God as he contemplated.

Saint Bernard said, “You are a son of grace; you have received an important gift from God. However, you have more to see, and you will not see it as long as you are looking at me.

“Raise your eyes high. Look up at the highest tier. Look up at Mary, the Mother of Christ and the Queen of Paradise.”

Dante raised his eyes. At dawn, the East is much brighter than the West. Dante looked at Mary, and just like the East outshining the West, she outshone the other souls.

The Sun at noon outshines everything around it. Just like that, Mary outshone all the souls on either side of her.

And around the brightness that is Mary, Dante saw more than a thousand Angels with outstretched wings — each Angel had a unique personality and a unique art and a unique motion.

And Dante saw Mary, smiling at the Angels, beautiful with a beauty that was reflected in Saint Bernard's eyes.

Dante the Poet thought, *I remember Mary and I remember Mary's beauty, but even if I had the words to describe the least part of her beauty, I would not.*

Saint Bernard saw Dante the Pilgrim looking devotedly at Mary, and he turned to Mary and looked at her with so much love that Dante had even more devotion in his gaze.

## Chapter 32: Mystic Empyrean — Saint Bernard and the Saints in the Rose (Paradise)

Still contemplating Mary, Saint Bernard — Dante's newest guide — wanted Dante to study the Mystic Empyrean with all of its saved souls and good Angels.

Saint Bernard said to Dante, "Eve caused a wound when she ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. She deepened the wound when she tempted Adam to also eat of the fruit. Mary closed that wound by giving birth to Christ, who suffered on the Cross to redeem Humankind and to heal original sin.

"Eve, who is beautiful and was directly created by God, sits at the feet of Mary.

"Sitting underneath Eve in one of the thrones of the third tier is Rachel, and Beatrice is by her side. Rachel is known for her contemplation, and Beatrice brought revelation to you.

"As you look down the tiers, you see more Hebrew women. Sarah is the wife of Abraham and the mother of Isaac. Rebecca is the heroine who killed Holofernes, the general of King Nebuchadnezzar. Ruth is the great-grandmother of David, the writer of the Psalms, who wrote '*Miserere mei*' — 'Have mercy on me.'

"This half of the Rose is complete. It is the half that is made up of pagans such as Ripheus and Old Testament souls such as Adam. Many, many Jews are in Paradise."

Dante thought, *These words appear in Psalm 51:1: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness: according to the multitude of Your tender mercies blot out my transgressions."*

*In the Dark Wood when I first saw Virgil, I said, "Miserere mei." The souls in Purgatory also sing the "Miserere" as a way to prepare themselves to purge their sins. It is one of the ways that they get ready for Purgatory.*

*Of course, the souls in the Rose are the souls of the Blest. They are the saved souls who reside in Paradise forever.*

Saint Bernard continued, "You can see all these souls as I go downward from tier to tier. Down from where I started is a line of Hebrew women. This vertical line and the vertical line directly opposite them divide the White Rose into two equal parts.

"On the side of the line in which I mentioned the names of a few souls are the souls who believed in the Christ Yet to Come. They lived in pre-Christian times. All of the seats are filled in this part of the White Rose.

"On the other side of this line are those who believed in Christ Already Come. They lived in Christian times. Here are some empty seats. Not all of the seats are filled in this part of the White Rose.

"On the opposite side of this line, John the Baptist sits facing Mary, Mother of God. John was always holy. He suffered in the desert, and he was martyred, and spent two years in Limbo before Christ rescued him during the Harrowing of Hell.

"Sitting in the line below John the Baptist are other saved souls. Saint Francis sits below John the Baptist. Saint Benedict sits below Saint Francis. Saint Augustine, who became the Bishop of Hippo in 396 C.E. and who is the author of *City of God* and *Confessions*, sits below Saint Benedict.

"Saint Francis is the perfect imitation of Christ, Saint Benedict is a contemplative, and Saint Augustine is a theologian.

"Others are also sitting down the line.

“The half of the White Rose that is not yet complete is devoted to those who believed in Christ Who had Come. These souls are from the New Testament onward.

“Marvel at how God has organized the White Rose. The seats for saved souls who believed in Christ Yet to Come are equal in number to the seats for saved souls who believed in Christ Who had Come.”

Dante thought, *Contrasts are in the Rose: young and old, male and female, Old Testament figures and New Testament figures. The wisdom I saw on the Sun involved complementarity. We have complementarity here in the Mystic Rose.*

Saint Bernard continued, “Down from the horizontal center row are saved souls who were saved not through any merit of their own. These are children. They died before they reached the age of reason. They are saved through the mercy of Another and through the merit of others.

“Some of these children died after they were baptized, and some of these children died before baptism existed. Sincere prayers for the dead are heard in Paradise. God knows what He is doing.

“Look at the faces of these children, and listen to their voices. You will know that what I say is true.

“You have some doubts, some questions. Let me try to explain things better.

“Here in the vastness of Paradise, no mistakes are made and nothing by chance occurs. Chance is not present here just as sorrow is not present here, thirst is not present here, and hunger is not present here.

“From before the beginning of time, God has known who will dwell here.

“The souls of children are arranged in tiers that seem to indicate merit, but since these children never reached the age of reason, they have no merit. Nevertheless, everything here is like a perfect fit between a ring and a finger.

“God knows how much bliss these children are able to enjoy, and they receive exactly as much bliss as they can enjoy. Every child in Paradise is happy, and every adult in Paradise is happy.

“God determines each soul’s place in Paradise. This is all we need to know.

“Holy scripture itself shows that children — even twins — are different. Jacob and Esau were twins, but they fought even in their mother’s womb.

“God gave each one the grace he deserved. To you, it may seem as if he judged them according to the color of the child’s hair, or for some trivial reason, but again I say that God knows what He is doing.

“The children are seated not according to their good deeds because they were too young to have done good deeds; instead, they are seated according to God’s knowledge from before the beginning of time and according to God’s grace.

“During the beginning centuries of the existence of Humankind, all that was needed to save the souls of the children was the faith of their parents.

“After this age was completed, for male children to be saved, circumcision was needed.

“After this age was completed, and Christ had been incarnated and crucified, baptism was needed for entry to Paradise, or the child would be sentenced to Limbo.

“Look now at Mary, who most resembles Christ. Only with Mary’s help can you look at Christ.”

Angels — intelligent beings of pure spirit — attended Mary. This sight spellbound Dante. Of all the faces that he had seen in Paradise, Mary’s face seemed most Godlike.

With his wings spread wide, an Angel now sang to her, “Hail, Mary, full of grace.” The other Angels and the saved souls joined their voices to his for the remainder of the song.

Dante asked Saint Bernard, “Holy father, you who left his seat in the White Rose to help enlighten me, please answer this question: Who is that Angel who looks into Mary’s eyes with joy, who is so filled with love that he seems to burn like a fire?”

Saint Bernard, who loved and loves Mary, said, “This Angel possesses as much love and joy as is possible for any soul or Angel to possess, and all Angels and all saved souls agree that this is fitting because this is the Angel Gabriel, who appeared before Mary on Earth to announce that she would give birth to the Messiah.

“Now let me explain more about the souls in the White Rose. I will point out to you some of the great patricians.

“Sitting at Mary’s left side is Adam, the Father of Humankind and the man who sinned by eating without God’s permission the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Sitting at Mary’s right side is Saint Peter, the Father of the Church and the man to whom Christ gave the keys of Paradise.

“They are the two roots of the White Rose.

“Saint John the Evangelist in his Revelation prophesied hard times to come for the Church. He sits by Saint Peter’s side.

“Moses sits before Adam. Moses led those who ate manna; they were difficult to lead.

“Across from Saint Peter sits Anna, who does not look at God, but instead looks with love at Mary, her daughter. She is happy as she looks at Mary and sings Hosanna.

“Facing Adam is Saint Lucia, who helped to save your soul when you seemed determined to go to Hell after your death. Saint Lucia went to Beatrice, at the request of Mary, and asked her to talk to Virgil in Limbo as a last-ditch effort — that succeeded — to save your soul.

“But now your time in Paradise is coming to an end. Let us be like a good tailor who uses the cloth he has to the best advantage.

“Let us turn our eyes upon God: the Primal Love.

“You need to look at God directly. You need to penetrate as deeply as you can into His Radiance.

“But lest you backslide into pride by thinking that you can achieve such a vision through your own merit, let us offer a prayer that asks for the gift of directly seeing God. One here has the power to help you directly see God.

“Say the prayer with me. Repeat my words in your heart sincerely.”

Saint Bernard began to pray.



## Chapter 33: Mystic Empyrean — Saint Bernard Prays to Mary; The Trinity and Christ's Dual Nature (Paradise)

Saint Bernard began his prayer with the language of paradox — actually, a trinity of paradoxes: “You, Mary, are the Virgin Mother. You, Mary, are the daughter of your son. You, Mary, are the most humble and the most exalted of all creatures.”

Beatrice thought, *A paradox occurs when two ideas that normally do not belong together are put together in such a way that they result in a true insight. The language of paradox is not the language that we use in everyday life. A new kind of language is needed to describe the things that are in Paradise. They are ineffable — they cannot be described adequately in words. To try to describe them, people must use language that is not ordinary language.*

Saint Bernard continued, “You, Mary, ennobled human nature with your merit to such an extent that God consented to become incarnate in your womb. God had partially withdrawn from Humankind after the original sin of Adam and Eve, but in your womb God’s love for Humankind was rekindled. God’s love made the White Rose possible.

“Here in Paradise you inspire love in all of the saved souls, and on Earth, you inspire hope. In Paradise, all is love.

“Mary, you are great and powerful. People who pray look to you to give their prayers wings so that they rise upward to God.

“When people ask you for help, you give it, and often you give help without being asked.

“You are tender, you feel pity, and you are generous. You have all of the good qualities that God’s created beings can have.

“This man here — Dante — has traveled from the deepest part of the deepest circle of Hell, from the bottom to the top of the Mountain of Purgatory, and from Sphere to Sphere of the Heavens, all the while talking to and learning from souls, and now he begs you to grant him one final gift: to intercede with God so that his vision may be strengthened so that he can directly see God.

“I pray for this, also. I fervently burned to have my own vision of God, and now I fervently burn to have Dante see God. I pray to you to grant my desire: to let Dante not be blind because of his own mortality, but instead to let Dante open his eyes and see God.

“I also pray to you, Mary, to protect his mortal senses and not let him be harmed when he sees God.

“And I pray to you to protect Dante from harm once he has returned to Earth. Protect him from such things as pride. The temptation to be proud can be strong for one who receives such a gift as the one I am asking you to grant him.

“And not just I am doing the asking. All of the saved souls in Paradise, including Beatrice, are now praying to you, Mary. Their hands are clasped in prayer, and they are praying that my prayer be granted.”

Mary looked at Saint Bernard, and her look showed that his prayer pleased her, and then she looked at God. No one can look as deeply into the mind of God as Mary.

Dante burned to see God face to face. He raised his eyes.

Saint Bernard smiled and gestured for him to look up at God, but Dante was already looking. Dante’s vision was growing clearer, and he was beginning to see into the mind of God.

Dante the Poet, back on Earth and writing *The Divine Comedy*, thought, *What I saw reached such heights that both memory and language fail me.*

*I am like a person who has had a dream and has woken up. Although he cannot remember the dream, he still feels the effect that the dream had on him.*

*The vision I had fades, but I can still remember the sweetness I felt while having the vision.*

*Other things fade in the same way. Footprints made in the snow fade when sunshine strikes the snow. The Sibyl would write down her prophecies on leaves, and their meaning would fade when the wind blew and mixed up the leaves.*

*Now, God, I pray to You as I write: Please give me back a small part of what I experienced when I saw You face to face in Paradise. Let me remember now a small part of what I saw then. And I pray to You to give me enough command of words to reveal to future generations even one small spark of Your Being.*

*God, if knowledge of Your Being can return briefly to my mind, and if my words can capture even a small part of Your Being, men will know more about Your might.*

*I remember looking at the Eternal Light. The Light strengthened me so that I was able to see it. If I had looked away from the Light, my senses would have been overpowered and I would have fainted.*

*I remember that I kept looking at the Eternal Light. My strength grew, and my vision grew.*

*I remember that my vision united with the Eternal Light. By the grace of God, I saw within the mind of God.*

*I remember that contained within the mind of God is a book bound by love; that book is the universe. And in the mind of God are all forms and all essences of things. The essence of all things is found in the mind of God. I saw also substance, aka matter, and accident, aka the phases of matter, conjoined and how the two are related. And my words now can give only a hint of what I knew then.*

*I remember that I saw the conjoining of the temporal and the eternal in the mind of God. I know that I saw that because now as I write this, my heart is joyful.*

*But in one instant I forgot more than has been forgotten in the 2,500 years since Neptune, god of the sea, looked up in the water and saw the keel of the Argo, the first ship, which took Jason and his Argonauts on their journey to find the Golden Fleece. Both Neptune and I saw something marvelous, but the journey of the Argo 2,500 years ago can be remembered with more clearness than I can remember what I saw recently when I looked into the mind of God.*

*But my mind looked deeply and intently, and the more it saw, the more it wanted to see.*

*Anyone who looks within the mind of God is transformed and never wants to look away. In the mind of God is everything that is good. If something is not within the mind of God, then that thing is defective.*

*But now, when I describe the little that I remember of my vision, my words are like the babbling of a baby that still feeds at the mother's breasts. My words are mere baby talk.*

*God is perfect, and God never changes, but as my ability to see deeper into the mind of God grew, my experience of God's perfection changed. Paradise is never boring. In Paradise, we experience more and more of God's infinite perfection. That perfection never comes to an end, and no matter how much God reveals to us of His perfection, more of His perfection remains to be revealed.*

*I remember that I saw three circles of different colors all occupying the same space. The first circle reflected the second circle, and the first and second circles reflected the third circle. The Father begets the Son, and the Father and the Son produce the Holy Spirit.*

*My words as I try to describe this are weak, and "weak" is too weak a word to describe my words' weakness!*

*Only God fully understands the mind of God, and God fully loves.*

*I remember that I looked at the three circles, and one of the circles bore the image of a Man — the incarnation. I stared.*

*A geometer can try to square the circle — something that is impossible. I remember that like that geometer I tried to understand this new mystery, to understand how the image of a Man can fit in the circle. But my finite human mind could not understand.*

*I remember that a flash of understanding hit me, and I saw and I understood. I cannot tell you what I saw and understood, but I experienced and felt the Infinite Love that moves the Sun and the other stars.*

## **Appendix A: Background Information**

### **• Who was Dante Alighieri?**

Dante, of course, is the author of *The Divine Comedy*. He was born a Roman Catholic in Florence in 1265 C.E. He died of malaria in Ravenna, Italy, in 1321 (the night of Sept. 13-14). He remains buried in Ravenna, although an empty tomb in Florence is dedicated to him. Dante is known for his ability as a world-class poet, for his interest in politics, and for being exiled from Florence. In a way, he remains exiled from Florence, as his body is not in a tomb in Florence.

### **• What is *The Divine Comedy* in essence?**

*The Divine Comedy* tells about Dante's imaginative journey through the afterlife. Dante finds himself in a dark wood of error, and his guide, Virgil, the author of the Roman epic the *Aeneid*, takes Dante through the Inferno (Hell), and up the Mountain of Purgatory to the Forest of Eden. There Beatrice, Dante's beloved who died early in life, takes over as Dante's guide, and the two ascend the spheres of Paradise, until finally Dante, with the aid of another guide and of the Virgin Mary, is able to see God face to face. These three parts of Dante's imaginative journey make up the three parts of *The Divine Comedy*: the *Inferno*, the *Purgatory*, and the *Paradise*.

In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante tells the reader how to achieve Paradise. In addition, the epic is a love story. A woman saves Dante.

### **• How long does the journey in *The Divine Comedy* take?**

Considering all the distance that is traveled, it doesn't take long at all. It begins on the night before Good Friday and ends on Easter Wednesday of the year 1300, when Dante was 35 years old (midway through his three score and ten years). The journey takes roughly five and a half days. The year 1300 is significant other than being the midpoint of Dante's life. In 1300, spiritual repentance and spiritual renewal were major themes of the Catholic Church's first Holy Year.

### **• What is the scope of *The Divine Comedy*?**

Herman Melville, author of *Moby Dick*, once said that in order to write a mighty book, an author needs to choose a mighty theme. By choosing the afterlife as his theme, Dante chose a mighty theme. He writes about the Inferno and how sins are punished, about Purgatory and how sins are purged, and about Paradise and how good souls are rewarded. In doing this, he writes about many themes that are important to people of his time and to people of our time and to people of any time: religion, God, poetry, politics, etc.

• **Is *The Divine Comedy* universal?**

“Universal” means applicable to anyone, at any time, and anywhere. Yes, *The Divine Comedy* is universal. One need not be a Christian to enjoy and learn from *The Divine Comedy*. All of us sin, and probably most of us regret sinning. Many people can identify with the characters of *The Divine Comedy*. For example, Francesca da Rimini refuses to take responsibility for her actions, instead casting blame on other people. Many of us have done exactly the same thing.

Reading *The Divine Comedy* seriously will take some work. Readers will need to know something about Dante’s biography, about the history of his time and previous eras, and about literature. However, *The Divine Comedy* is relevant to our lives today, and this book and its companion volumes can be your guide to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.

• **What are some of the really big issues that are of concern to *The Divine Comedy*?**

One big issue is sin. For example, what are the results of sin?

One big issue is spiritual transformation. For example, how can one purge him- or herself of sin?

One big issue is politics. For example, Dante warns the reader about the dangers of extreme factionalism.

One big issue is poetry. How can poetry help us?

Of course, one really big issue is this: How do I enter Paradise?

• **This book can be your guide to *The Inferno*. What is the purpose of a guide?**

A guide will help you to cover territory safely the first time you go through the territory. However, many guides, including teachers, want to make themselves irrelevant. By reading this book as you read Dante’s *Inferno*, you will get a good grasp of the material, but I hope that you continue to read *The Divine Comedy* and the *Inferno* on your own, making it a part of your life and going beyond what is written here. *The Divine Comedy* is one of the Great Books of Western Literature — a book that you can reread with interest and profit each year of your life.

• **Briefly, what are the major facts of the biography of Dante the Poet?**

Dante was born in 1265 in Florence, Italy. He was successful in both poetry and politics. Early, he fell in love with Beatrice, a woman who died young in 1290. Both Dante and Beatrice married other people. About Beatrice Dante wrote a group of poems that he published in a volume (with commentary) titled *Vita Nuova* (*The New Life*).

Dante was a member of the political group known as the Guelfs, but when the Guelfs split into rival factions, he became a White Guelf. The White Guelfs opposed the Pope and wanted Florence to be free from papal power, while the Black Guelfs supported the Pope and were willing to do his bidding if he put them in power. Not surprisingly, Pope Boniface VIII supported the Black Guelfs, and he sent troops to Florence who took over the city in November of 1301. We can date Dante’s exile from Florence at this time, but he was officially exiled in January of 1302. Dante never returned to Florence.

While in exile, Dante composed his masterpiece: *The Divine Comedy*. He died on Ravenna in 1321 at age 56.

By the way, “Guelf” is sometimes spelled “Guelph.”

• **What does the title *The Divine Comedy* mean?**

Dante called his poem the *Commedia* or *Comedy*. In the 16th century, the word *Divina* or *Divine* was added to the title to show that it was a work rooted in religion.

*The Divine Comedy* is a “comedy” for two reasons:

1) *The Divine Comedy* was not written in Latin, but was instead written in the “vulgar” language of Italian. Being written in a “vulgar” language, the vernacular, it is written in a language that was regarded as not suited for tragedy.

2) The epic poem has a happy ending.

• **What is the difference between Dante the Pilgrim and Dante the Poet?**

Dante the Pilgrim is different from Dante the Poet. Dante the Pilgrim is a character in *The Divine Comedy*. At the beginning, he is naive and sometimes believes the spin that the sinners in the *Inferno* put on their own stories. However, Dante the Poet is an older, wiser Dante. Dante the Poet has journeyed throughout the *Inferno*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*, and he sees through the stories that the sinners tell in the *Inferno*.

Dante the Poet is the author of *The Divine Comedy*, whose major character is Dante the Pilgrim. Dante the Poet has more knowledge and experience than Dante the Pilgrim.

For example, Dante the Poet knows that he has been exiled from Florence because he is in exile when he writes *The Divine Comedy*. Because the poem is set in 1300, and Dante is not officially exiled until 1302, Dante the Pilgrim does not know at the beginning of the poem that he will be exiled. He will hear the prophecies of his upcoming exile that are made in the *Inferno*, but he will not fully understand that he will be exiled until his ancestor, Cacciaguidda, clearly tells him that in the *Paradise*.

Dante the Poet is also more intelligent than Dante the Pilgrim. Dante the Pilgrim will sometimes be taken in by the spin that sinners in the *Inferno* put on their stories, but Dante the Poet knows that God does not make mistakes. If a sinner is in the *Inferno*, Dante the Poet knows that the sinner belongs there.

• ***The Divine Comedy* is an allegory. Define “allegory.”**

An allegory has a double meaning. It can be understood on a literal level, but also present is a symbolic level. Literally, Dante the Pilgrim travels through the *Inferno*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*. Symbolically, a human soul who will be saved faces trials, overcomes them, and achieves *Paradise*.

Allegories have many symbols.

• **What do you need to be in the Afterlife in Dante’s *Inferno*?**

You must meet three criteria:

1) You must be dead.

2) You must be dead in 1300 (with a few exceptions where a soul is in the Inferno while a demon occupies the soul's body in the living world).

3) You must be a dead unrepentant sinner. (After all, if you were a dead repentant sinner, you would be found in either Purgatory or Paradise.)

• **What does it mean to repent?**

To repent your sins means to regret them. Of course, this does not mean regretting being caught for doing them, but regretting the sins themselves.

The sinners Dante will meet in the Inferno are unrepentant sinners. The repentant sinners he will meet in Purgatory treat Dante very much differently from the way the unrepentant sinners he meets in the Inferno treat him.

• **What is the geography of Hell? In *The Divine Comedy*, where is Hell located?**

Dante did not think that the world was flat. (Educated people of his time did not think the world was flat.) To get to the Inferno, you go down. The story is that Lucifer rebelled against God, was thrown from Paradise to the Earth, and landed on the point of the earth that is opposite to Jerusalem. His landing made the Southern Hemisphere composed of water as the land rushed under the water to hide from him. In addition, when he fell to the center of the Earth the land he displaced formed the Mountain of Purgatory.

Dante and Virgil will climb down to the center of the Earth, where Lucifer is punished, then they will keep climbing up to the other side of the world, where they will climb Mount Purgatory.

• **Explain the three separate kinds of moral failure: incontinence, violence, and fraud.**

*Incontinence*

Incontinence is not being able to control yourself. For example, you may not be able to control your sexual desire (lust) or your desire for food and drink (gluttony).

*Violence*

Violence can be directed against yourself (suicide), against God (blasphemy), or against other people (physical violence).

*Fraud*

Fraud involves the willful use of misrepresentation to deprive another person of his or her rights. For example, one can claim to be able to foretell the future and charge people money to tell them their "futures."

Simple fraud is fraud, but it is not committed against those to whom one has a special obligation of trust.

Complex fraud is fraud committed against those to whom one has a special obligation of trust. Sinners who commit complex fraud are traitors of various kinds: e.g., traitors to kin/family, traitors to government, traitors to guests, or traitors to God.

• **What kinds of characters will we see in *The Divine Comedy*?**

We will see both real characters and fictional characters. Mythological creatures will often be the guards in the *Inferno*.

Some of the characters will be important historically and globally, while others will be important only locally and would in fact be forgotten if they had not been mentioned in the *Inferno*.

• **What do the sinners in the *Inferno* all have in common? Why can't we take what the sinners say at face value?**

They have in common the fact that they are unrepentant. They do not take responsibility for the sins they have committed. Because of that, they will spin their stories and try to put the blame on someone or something else.

When we read the *Inferno*, we must be careful to try to see the whole story. The sinners will **not** tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. (Reading this retelling of Dante's *Inferno* or the notes in the translation of the *Inferno* that you are reading can help you to understand when a character is trying to spin you.)

Be aware that many people in the *Inferno* are going to be able to tell a good story, and you may end up thinking — like Dante the Pilgrim sometimes — that a certain sinner does not belong in Hell. However, Dante the Poet realizes that God doesn't make mistakes. Anyone who is in Hell deserves to be in Hell. It's important to closely examine the stories of some persuasive sinners to see what they are leaving out.

• **Why do people sin?**

Two main reasons, perhaps:

1) A lack of will. Often, we know what we ought to do, but we can't bring ourselves to do it. (Everyone who needs to lose 10 pounds knows exactly what to do to lose it: Exercise more and eat less. Someone who exercises less than they should and eats more than they should without a good reason such as illness is guilty of the sin of gluttony.)

2) An attractive veneer. Sometimes, sinning can appear to be attractive and to be fun, and thus people are tempted to sin. (Staying up late, getting drunk, and partying can be fun, but if these things prevent a student from attending class, that student is guilty of the sin of sloth.)

• **Does God make mistakes? Do these sinners belong in the *Inferno*?**

We must be careful when reading the *Inferno*. Dante the Pilgrim will sympathize with some sinners early in the *Inferno*, and we may be tempted to do exactly the same thing, but God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. God does not make mistakes. If a sinner is in the *Inferno*, the sinner belongs there.

By the way, the difference between *Inferno* and Inferno is that *Inferno* is the title of a book and Inferno is the name of a place. (Similarly, *Hamlet* is the title of a play, and Hamlet is the name of a character in that play.)

**Conclusion**

Once you have read this retelling in prose of Dante's great epic poem *Inferno*, you will have a good but basic understanding of it.

Then go and read the real thing. I recommend the translation by Mark Musa. The translation by John Ciardi is also very good.

## **Appendix B: About the Author**

It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a cry rang out, and on a hot summer night in 1954, Josephine, wife of Carl Bruce, gave birth to a boy — me. Unfortunately, this young married couple allowed Reuben Saturday, Josephine's brother, to name their first-born. Reuben, aka "The Joker," decided that Bruce was a nice name, so he decided to name me Bruce Bruce. I have gone by my middle name — David — ever since.

Being named Bruce David Bruce hasn't been all bad. Bank tellers remember me very quickly, so I don't often have to show an ID. It can be fun in charades, also. When I was a counselor as a teenager at Camp Echoing Hills in Warsaw, Ohio, a fellow counselor gave the signs for "sounds like" and "two words," then she pointed to a bruise on her leg twice. Bruise Bruise? Oh yeah, Bruce Bruce is the answer!

Uncle Reuben, by the way, gave me a haircut when I was in kindergarten. He cut my hair short and shaved a small bald spot on the back of my head. My mother wouldn't let me go to school until the bald spot grew out again.

Of all my brothers and sisters (six in all), I am the only transplant to Athens, Ohio. I was born in Newark, Ohio, and have lived all around Southeastern Ohio. However, I moved to Athens to go to Ohio University and have never left.

At Ohio U, I never could make up my mind whether to major in English or Philosophy, so I got a bachelor's degree with a double major in both areas, then I added a Master of Arts degree in English and a Master of Arts degree in Philosophy. Yes, I have my MAMA degree.

Currently, and for a long time to come (I eat fruits and veggies), I am spending my retirement writing books such as *Nadia Comaneci: Perfect 10*, *The Funniest People in Dance*, *Homer's Iliad: A Retelling in Prose*, and *William Shakespeare's Othello: A Retelling in Prose*.

By the way, my sister Brenda Kennedy writes romances such as *A New Beginning* and *Shattered Dreams*.

## **Appendix C: Some Books by David Bruce**

### **Retellings of a Classic Work of Literature**

*Arden of Faversham: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's The Alchemist: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's The Arraignment, or Poetaster: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's Bartholomew Fair: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's The Case is Altered: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's Catiline's Conspiracy: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's The Devil is an Ass: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's Epicene: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's Every Man in His Humor: A Retelling*



*Ben Jonson's Every Man Out of His Humor: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's The Fountain of Self-Love, or Cynthia's Revels: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's The Magnetic Lady, or Humors Reconciled: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's The New Inn, or The Light Heart: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's Sejanus' Fall: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's The Staple of News: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's A Tale of a Tub: A Retelling*

*Ben Jonson's Volpone, or the Fox: A Retelling*

*Christopher Marlowe's Complete Plays: Retellings*

*Christopher Marlowe's Dido, Queen of Carthage: A Retelling*

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