

# PARADISO

## CANTO XVI

O insignificant nobility of blood,  
if you make us glory in you here below,  
where our affections are ephemeral, 3  
I will not ever think it strange,  
for there, where appetite is never warped --  
in, I mean, the heavens themselves -- I gloried in you too. 6  
You are indeed a cloak that quickly shrinks,  
so that, if we do not add to it day by day,  
time trims the edges with its shears. 9  
With that *You* which had its origin in Rome  
and which her offspring least preserve by use,  
I once again began to speak, 12  
and Beatrice, who stood somewhat apart,  
smiled, like the lady who discreetly coughed  
at the first fault inscribed of Guinevere. 15  
I began: 'You are my father,  
You prompt me to speak with bold assurance.  
You raise me up, so I am more than I. 18  
'My mind is flooded by such rivers of delight  
that it exults it has not burst  
with so much happiness and joy. 21  
'Tell me then, belovèd stock from which I spring,  
who were Your ancestors, and say what were the years  
written in the record of Your childhood. 24  
'Tell me of the sheepfold of Saint John,  
how many people lived there and who among them  
were worthy of its highest offices.' 27  
As embers leap to flame on a puff of wind,  
I watched that light become resplendent  
at my respectful and persuasive words. 30  
And as it became more pleasing to my sight,  
so, with a voice more sweet and gentle,  
but not in this our modern tongue, 33

he said: 'From the day Ave was first spoken  
 until the birthpangs by which my mother,  
 now blessed, was lightened of me, her burden, 36  
 'this fiery star came to its Lion  
 five hundred fifty times and thirty more  
 to be rekindled underneath its paw. 39  
 'My ancestors and I were born just where  
 the horsemen in your yearly race  
 first come upon the farthest district. 42  
 'Let that be enough for you about my forebears.  
 As to who they were and where they came from,  
 it is more modest to be silent than to speak. 45  
 'All who lived there then, fit to bear arms,  
 and who dwelt between Mars and the Baptist,  
 amounted to a fifth of those who live there now, 48  
 'but the city's bloodline, now mixed  
 with that of Campi, of Certaldo, and Figline,  
 was then found pure in the humblest artisan. 51  
 'Ah, how much better would it be  
 had those cities which I name remained but neighbors,  
 had you kept your borders at Galluzzo and Trespiano, 54  
 'than to have them in your midst and bear the stench  
 of the lout from Aguglion and of him from Signa  
 who already has so sharp an eye for graft! 57  
 'If that tribe, which is the most degenerate  
 in all the world, had not been like a stepmother  
 to Caesar, but kind as a mother to her son, 60  
 'there is one, become a Florentine, who is in trade  
 and changes money, who would be sent straight back  
 to Semifonte, where his granddad scoured the country. 63  
 'Montemurlo would still owe fealty to the Conti,  
 the Cerchi would be in the parish of Acone,  
 and the Buondelmonti might remain in Valdigueve. 66  
 'Intermingling of peoples has ever been  
 the source of all the city's ills,  
 as eating in excess is to the body. 69  
 'A blind bull is more prone to fall  
 than a blind lamb, and frequently a single sword  
 cuts deeper and more sharp than five. 72

'If you consider Luni, Urbisaglia --  
 how they've ceased to be -- and how Chiusi  
 and Senigallia soon will join them, 75  
 'then to hear how families come to nothing  
 will not seem strange or difficult to grasp,  
 since even cities cease to be. 78  
 'All your concerns are mortal, even as are you,  
 but in some things that are more lasting  
 this lies hidden, because all lives are brief. 81  
 'And, as the turning of the lunar sphere covers  
 and endlessly uncovers the edges of the shore,  
 thus does fortune deal with Florence. 84  
 'Then it should not seem strange or marvelous to you  
 to hear me talk of noble Florentines,  
 whose fame is buried in the depth of time. 87  
 'I saw the Ughi, I saw the Catellini,  
 Filippi, Greci, Ormanni and Alberichi,  
 illustrious citizens already in decline, 90  
 'and I saw, as great as they were ancient,  
 dell'Arca alongside della Sannella,  
 and Soldanieri and Ardinghi and Bostichi. 93  
 'Over the gate, which is today weighed down  
 with such burden of new and unspeakable treachery  
 that some cargo soon shall be hurled from the ship, 96  
 'lived the Ravignani, from whom Count Guido  
 and all those who since have taken their name  
 from the noble Bellincione are descended. 99  
 'The Della Pressa already knew the way to rule,  
 and in their house the Galigaio already had  
 the gilded hilt and pommel. 102  
 'Great already was the stripe of fur,  
 great were the Sacchetti, Giuochi, Fifanti, Barucci,  
 Galli, and those who blush because of the bushel. 105  
 'The stock from which the Calfucci sprang  
 was already great, and already called  
 to the seats of power were Sizii and Arrigucci. 108  
 'Ah, in what glory I saw those,  
 now quite undone by pride! And the golden balls  
 made Florence flower with all their glorious deeds. 111

'Thus did the fathers of those who now,  
 whenever your church needs to fill the bishop's seat,  
 fatten themselves by sitting long in council. 114

'The proud and insolent race, playing the dragon  
 at the back of him who flees, but mild as a lamb  
 to him who shows his teeth -- or else his purse, 117

'was already on the rise, but of mean stock,  
 so that it gave no joy to Ubertain Donato  
 when his father-in-law made him their kinsman. 120

'The Caponsacchi had already made their way  
 from Fiesole to the market-place, and both Giuda  
 and Infangato were already citizens of note. 123

'I will tell a thing incredible but true:  
 The old city walls were entered through a gate  
 that took its name from the della Pera. 126

'Everyone bearing the noble coat of arms  
 of the great baron whose name and praise  
 are celebrated at the feast of Thomas 129

'had from him their knighthood and their privilege,  
 although he that decks it with a golden fringe  
 today takes the side of the common folk. 132

'Gualterotti and Importuni were already there,  
 and the Borgo would even now be more at peace  
 had they been left hungry for new neighbors. 135

'The house that is the wellspring of your tears,  
 whose just disdain brought death among you  
 and put an end to your light-hearted life, 138

'was honored then, both it and its allies.  
 O Buondelmonte, how ill-fated that you fled  
 those nuptials at another's urging! 141

'Many would be happy who now grieve  
 if God had let the river Ema take you  
 the first time that you came into our town. 144

'But it was destined that, to the shattered stone  
 that guards the bridge, Florence should offer  
 a sacrificial victim in her final days of peace. 147

'With these noble families, and with others still,  
 I saw Florence in such tranquility  
 that there was nothing that might cause her grief. 150

'With these noble families I saw her people  
so glorious and just, that the lily  
had not yet been reversed upon the lance  
nor by dissension changed to red.'

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