

# PARADISO

## CANTO XXXI

In form, then, of a luminous white rose  
I saw the saintly soldiery that Christ,  
with His own blood, took as His bride. 3

But the others -- who, even as they fly, behold  
and sing the glory of Him who stirs their love,  
and sing His goodness that raised them up so high, 6  
as a swarm of bees that in one instant plunge  
deep into blossoms and, the very next, go back  
to where their toil is turned to sweetness -- 9  
these descended to the splendid flower,  
adorned with many petals, and then flew up  
to where their love forever dwells. 12

Their faces were of living flame,  
their wings were gold, the rest  
was of a whiteness never matched by snow. 15

When they descended to the flower, they bestowed  
the peace and love acquired with their beating wings  
upon the petals, row on row. 18

Nor did so vast a flying throng,  
coming between the flower and the light above,  
obstruct the looking up or shining down, 21  
for the light of God so penetrates the universe,  
according to the fitness of its parts to take it in,  
that there is nothing can withstand its beam. 24

This sure and joyful kingdom,  
thronged with souls from both the old times and the new,  
aimed sight and love upon a single goal. 27

O threefold Light, which, in a single star  
sparkling in their sight, contents them so!  
Look down upon our tempest here below. 30

If the barbarians, coming from that region  
which Helice covers every day,  
wheeling with her son, in whom she takes delight, 33

were dumbstruck at the sight of Rome  
 and her majestic monuments,  
 when the Lateran surpassed all other works of man, 36  
 I, who had come to things divine from man's estate,  
 to eternity from time,  
 from Florence to a people just and sane, 39  
 with what amazement must I have been filled!  
 Indeed, between the wonder and my joy, I was content  
 neither to hear nor speak a word. 42  
 And, as a pilgrim, in the temple of his vow,  
 content within himself, looks lovingly about  
 and expects to tell his tale when he gets home, 45  
 so, through the living light I let my eyes  
 range freely through the ranks, now up, now down,  
 now circling freely all around again. 48  
 I saw visages informed by heavenly love, resplendent  
 with Another's light and their own smiles,  
 their every movement graced with dignity. 51  
 My gaze by now had taken in  
 the general form of Paradise  
 but not yet fixed on any single part of it, 54  
 and I turned, with newly kindled eagerness  
 to ask my lady many things  
 that kept my mind yet in suspense. 57  
 I expected one thing but found another:  
 instead of Beatrice, an old man, adorned  
 as were the rest of those in glory, met my eyes. 60  
 His eyes and cheeks were quite suffused  
 with kindly joy, and from his whole appearance shone  
 a loving father's tenderness. 63  
 Then 'Where is she?' I asked at once  
 and he replied: 'To lead your longing to its goal  
 Beatrice called me from my place. 66  
 'If you raise your eyes to the third circle  
 below the highest tier, you shall see her again,  
 now on the throne her merits have assigned.' 69  
 Without a word, I lifted up my eyes  
 and saw that she, reflecting the eternal rays,  
 appeared to be encircled by a crown. 72

From the highest region where the thunder breaks  
 down to the bottom of the deepest sea,  
 no mortal eye is ever quite so far 75  
 as was my sight removed from Beatrice.  
 Yet to me that mattered not, because her image  
 came down undimmed by anything between. 78  
 'O lady who give strength to all my hope  
 and who allowed yourself, for my salvation,  
 to leave your footprints there in Hell, 81  
 'of all the many things that I have seen,  
 I know the grace and virtue I've been shown  
 come from your goodness and your power. 84  
 'It is you who, on no matter what the path,  
 have drawn me forth from servitude to freedom  
 by every means that you had in your power. 87  
 'Keep your munificence alive in me, so that  
 my soul, which you have healed,  
 may please you when it leaves its mortal frame.' 90  
 This was my prayer. And she, however far away  
 she seemed, smiled and looked down at me,  
 then turned again to the eternal fountain. 93  
 And the holy ancient spoke: 'So that you may achieve  
 your journey's consummation now,  
 both sacred love and prayer have sent me here: 96  
 'Let your sight fly through this garden,  
 for seeing it will help prepare your eyes  
 to rise, along the beam of holy light. 99  
 'And Heaven's queen, for whom I burn  
 with love, will grant us every grace,  
 since I am her own, her faithful Bernard.' 102  
 As the man who, perhaps from Croatia, has come  
 to set his gaze on our Veronica,  
 his ancient craving still not satisfied, 105  
 and who thinks to himself while it is shown:  
 'My Lord Jesus Christ, God Himself,  
 was this then how You really looked?', 108  
 just so was I, gazing on the living love  
 of him who, still within the confines of this world,  
 in contemplation tasted of that peace. 111

'Child of grace,' he said, 'you will not know  
this joyful state if you maintain your gaze,  
instead of upward, fixed down here. 114

'Rather to the highest circles raise your eyes  
so that you may behold the queen enthroned,  
her to whom this realm is subject and devout.' 117

I raised my eyes. As, at break of day,  
the eastern part of the horizon shines  
with a brighter glow than where the sun goes down, 120  
so, as though my eyes were moving from a valley  
up a mountain, I saw that one far crest  
surpassed in brightness all the others. 123

Where we await the shaft of Phaeton's car,  
poorly guided there, where it is most aflame,  
while on this side and on that the light shades off, 126  
just so that peaceful oriflamme showed brightest  
in the middle, while on either side  
the flame was dimmed in equal measure. 129

Around that point I saw more than a thousand angels,  
their wings outspread, in joyful festival,  
each distinct in brightness and in motion. 132

I saw there, smiling at their games and songs,  
beauty that brought pleasure to the gaze  
of all the other gathered saints. 135

Were I as rich with words as in my store of images,  
I still would never dare attempt to tell  
the least of these delights that came from her. 138

Bernard, who saw my eyes were fixed, intent  
upon the very fire that made him warm,  
turned his own on her with such affection 141  
that he made mine more ardent in their gaze. 142