

# PURGATORIO

## CANTO VI

When the game of dice breaks up,  
the loser, left dejected,  
rehearses every throw and sadly learns, 3  
while all the others crowd around the winner.  
One goes in front, one grabs him from the back,  
and, at his side, another calls himself to mind. 6  
The winner does not stop, but listens first to one  
and then another. Those to whom he gives his hand  
then let him be, and so he gets away. 9  
Such was I among that pressing throng,  
turning my face this way and that,  
and through my promises I freed myself of them. 12  
The Aretine was there who met his death  
at the fierce hands of Ghino di Tacco,  
and the other who was drowned in the frenzied chase. 15  
There Federico Novello was beseeching  
with outstretched hands, and he of Pisa  
who made the good Marzucco show his strength. 18  
I saw Count Orso, and that soul severed  
from its body both by spite and envy,  
or so he said, and not for any crime-- 21  
Pierre de la Brosse. And let the Lady  
of Brabant be mindful, while she remains on earth,  
lest she be made to join a flock far worse. 24  
As soon as I was free of all those shades,  
whose only prayer it was that others pray  
and speed them on to blessedness, 27  
I began: 'O my light, it seems to me  
that in one passage you explicitly deny  
that prayer can bend decrees of Heaven, 30  
'and yet these people pray for that alone.  
Will this their hope, then, be in vain,  
or are your words not really clear to me?' 33

He answered: 'Plain is my writing  
 and their hopes not false  
 if with a sound mind you examine it, 36  
 'for not demeaned or lessened is high justice  
 if in one instant love's bright fire achieve  
 what they who sojourn here must undergo. 39  
 'And there where I affirmed that point  
 defect was not made good by prayer  
 because that prayer did not ascend to God. 42  
 'But do not let these doubts beset you  
 with high questions before you hear from her  
 who shall be light between the truth and intellect-- 45  
 'I don't know if you understand: I speak of Beatrice.  
 You shall see her above, upon the summit  
 of this mountain, smiling and in bliss.' 48  
 Then I: 'My lord, let us go on more quickly,  
 for now I am not wearied as I was,  
 and look, the hill already casts a shadow.' 51  
 'We will go on as long as this day lasts,'  
 he answered, 'as far as we still can,  
 but the truth is other than you think. 54  
 'Before you reach the top you'll see again  
 the one whose beams you do not break  
 because he is now hidden by the slope. 57  
 'But see that soul there seated all alone  
 who looks in our direction.  
 He will let us know the shortest way.' 60  
 We came up to him. O Lombard soul, how lofty  
 and disdainful was your bearing,  
 and in the calmness of your eyes, what dignity! 63  
 He did not speak to us  
 but let us approach, watching us  
 as would a couching lion. 66  
 Nevertheless, Virgil drew up closer,  
 asking him to point us to the best ascent.  
 To this request he gave no answer 69  
 but asked about our country and condition.  
 My gentle guide began: 'Mantua--'  
 and the shade, who had seemed so withdrawn, 72

leaped toward him from his place, saying:  
 'O Mantuan, I am Sordello of your city.'  
 And the two of them embraced. 75  
 Ah, Italy enslaved, abode of misery,  
 pilotless ship in a fierce tempest tossed,  
 no mistress over provinces but a harlot! 78  
 How eager was that noble soul,  
 only at the sweet name of his city,  
 to welcome there his fellow citizen! 81  
 Now your inhabitants are never free from war,  
 and those enclosed within a single wall and moat  
 are gnawing on each other. 84  
 Search, miserable one, around your shores,  
 then look into your heart,  
 if any part of you rejoice in peace. 87  
 If there is no one in your saddle, what good  
 was it Justinian repaired your harness?  
 Your shame would be less great had he not done so. 90  
 Ah, you who should be firm in your devotion  
 and let Caesar occupy the saddle,  
 if you but heeded what God writes for you, 93  
 see how vicious is the beast not goaded  
 and corrected by the spurs,  
 ever since you took the bridle in your hands. 96  
 O German Albert, who abandon her  
 now that she is untamed and wild,  
 you who should bestride her saddle-bow, 99  
 may the just sentence falling from the stars  
 upon your blood be strange enough and clear  
 that your successor live in fear of it! 102  
 In that far land, both you and your father,  
 dragged along by greed, allowed  
 the garden of the empire to be laid waste. 105  
 Come and see the Montecchi and Cappelletti,  
 Monaldi and Filippeschi, those already wretched  
 and the ones in dread, you who have no care. 108  
 Come, cruel one, come and see the tribulation  
 your nobles suffer and consider their distress.  
 Then you shall see how dark is Santafiora. 111

Come and see your Rome and how she weeps,  
widowed and bereft, and cries out day and night:  
'My Caesar, why are you not with me?' 114

Come and see your people, how they love  
one another, and, if no pity for us moves you,  
come for shame of your repute. 117

And if it is lawful to ask, O Jove on high,  
you who were crucified on earth for us,  
are your righteous eyes turned elsewhere, 120  
or, in your abyss of contemplation,  
are you preparing some mysterious good,  
beyond our comprehension? 123

For each Italian city overflows with tyrants  
and every clown that plays the partisan  
thinks he is the new Marcellus. 126

My Florence, you may well be pleased  
with this digression, which does not touch you,  
thanks to the exertions of your people. 129

Many others have justice in their hearts,  
even if its arrow's late to fly from all their talking,  
but yours have justice ready on their tongues. 132

Many others refuse the public burden. But yours  
are eager with an answer without even being asked,  
crying out: 'I'll take it on *my* shoulders.' 135

Count yourself happy then, for you have reason to,  
since you are rich, at peace, and wise!  
If I speak truth, the facts cannot deny it. 138

Athens and Sparta, which made the ancient laws  
and had such civil order,  
gave only hints of the good life compared to you, 141  
who make such fine provisions  
that the threads you've spun but in October  
do not survive to mid-November. 144

How many times within your memory  
have you changed laws, coinage, offices,  
as well as customs, and renewed your members! 147

If you recall your past and think upon it clearly,  
you will see that you are like a woman, ill in bed,  
who on the softest down cannot find rest 150

but twisting, turning, seeks to ease her pain.

151