



THE DIVINE COMEDY

BY DANTE ALIGHIERI

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AudioBook

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Part 1

Inferno

Chapter 1

The Dark Forest. The Hill of Difficulty. The Panther, the Lion, and the Wolf. Virgil.

Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straight-forward pathway had been lost.
Ah me! how hard a thing it is to say
What was this forest savage, rough, and stern,
Which in the very thought renews the fear.
So bitter is it, death is little more;
But of the good to treat, which there I found,
Speak will I of the other things I saw there.
I cannot well repeat how there I entered,
So full was I of slumber at the moment
In which I had abandoned the true way.
But after I had reached a mountain's foot,
At that point where the valley terminated,
Which had with consternation pierced my heart,
Upward I looked, and I beheld its shoulders,
Vested already with that planet's rays
Which leadeth others right by every road.
Then was the fear a little quieted
That in my heart's lake had endured throughout
The night, which I had passed so piteously.
And even as he, who, with distressful breath,
Forth issued from the sea upon the shore,
Turns to the water perilous and gazes;

So did my soul, that still was fleeing onward,
Turn itself back to re-behold the pass
Which never yet a living person left.
After my weary body I had rested,
The way resumed I on the desert slope,
So that the firm foot ever was the lower.
And lo! almost where the ascent began,
A panther light and swift exceedingly,
Which with a spotted skin was covered o'er!
And never moved she from before my face,
Nay, rather did impede so much my way,
That many times I to return had turned.
The time was the beginning of the morning,
And up the sun was mounting with those stars
That with him were, what time the Love Divine
At first in motion set those beauteous things;
So were to me occasion of good hope,
The variegated skin of that wild beast,
The hour of time, and the delicious season;
But not so much, that did not give me fear
A lion's aspect which appeared to me.
He seemed as if against me he were coming
With head uplifted, and with ravenous hunger,
So that it seemed the air was afraid of him;
And a she-wolf, that with all hungerings
Seemed to be laden in her meagreness,
And many folk has caused to live forlorn!
She brought upon me so much heaviness,
With the affright that from her aspect came,
That I the hope relinquished of the height.
And as he is who willingly acquires,
And the time comes that causes him to lose,
Who weeps in all his thoughts and is despondent,
E'en such made me that beast withouten peace,
Which, coming on against me by degrees
Thrust me back thither where the sun is silent.

While I was rushing downward to the lowland,
Before mine eyes did one present himself,
Who seemed from long-continued silence hoarse.
When I beheld him in the desert vast,
"Have pity on me," unto him I cried,
"Whiche'er thou art, or shade or real man!"
He answered me: "Not man; man once I was,
And both my parents were of Lombardy,
And Mantuans by country both of them.
'Sub Julio' was I born, though it was late,
And lived at Rome under the good Augustus,
During the time of false and lying gods.
A poet was I, and I sang that just
Son of Anchises, who came forth from Troy,
After that Ilion the superb was burned.
But thou, why goest thou back to such annoyance?
Why climb'st thou not the Mount Delectable,
Which is the source and cause of every joy?"
"Now, art thou that Virgilius and that fountain
Which spreads abroad so wide a river of speech?"
I made response to him with bashful forehead.
"O, of the other poets honour and light,
Avail me the long study and great love
That have impelled me to explore thy volume!
Thou art my master, and my author thou,
Thou art alone the one from whom I took
The beautiful style that has done honour to me.
Behold the beast, for which I have turned back;
Do thou protect me from her, famous Sage,
For she doth make my veins and pulses tremble."
"Thee it behoves to take another road,"
Responded he, when he beheld me weeping,
"If from this savage place thou wouldst escape;
Because this beast, at which thou criest out,
Suffers not any one to pass her way,
But so doth harass him, that she destroys him;

And has a nature so malign and ruthless,
That never doth she glut her greedy will,
And after food is hungrier than before.
Many the animals with whom she weds,
And more they shall be still, until the Greyhound
Comes, who shall make her perish in her pain.
He shall not feed on either earth or pelf,
But upon wisdom, and on love and virtue;
'Twixt Feltro and Feltro shall his nation be;
Of that low Italy shall he be the saviour,
On whose account the maid Camilla died,
Euryalus, Turnus, Nisus, of their wounds;
Through every city shall he hunt her down,
Until he shall have driven her back to Hell,
There from whence envy first did let her loose.
Therefore I think and judge it for thy best
Thou follow me, and I will be thy guide,
And lead thee hence through the eternal place,
Where thou shalt hear the desperate lamentations,
Shalt see the ancient spirits disconsolate,
Who cry out each one for the second death;
And thou shalt see those who contented are
Within the fire, because they hope to come,
Whene'er it may be, to the blessed people;
To whom, then, if thou wishest to ascend,
A soul shall be for that than I more worthy;
With her at my departure I will leave thee;
Because that Emperor, who reigns above,
In that I was rebellious to his law,
Wills that through me none come into his city.
He governs everywhere, and there he reigns;
There is his city and his lofty throne;
O happy he whom thereto he elects!"
And I to him: "Poet, I thee entreat,
By that same God whom thou didst never know,
So that I may escape this woe and worse,

Thou wouldst conduct me there where thou hast said,
That I may see the portal of Saint Peter,
And those thou makest so disconsolate."
Then he moved on, and I behind him followed.

Chapter 2

The Descent. Dante's Protest and Virgil's Appeal. The Intercession of the Three Ladies Benedight.

Day was departing, and the embrowned air
Released the animals that are on earth
From their fatigues; and I the only one
Made myself ready to sustain the war,
Both of the way and likewise of the woe,
Which memory that errs not shall retrace.
O Muses, O high genius, now assist me!
O memory, that didst write down what I saw,
Here thy nobility shall be manifest!
And I began: "Poet, who guidest me,
Regard my manhood, if it be sufficient,
Ere to the arduous pass thou dost confide me.
Thou sayest, that of Silvius the parent,
While yet corruptible, unto the world
Immortal went, and was there bodily.
But if the adversary of all evil
Was courteous, thinking of the high effect
That issue would from him, and who, and what,
To men of intellect unmeet it seems not;
For he was of great Rome, and of her empire
In the empyreal heaven as father chosen;
The which and what, wishing to speak the truth,
Were stablished as the holy place, wherein
Sits the successor of the greatest Peter.

Upon this journey, whence thou givest him vaunt,
Things did he hear, which the occasion were
Both of his victory and the papal mantle.
Thither went afterwards the Chosen Vessel,
To bring back comfort thence unto that Faith,
Which of salvation's way is the beginning.
But I, why thither come, or who concedes it?
I not Aeneas am, I am not Paul,
Nor I, nor others, think me worthy of it.
Therefore, if I resign myself to come,
I fear the coming may be ill-advised;
Thou'rt wise, and knowest better than I speak."
And as he is, who unwillis what he willed,
And by new thoughts doth his intention change,
So that from his design he quite withdraws,
Such I became, upon that dark hillside,
Because, in thinking, I consumed the emprise,
Which was so very prompt in the beginning.
"If I have well thy language understood,"
Replied that shade of the Magnanimous,
"Thy soul attainted is with cowardice,
Which many times a man encumbers so,
It turns him back from honoured enterprise,
As false sight doth a beast, when he is shy.
That thou mayst free thee from this apprehension,
I'll tell thee why I came, and what I heard
At the first moment when I grieved for thee.
Among those was I who are in suspense,
And a fair, saintly Lady called to me
In such wise, I besought her to command me.
Her eyes where shining brighter than the Star;
And she began to say, gentle and low,
With voice angelical, in her own language:
'O spirit courteous of Mantua,
Of whom the fame still in the world endures,
And shall endure, long-lasting as the world;

A friend of mine, and not the friend of fortune,
Upon the desert slope is so impeded
Upon his way, that he has turned through terror,
And may, I fear, already be so lost,
That I too late have risen to his succour,
From that which I have heard of him in Heaven.
Bestir thee now, and with thy speech ornate,
And with what needful is for his release,
Assist him so, that I may be consoled.
Beatrice am I, who do bid thee go;
I come from there, where I would fain return;
Love moved me, which compelleth me to speak.
When I shall be in presence of my Lord,
Full often will I praise thee unto him.'
Then paused she, and thereafter I began:
'O Lady of virtue, thou alone through whom
The human race exceedeth all contained
Within the heaven that has the lesser circles,
So grateful unto me is thy commandment,
To obey, if 'twere already done, were late;
No farther need'st thou ope to me thy wish.
But the cause tell me why thou dost not shun
The here descending down into this centre,
From the vast place thou burnest to return to.'
'Since thou wouldst fain so inwardly discern,
Briefly will I relate,' she answered me,
'Why I am not afraid to enter here.
Of those things only should one be afraid
Which have the power of doing others harm;
Of the rest, no; because they are not fearful.
God in his mercy such created me
That misery of yours attains me not,
Nor any flame assails me of this burning.
A gentle Lady is in Heaven, who grieves
At this impediment, to which I send thee,
So that stern judgment there above is broken.

In her entreaty she besought Lucia,
And said, "Thy faithful one now stands in need
Of thee, and unto thee I recommend him."
Lucia, foe of all that cruel is,
Hastened away, and came unto the place
Where I was sitting with the ancient Rachel.
"Beatrice" said she, "the true praise of God,
Why succourest thou not him, who loved thee so,
For thee he issued from the vulgar herd?
Dost thou not hear the pity of his plaint?
Dost thou not see the death that combats him
Beside that flood, where ocean has no vaunt?"
Never were persons in the world so swift
To work their weal and to escape their woe,
As I, after such words as these were uttered,
Came hither downward from my blessed seat,
Confiding in thy dignified discourse,
Which honours thee, and those who've listened to it.'
After she thus had spoken unto me,
Weeping, her shining eyes she turned away;
Whereby she made me swifter in my coming;
And unto thee I came, as she desired;
I have delivered thee from that wild beast,
Which barred the beautiful mountain's short ascent.
What is it, then? Why, why dost thou delay?
Why is such baseness bedded in thy heart?
Daring and hardihood why hast thou not,
Seeing that three such Ladies benedight
Are caring for thee in the court of Heaven,
And so much good my speech doth promise thee?"
Even as the flowerets, by nocturnal chill,
Bowed down and closed, when the sun whitens them,
Uplift themselves all open on their stems;
Such I became with my exhausted strength,
And such good courage to my heart there coursed,
That I began, like an intrepid person:

"O she compassionate, who succoured me,
And courteous thou, who hast obeyed so soon
The words of truth which she addressed to thee!
Thou hast my heart so with desire disposed
To the adventure, with these words of thine,
That to my first intent I have returned.
Now go, for one sole will is in us both,
Thou Leader, and thou Lord, and Master thou."
Thus said I to him; and when he had moved,
I entered on the deep and savage way.

Chapter 3

The Gate of Hell. The Inefficient or Indifferent. Pope Celestine V. The Shores of Acheron. Charon. The Earthquake and the Swoon.

"Through me the way is to the city dolent;
Through me the way is to eternal dole;
Through me the way among the people lost.
Justice incited my sublime Creator;
Created me divine Omnipotence,
The highest Wisdom and the primal Love.
Before me there were no created things,
Only eterne, and I eternal last.
All hope abandon, ye who enter in!"
These words in sombre colour I beheld
Written upon the summit of a gate;
Whence I: "Their sense is, Master, hard to me!"
And he to me, as one experienced:
"Here all suspicion needs must be abandoned,
All cowardice must needs be here extinct.
We to the place have come, where I have told thee
Thou shalt behold the people dolorous
Who have foregone the good of intellect."
And after he had laid his hand on mine
With joyful mien, whence I was comforted,
He led me in among the secret things.
There sighs, complaints, and ululations loud
Resounded through the air without a star,

Whence I, at the beginning, wept thereat.
Languages diverse, horrible dialects,
Accents of anger, words of agony,
And voices high and hoarse, with sound of hands,
Made up a tumult that goes whirling on
For ever in that air for ever black,
Even as the sand doth, when the whirlwind breathes.
And I, who had my head with horror bound,
Said: "Master, what is this which now I hear?
What folk is this, which seems by pain so vanquished?"
And he to me: "This miserable mode
Maintain the melancholy souls of those
Who lived withouten infamy or praise.
Commingled are they with that caitiff choir
Of Angels, who have not rebellious been,
Nor faithful were to God, but were for self.
The heavens expelled them, not to be less fair;
Nor them the nethermore abyss receives,
For glory none the damned would have from them."
And I: "O Master, what so grievous is
To these, that maketh them lament so sore?"
He answered: "I will tell thee very briefly.
These have no longer any hope of death;
And this blind life of theirs is so debased,
They envious are of every other fate.
No fame of them the world permits to be;
Misericord and Justice both disdain them.
Let us not speak of them, but look, and pass."
And I, who looked again, beheld a banner,
Which, whirling round, ran on so rapidly,
That of all pause it seemed to me indignant;
And after it there came so long a train
Of people, that I ne'er would have believed
That ever Death so many had undone.
When some among them I had recognised,
I looked, and I beheld the shade of him

Who made through cowardice the great refusal.
Forthwith I comprehended, and was certain,
That this the sect was of the caitiff wretches
Hateful to God and to his enemies.
These miscreants, who never were alive,
Were naked, and were stung exceedingly
By gadflies and by hornets that were there.
These did their faces irrigate with blood,
Which, with their tears commingled, at their feet
By the disgusting worms was gathered up.
And when to gazing farther I betook me.
People I saw on a great river's bank;
Whence said I: "Master, now vouchsafe to me,
That I may know who these are, and what law
Makes them appear so ready to pass over,
As I discern athwart the dusky light."
And he to me: "These things shall all be known
To thee, as soon as we our footsteps stay
Upon the dismal shore of Acheron."
Then with mine eyes ashamed and downward cast,
Fearing my words might irksome be to him,
From speech refrained I till we reached the river.
And lo! towards us coming in a boat
An old man, hoary with the hair of eld,
Crying: "Woe unto you, ye souls depraved!
Hope nevermore to look upon the heavens;
I come to lead you to the other shore,
To the eternal shades in heat and frost.
And thou, that yonder standest, living soul,
Withdraw thee from these people, who are dead!"
But when he saw that I did not withdraw,
He said: "By other ways, by other ports
Thou to the shore shalt come, not here, for passage;
A lighter vessel needs must carry thee."
And unto him the Guide: "Vex thee not, Charon;
It is so willed there where is power to do

That which is willed; and farther question not."
Thereat were quieted the fleecy cheeks
Of him the ferryman of the livid fen,
Who round about his eyes had wheels of flame.
But all those souls who weary were and naked
Their colour changed and gnashed their teeth together,
As soon as they had heard those cruel words.
God they blasphemed and their progenitors,
The human race, the place, the time, the seed
Of their engendering and of their birth!
Thereafter all together they drew back,
Bitterly weeping, to the accursed shore,
Which waiteth every man who fears not God.
Charon the demon, with the eyes of glede,
Beckoning to them, collects them all together,
Beats with his oar whoever lags behind.
As in the autumn-time the leaves fall off,
First one and then another, till the branch
Unto the earth surrenders all its spoils;
In similar wise the evil seed of Adam
Throw themselves from that margin one by one,
At signals, as a bird unto its lure.
So they depart across the dusky wave,
And ere upon the other side they land,
Again on this side a new troop assembles.
"My son," the courteous Master said to me,
"All those who perish in the wrath of God
Here meet together out of every land;
And ready are they to pass o'er the river,
Because celestial Justice spurs them on,
So that their fear is turned into desire.
This way there never passes a good soul;
And hence if Charon doth complain of thee,
Well mayst thou know now what his speech imports."
This being finished, all the dusk champaign
Trembled so violently, that of that terror

The recollection bathes me still with sweat.
The land of tears gave forth a blast of wind,
And fulminated a vermilion light,
Which overmastered in me every sense,
And as a man whom sleep hath seized I fell.

Chapter 4

The First Circle, Limbo: Virtuous Pagans and the Unbaptized. The Four Poets, Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan. The Noble Castle of Philosophy.

Broke the deep lethargy within my head
A heavy thunder, so that I upstarted,
Like to a person who by force is wakened;
And round about I moved my rested eyes,
Uprisen erect, and steadfastly I gazed,
To recognise the place wherein I was.
True is it, that upon the verge I found me
Of the abysmal valley dolorous,
That gathers thunder of infinite ululations.
Obscure, profound it was, and nebulous,
So that by fixing on its depths my sight
Nothing whatever I discerned therein.
"Let us descend now into the blind world,"
Began the Poet, pallid utterly;
"I will be first, and thou shalt second be."
And I, who of his colour was aware,
Said: "How shall I come, if thou art afraid,
Who'rt wont to be a comfort to my fears?"
And he to me: "The anguish of the people
Who are below here in my face depicts
That pity which for terror thou hast taken.
Let us go on, for the long way impels us."

Thus he went in, and thus he made me enter
The foremost circle that surrounds the abyss.
There, as it seemed to me from listening,
Were lamentations none, but only sighs,
That tremble made the everlasting air.
And this arose from sorrow without torment,
Which the crowds had, that many were and great,
Of infants and of women and of men.
To me the Master good: "Thou dost not ask
What spirits these, which thou beholdest, are?
Now will I have thee know, ere thou go farther,
That they sinned not; and if they merit had,
'Tis not enough, because they had not baptism
Which is the portal of the Faith thou holdest;
And if they were before Christianity,
In the right manner they adored not God;
And among such as these am I myself.
For such defects, and not for other guilt,
Lost are we and are only so far punished,
That without hope we live on in desire."
Great grief seized on my heart when this I heard,
Because some people of much worthiness
I knew, who in that Limbo were suspended.
"Tell me, my Master, tell me, thou my Lord,"
Began I, with desire of being certain
Of that Faith which o'ercometh every error,
"Came any one by his own merit hence,
Or by another's, who was blessed thereafter?"
And he, who understood my covert speech,
Replied: "I was a novice in this state,
When I saw hither come a Mighty One,
With sign of victory incoronate.
Hence he drew forth the shade of the First Parent,
And that of his son Abel, and of Noah,
Of Moses the lawgiver, and the obedient
Abraham, patriarch, and David, king,

Israel with his father and his children,
And Rachel, for whose sake he did so much,
And others many, and he made them blessed;
And thou must know, that earlier than these
Never were any human spirits saved."
We ceased not to advance because he spake,
But still were passing onward through the forest,
The forest, say I, of thick-crowded ghosts.
Not very far as yet our way had gone
This side the summit, when I saw a fire
That overcame a hemisphere of darkness.
We were a little distant from it still,
But not so far that I in part discerned not
That honourable people held that place.
"O thou who honourest every art and science,
Who may these be, which such great honour have,
That from the fashion of the rest it parts them?"
And he to me: "The honourable name,
That sounds of them above there in thy life,
Wins grace in Heaven, that so advances them."
In the mean time a voice was heard by me:
"All honour be to the pre-eminent Poet;
His shade returns again, that was departed."
After the voice had ceased and quiet was,
Four mighty shades I saw approaching us;
Semblance had they nor sorrowful nor glad.
To say to me began my gracious Master:
"Him with that falchion in his hand behold,
Who comes before the three, even as their lord.
That one is Homer, Poet sovereign;
He who comes next is Horace, the satirist;
The third is Ovid, and the last is Lucan.
Because to each of these with me applies
The name that solitary voice proclaimed,
They do me honour, and in that do well."
Thus I beheld assemble the fair school

Of that lord of the song pre-eminent,
Who o'er the others like an eagle soars.
When they together had discoursed somewhat,
They turned to me with signs of salutation,
And on beholding this, my Master smiled;
And more of honour still, much more, they did me,
In that they made me one of their own band;
So that the sixth was I, 'mid so much wit.
Thus we went on as far as to the light,
Things saying 'tis becoming to keep silent,
As was the saying of them where I was.
We came unto a noble castle's foot,
Seven times encompassed with lofty walls,
Defended round by a fair rivulet;
This we passed over even as firm ground;
Through portals seven I entered with these Sages;
We came into a meadow of fresh verdure.
People were there with solemn eyes and slow,
Of great authority in their countenance;
They spake but seldom, and with gentle voices.
Thus we withdrew ourselves upon one side
Into an opening luminous and lofty,
So that they all of them were visible.
There opposite, upon the green enamel,
Were pointed out to me the mighty spirits,
Whom to have seen I feel myself exalted.
I saw Electra with companions many,
'Mongst whom I knew both Hector and Aeneas,
Caesar in armour with gerfalcon eyes;
I saw Camilla and Penthesilea
On the other side, and saw the King Latinus,
Who with Lavinia his daughter sat;
I saw that Brutus who drove Tarquin forth,
Lucretia, Julia, Marcia, and Cornelia,
And saw alone, apart, the Saladin.
When I had lifted up my brows a little,

The Master I beheld of those who know,
Sit with his philosophic family.
All gaze upon him, and all do him honour.
There I beheld both Socrates and Plato,
Who nearer him before the others stand;
Democritus, who puts the world on chance,
Diogenes, Anaxagoras, and Thales,
Zeno, Empedocles, and Heraclitus;
Of qualities I saw the good collector,
Hight Dioscorides; and Orpheus saw I,
Tully and Livy, and moral Seneca,
Euclid, geometrician, and Ptolemy,
Galen, Hippocrates, and Avicenna,
Averroes, who the great Comment made.
I cannot all of them pourtray in full,
Because so drives me onward the long theme,
That many times the word comes short of fact.
The sixfold company in two divides;
Another way my sapient Guide conducts me
Forth from the quiet to the air that trembles;
And to a place I come where nothing shines.