

**PURGATORIO  
BOOK TWO OF THE  
DIVINE COMEDY**

*By Dante Alighieri*

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## CANTO I

*The poets issue on the low-lying shore east of the Mount of Purgatory, and Dante's eyes, which in Hell have shared the misery of his heart, become once more the instruments of delight, as he looks into the clear blue sky and sees Venus near the eastern horizon. The South Pole of the Heavens is well above the southern horizon, and all is bathed in the light of the glorious constellation never seen since man, at the Fall, was banished to the Northern Hemisphere. Turning north, the poet perceives the venerable figure of Cato, his face illuminated by the four stars, typifying the four moral virtues. He challenges the poets as though fugitives from Hell; but Virgil pleads the command of a Lady of Heaven, and explains that Dante still lives, and is seeking that liberty for love of which Cato himself had renounced his life. He further appeals to him, by his love of Marcia, to further their journey through his realm. Cato is untouched by the thought of Marcia, from whom he is now inwardly severed; but in reverence for the heavenly mandate he bids Virgil gird Dante with the rush of humility and cleanse his face with dew from the stains of Hell, that he may be ready to meet the ministers of Heaven. The sun, now rising, will teach them the ascent. The poets seek the shore, as the sea ripples under the morning breeze, and Virgil follows Cato's behest, cleansing Dante's face with dew, and plucking the rush, which instantly springs up again miraculously renewed.*

Henceforth the little vessel of my mind

To glide o'er better waters hoists the sail,  
 And all the cruel seas she leaves behind:  
 Now of the second kingdom tells my tale, 4  
 Wherein the human soul is purged of stain  
 That to ascend to Heav'n it may avail.  
 Here let dead Poetry arise again, 7  
 O holy Muses, since I am your own,  
 And may Calliope revive the strain,\*  
 Accompanying my song, which once beat down 10  
 The wretched magpies, till in shame they knew  
 That past all pardon their offence had grown.†  
 The Oriental sapphire's‡ gentle hue, 13  
 Which made the peaceful aspect of the sky  
 To the first circle's height, grow clear and blue,  
 Restored all happiness unto mine eye, 16  
 Soon as I issued forth from that dead air  
 That breast and eyes had saddened equally.  
 She who gives strength to Love, the Planet fair, 19  
 With smiles made all the Eastern heaven kind,  
 Veiling the Fishes that her escort were.§  
 I turned to my right hand and set my mind 22  
 On the other pole, and stars I noted, four,  
 That none save our first parents e'er could find.  
 All Heaven seemed as though rejoicing o'er 25  
 Their flames. O Northern lands, how widowed ye  
 That now can gaze upon them nevermore!

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\* Calliope was the muse of heroic poetry.

† The magpies challenged Calliope to a singing contest and turned them into birds (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* V.294-678).

‡ The sun.

§ The planet Venus was the planet of love and right behind her Dante thought was the fishes constellation.

When of their worth I sought no more to see, 28  
 And somewhat toward the other pole I turned,  
 Whence now the Wain had vanished utterly,  
 An aged man close by me I discerned; 31  
 For such great reverence his mien did call  
 As never son for any father learned.  
 Long was his beard and streaked with white withal, 34  
 Like to the aspect of the locks of hair  
 That to his breast in two-fold list did fall.  
 The rays of those four holy lamps made fair 37  
 His face, with such a brilliancy of light  
 I saw him, as the Sun before him were.  
 "Who are ye, who against the dark stream's might," 40  
 His reverent plumes he moved and thus he said,  
 "From the eternal prison thus take flight?  
 "Who guided you? What lamp was it that led 43  
 You issuing forth from out the night profound,  
 Whose blackness o'er the infernal vale is shed?  
 "Are then the laws of the abyss unbound, 46  
 Or is from Heaven some new counsel sent,  
 That damned, ye still can enter on my ground?"  
 Then did my leader, on my welfare bent, 49  
 With words and hands and signs lay hold on me  
 Till knees and brow he had made reverent.  
 "I came not of myself," then answered he, 52  
 A lady came from Heav'n and at her prayer  
 This man I aided with my company:  
 "But since it is thy will that I declare 55  
 More of our state, that truth established stay,  
 It cannot be my will to thwart thee there.  
 "He has not looked upon his life's last day, 58  
 But through his folly was so near it led,

Short time indeed there was to turn away.  
 "Then was I sent to him, as I have said, 61  
 To rescue him, nor is a pathway known  
 Other than this on which my foot has sped.  
 "To him the guilty nations I have shown, 64  
 And now those spirits would display who dwell  
 Beneath thy wardship, and for sin atone.  
 "How I have brought him were too long to tell: 67  
 Virtue from high gives aid, that thus through me  
 He may both see thee and may hear thee well.  
 "Let now his coming be found sweet to thee: 70  
 Freedom he seeketh, and how she is dear,  
 He knows, who gives up life for liberty.  
 "Thou knowest; Death no bitterness did wear 73  
 In Utica, when the robe was laid aside  
 Which on the great Day shall shine bright and clear.\*  
 "Nor are for us eternal laws denied, 76  
 For this man lives and Minos binds not me,  
 But where I dwell do the chaste eyes abide  
 "Of Marcia, who, in thy memory 79  
 To live, O Holy heart, doth ever pray,  
 For her love's sake bend to us presently;†  
 "Throughout thy seven kingdoms grant us way, 82  
 And if thou deign to be remembered there,  
 Then thanks of thee to her will I repay."  
 "Marcia to mine eyes was found so fair." 85  
 Then he began: "While yonder life was good,

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\* The old man here is the Roman statesman Cato (234-149 BC) who peacefully committed suicide at Utica when Caesar conquered Pompey.

† Cato gave his wife Marcia away to his friend Hortensius, and when Hortensius died, Marcia asked to be returned to Cato. However, Marcia is not allowed into Purgatory so Cato no longer is moved by her name.





## CANTO II

*At Jerusalem day is setting and night rising, and in Purgatory day rising and night setting; and as the poets, pondering on their course, are delaying their journey against their will, they see glowing red in the east a light swiftly approaching them; which Virgil soon recognizes as Charon's angelic counterpart, who with stroke of wing guides a light bark with its charge of happy souls to the mountain of purification. As they land the souls chant the psalm of the Exodus, and with the sign of the cross their angelic guard departs, to renew his mission. The risen sun now shoots full daylight into the sky, obliterating Capricorn from the zenith; the new-come folk inquire the way and Virgil answers that he and his companion are strangers like themselves, whereon the shades observe that Dante breathes and is still in the first life, and in their eagerness almost forget the cleansing for which they have come to the mount. One especially, the musician Casella, presses forward with a look of such affection that the poet opens his arms to embrace him, but he only clasps an empty shade. Dante must now explain the mystery of his own presence in that place while still in the flesh, and Casella in his turn must explain the delay of many months between his death and his admission into the boat of the redeemed that gathers its happy charge at the mouth of Tiber. Dante's heart and senses are still aching from the anguish of Hell; and the loveliness of earth, sea, and sky has re-awakened his perception of the healing power of beauty. So a great longing comes over him once more to hear the sweet singer's voice that*

*has so often soothed him and banished all his cares. Does that power of song which on earth seems akin to the spirit world, survive the great change? Casella's answer is to sing, in tones the sweetness whereof can never die, a song that Dante himself had written to the praise of Wisdom; whereon Virgil and all the other souls gather eagerly around, till rebuked for this premature indulgence and repose by the stem Cato, who bids them to press forward the cleansing work of the mountain.*

*Whereon they scud along the plain like startled doves.*

Now did the sun on that horizon rise  
 'Neath whose meridian circle's loftiest sway,  
 Jerusalem, the holy city, lies;  
 And night, who circles opposite to day, 4  
 From Ganges bore the scales, which when her might  
 Prevailleth, from her hand must fall away;  
 So fair Aurora's cheeks of red and white 7  
 There where I was, were changing speedily,  
 Through too great age o'erspread with orange light.  
 As yet we stayed beside the open sea; 10  
 As men who think upon their path we were,  
 Whose bodies tarry, though their hearts go free.  
 And, lo, as when the morning draweth near, 13  
 Down in the west above the level main  
 Through the thick mists. Mars shineth red and clear;  
 There then appeared (so may I see't again!) 16  
 A light that crossed the sea at such swift pace,  
 Beside its swiftness any flight were vain.  
 And when therefrom for a short moment's space 19  
 I drew mine eyes to question now my guide,  
 Larger it shone and with a brighter grace.  
 Then was there seen by me upon each side, 22  
 Some white, unknown thing, and beneath it, still

Another slowly growing I espied.  
 As yet my master spake no word until 25  
 As wings the first great whitenesses were clear,  
 Then, when at length he knew the pilot well,  
 "Bend! Bend thy knees!" he cried to me, "for here 28  
 Behold, God's angel! Fold thy hands intent!  
 Such ministers shall oft to thee appear.  
 "See how he scorns all human instrument, 31  
 So that for neither oar nor sail has care  
 Except his wings, between such far shores sent.  
 "See how toward Heaven he directs them there; 34  
 With white eternal plumes, that are not shed  
 As are our mortal locks, plying the air."  
 Then as toward us near and nearer sped 37  
 The bird divine, he seemed to glow yet more,  
 Until, seen close, mine eyes were vanquished  
 And beaten down; and thus he came to shore, 40  
 Within a ship so swift and light, it weighed  
 Nowise upon the waves it glided o'er.  
 With blessedness upon him clear displayed, 43  
 The heavenly pilot on the stern stood fast,  
 And more than a hundred souls within were stayed.  
 "When Israel out of Egypt's bondage passed," 46  
 They sang together in right joyful mood,  
 And all the psalm that follows, to the last.  
 The sign then made he of the blessed rood,\* 49  
 Whereat they flung them all upon the strand;  
 And he, swift as he came, his course renewed.  
 The new-come throng seemed strange unto the land. 52  
 Looking about them, as a man well may,

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\* The sign of the cross, still used by Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox.

When first he tries new things to understand.  
 On every side the sun shot forth the day, 55  
 The sun who with his arrows bright did chase  
 The Goat, from midmost of the heav'n away.  
 When each newcomer lifted up his face 58  
 Toward us, saying, "If perchance ye know,  
 Point us the way to reach the mountain's base."  
 Then Virgil answered them, "In sooth ye show, 61  
 Ye deem us full of knowledge of this land,  
 But we like you, herein as pilgrims go;  
 "But now, short space before your happy band, 64  
 We came by roads so rough and harsh to scale,  
 Child's play will seem the climbing now at hand."  
 The souls when that they knew, as could not fail, 67  
 That, by my breathing, yet alive was I,  
 Filled with the marvel, grew in wonder pale.  
 And like to people who for news draw nigh 70  
 Toward the olive-bearing messenger,  
 And crowd on one another heedlessly,  
 So on my face, there now directed were 73  
 The eyes of all those happy souls, until  
 They nigh forgot to haste and make them fair.  
 And one I saw whom eager love did fill, 76  
 Who longing to embrace me, forward pressed,  
 So that he moved me to the selfsame will.  
 O shadows, save to sight, how vain at best! 79  
 Three times behind him were my hands clasped tight,  
 Three times my hands came empty to my breast.  
 My face I deem showed wonder plain to sight; 82  
 Whereon the shadow smiled and drew away,  
 And I thrust forward to pursue its flight.  
 Gently besought my eagerness to stay; 85



## CANTO III

*When Dante has recovered from his confusion, and Virgil from the self-reproach caused by his momentary neglect of his charge, the poets look west toward the mountain. The sun shines behind them and throws Dante's shadow right before him. Now for the first time he misses Virgil's shadow, and thinks that he has lost his companionship; but Virgil reassures him. It is nine hours since the sun rose in the place where lies that part of him which once cast a shadow. The nature of the aerial bodies in the spirit world is unfathomable by human philosophy, which yearns in vain for solutions of the mysteries of faith. When they arrive at the foot of the mountain, the poets are at a loss how to scale it; but at their left Dante perceives a group of souls slowly moving toward them from the south. They go to meet them, and by thus reversing the usual direction which the souls take, following the sun, they excite the amazement of the elect spirits from whom they inquire their way. These sheep without a shepherd—for they are the souls of such as died in contumacy against the Church, and they must pay for their rebellion against the chief Shepherd by thirty times as long a space of shepherdless wandering—are yet more amazed than before when they see Dante's shadow and hear from Virgil that he is still in the first life. They make sign to them to reverse their course; and one of them, King Manfred, when Dante has failed to recognize him, tells the story of his death at the battle of Benevento; of the pitiless persecution even of his lifeless body by the Bishop of Cosenza and Pope Clement.*