



Summary of Canto: Inferno II

1-6	Dante, 'alone' with Virgil, prepares for the journey
7-9	invocation (Muses, 'lofty genius'); his worthy memory
10-36	Dante's uncertainty as to his qualifications
37-42	simile: a man unwilling what he had resolved
43-48	Virgil: you are a coward
49-74	Virgil tells of his encounter with Beatrice in Limbo
75-84	Virgil will lead Dante; why is Beatrice not fearful?
85-93	Beatrice's response: the saved are proof against hell
94-114	a lady in heaven (Mary), Lucy, and Beatrice all help
115-120	tears of Beatrice induce Virgil to begin at once
121-126	Virgil chides Dante for his cowardice
127-130	simile: flowers raised and opened by sun
131-135	Dante's renewed vigor; debt to Beatrice and to Virgil
136-140	Dante has again embraced his first resolve
141-142	the two again set out

1 Day was departing and the darkened air  
 2 released the creatures of the earth  
 3 from their labor, and I, alone,  
 4 prepared to face the struggle --  
 5 of the way and of the pity of it --  
 6 which memory, unerring, shall retrace.  
 7 O Muses, O lofty genius, aid me now!  
 8 O memory, that set down what I saw,  
 9 here shall your worth be shown.  
 10 I began: 'Poet, you who guide me,  
 11 consider if my powers will suffice  
 12 before you trust me to this arduous passage.  
 13 'You tell of the father of Sylvius  
 14 that he, still subject to corruption, went  
 15 to the eternal world while in the flesh.  
 16 'But that the adversary of all evil showed  
 17 such favor to him, considering who and what he was,  
 18 and the high sequel that would spring from him,  
 19 'seems not unfitting to a man who understands.  
 20 For in the Empyrean he was chosen  
 21 to father holy Rome and her dominion,  
 22 'both of these established -- if we would speak  
 23 the truth -- to be the sacred precinct where  
 24 successors of great Peter have their throne.  
 25 'On this journey, for which you grant him glory,  
 26 he heard the words that prompted him  
 27 to victory and prepared the Papal mantle.  
 28 'Later, the Chosen Vessel went there  
 29 to bring back confirmation of our faith,  
 30 the first step in our journey to salvation.  
 31 'But why should I go there? who allows it?  
 32 I am not Aeneas, nor am I Paul.  
 33 Neither I nor any think me fit for this.

*Who is St. Peter? "...of great Peter"*

*With which two other travelers does Dante compare himself unfavorably?*

*Note: Paul was the New Testament Saint who recorded his images of hell.*

*Note: Aeneas was the character created by Virgil. He was a Trojan Prince and hero and in Virgil's epic, The Aeneid, he too travels into hell.*

34 'And so, if I commit myself to come,  
35 I fear it may be madness. You are wise,  
36 you understand what I cannot express.'  
37 And as one who unwills what he has willed,  
38 changing his intent on second thought  
39 so that he quite gives over what he has begun,  
40 such a man was I on that dark slope.  
41 With too much thinking I had undone  
42 the enterprise so quick in its inception.  
43 'If I have rightly understood your words,'  
44 replied the shade of that great soul,  
45 'your spirit is assailed by cowardice,  
46 'which many a time so weighs upon a man  
47 it turns him back from noble enterprise,  
48 the way a beast shies from a shadow.  
49 'To free you from this fear  
50 I'll tell you why I came and what I heard  
51 when first I felt compassion for you.  
52 'I was among the ones who are suspended  
53 when a lady called me, so blessed and so fair  
54 that I implored her to command me.  
55 'Her eyes shone brighter than the stars.  
56 Gentle and clear, the words she spoke to me --  
57 an angel's voice was in her speech:  
58 "'O courteous Mantuan spirit,  
59 whose fame continues in the world  
60 and shall continue while the world endures,  
61 "my friend, who is no friend of Fortune,  
62 is so hindered on his way upon the desert slope  
63 that, in his terror, he has turned back,  
64 "'and, from what I hear of him in Heaven,  
65 I fear he has gone so far astray  
66 that I arose too late to help him.  
67 "'Set out, and with your polished words  
68 and whatever else is needed for his safety,  
69 go to his aid, that I may be consoled.  
70 "'I who bid you go am Beatrice.  
71 I come from where I most desire to return.  
72 The love that moved me makes me speak.  
73 "'And when I am before my Lord  
74 often will I offer praise of you to Him."  
75 Then she fell silent. And I began:  
76 "'O lady of such virtue that by it alone  
77 the human race surpasses all that lies  
78 within the smallest compass of the heavens,  
79 "'so pleased am I at your command that my consent,  
80 were it already given, would be given late.  
81 You have but to make your desire known.  
82 "'But tell me why you do not hesitate  
83 to descend into the center of the earth  
84 from the unbounded space you long for."  
85 "'Since you are so eager to know more,"  
86 she answered, "I shall be brief in telling you  
87 why I am not afraid to enter here.  
88 "'We should fear those things alone  
89 that have the power to harm.

*What is Virgil's impression of Dante's  
courage?*

*Why did Virgil decide to try to rescue Dante  
from his wanderings?*

*Who was the heavenly woman who was  
concerned about Dante?*

90 Nothing else is frightening.  
91 "I am made such by God's grace  
92 that your affliction does not touch,  
93 nor can these fires assail me.  
94 "There is a gracious lady in Heaven so moved  
95 by pity at his peril, she breaks stern judgment  
96 there above and lets me send you to him.  
97 "She summoned Lucy and made this request:  
98 «Your faithful one is now in need of you  
99 and I commend him to your care.»  
100 "Lucy, the enemy of every cruelty,  
101 arose and came to where I sat  
102 at venerable Rachel's side,  
103 "and said: «Beatrice, true praise of God,  
104 why do you not help the one who loved you so  
105 that for your sake he left the vulgar herd?  
106 "«Do you not hear the anguish in his tears?  
107 Do you not see the death besetting him  
108 on the swollen river where the sea cannot prevail?»  
109 "Never were men on earth so swift to seek  
110 their good or to escape their harm as I,  
111 after these words were spoken,  
112 "to descend here from my blessed seat,  
113 trusting to the noble speech that honors you  
114 and those who have paid it heed."  
115 'After she had said these things to me,  
116 she turned away her eyes, now bright with tears,  
117 making me more eager to set out.  
118 'And so I came to you just as she wished.  
119 I saved you from the beast denying you  
120 the short way to the mountain of delight.  
121 'What then? Why, why do you delay?  
122 Why do you let such cowardice rule your heart?  
123 Why are you not more spirited and sure,  
124 'when three such blessed ladies  
125 care for you in Heaven's court  
126 and my words promise so much good?'  
127 As little flowers, bent and closed  
128 with chill of night, when the sun  
129 lights them, stand all open on their stems,  
130 such, in my failing strength, did I become.  
131 And so much courage poured into my heart  
132 that I began, as one made resolute:  
133 'O how compassionate was she to help me,  
134 how courteous were you, so ready to obey  
135 the truthful words she spoke to you!  
136 'Your words have made my heart  
137 so eager for the journey  
138 that I've returned to my first intent.  
139 'Set out then, for one will prompts us both.  
140 You are my leader, you my lord and master,'  
141 I said to him, and when he moved ahead  
142 I entered on the deep and savage way.

*Who opposes cruelty?*

*What is Virgil's impression of Dante's courage?*

*What happens to Dante's courage after Virgil talks to him?*

*How does Virgil's courage compare to Dante's?*