



Summary of Canto: Inferno I

1-9	Dante, having lost his way, in a dark wood
10-21	hint of dawn: the sun on a mountaintop
22-27	simile: survivor of shipwreck looking back at sea
28-36	journey resumed; ascending the slope; a leopard
37-43	dawn and reassurance
44-54	a lion renews his fear; a she-wolf drives him back
55-60	simile: merchant (or gambler?) losing everything
61-66	apparition (of Virgil) and Dante's first words
67-75	Virgil identifies himself
76-78	his pointed question to Dante
79-90	Dante's recognition, praise of Virgil; plea for aid
91-100	Virgil's warning: power of the she-wolf
101-111	Virgil's prophecy of the hound that will defeat her
112-120	Virgil will guide Dante through two realms to a third
121-129	Virgil: a second guide will take him to those in bliss, since he is not allowed into that realm
130-135	Dante agrees to be led through the first two realms
136	the two set out

1 Midway in the journey of our life
 2 I came to myself in a dark wood,
 3 for the straight way was lost.
 4 Ah, how hard it is to tell
 5 the nature of that wood, savage, dense and harsh --
 6 the very thought of it renews my fear!
 7 It is so bitter death is hardly more so.
 8 But to set forth the good I found
 9 I will recount the other things I saw.
 10 How I came there I cannot really tell,
 11 I was so full of sleep
 12 when I forsook the one true way.
 13 But when I reached the foot of a hill,
 14 there where the valley ended
 15 that had pierced my heart with fear,
 16 looking up, I saw its shoulders
 17 arrayed in the first light of the planet
 18 that leads men straight, no matter what their road.
 19 Then the fear that had endured
 20 in the lake of my heart, all the night
 21 I spent in such distress, was calmed.
 22 And as one who, with laboring breath,
 23 has escaped from the deep to the shore
 24 turns and looks back at the perilous waters,
 25 so my mind, still in flight,
 26 turned back to look once more upon the pass
 27 no mortal being ever left alive.
 28 After I rested my wearied flesh a while,
 29 I took my way again along the desert slope,
 30 my firm foot always lower than the other.

Describe the spiritual state and time of life that the narrator is in when the canto begins. To help do this, where is he -- how do you interpret the natural setting in the first 30 or so lines? The "dark wood," the "hill," and the path, the rays of light? Why did Dante not know how he got into the woods?

What helped Dante to feel hope?

31 But now, near the beginning of the steep,
32 a leopard light and swift
33 and covered with a spotted pelt
34 refused to back away from me
35 but so impeded, barred the way,
36 that many times I turned to go back down.
37 It was the hour of morning,
38 when the sun mounts with those stars
39 that shone with it when God's own love
40 first set in motion those fair things,
41 so that, despite that beast with gaudy fur,
42 I still could hope for good, encouraged
43 by the hour of the day and the sweet season,
44 only to be struck by fear
45 when I beheld a lion in my way.
46 He seemed about to pounce --
47 his head held high and furious with hunger --
48 so that the air appeared to tremble at him.
49 And then a she-wolf who, all hide and bones,
50 seemed charged with all the appetites
51 that have made many live in wretchedness
52 so weighed my spirits down with terror,
53 which welled up at the sight of her,
54 that I lost hope of making the ascent.
55 And like one who rejoices in his gains
56 but when the time comes and he loses,
57 turns all his thought to sadness and lament,
58 such did the restless beast make me --
59 coming against me, step by step,
60 it drove me down to where the sun is silent.
61 While I was fleeing to a lower place,
62 before my eyes a figure showed,
63 faint, in the wide silence.
64 When I saw him in that vast desert,
65 'Have mercy on me, whatever you are,'
66 I cried, 'whether shade or living man!'
67 He answered: 'Not a man, though once I was.
68 My parents were from Lombardy --
69 Mantua was their homeland.
70 'I was born *sub Julio*, though late in his time,
71 and lived at Rome, under good Augustus
72 in an age of false and lying gods.
73 'I was a poet and I sang
74 the just son of Anchises come from Troy
75 after proud Ilium was put to flame.
76 'But you, why are you turning back to misery?
77 Why do you not climb the peak that gives delight,
78 origin and cause of every joy?'
79 'Are you then Virgil, the fountainhead
80 that pours so full a stream of speech?'
81 I answered him, my head bent low in shame.
82 'O glory and light of all other poets,
83 let my long study and great love avail
84 that made me delve so deep into your volume.
85 'You are my teacher and my author.
86 You are the one from whom alone I took

Name the three creatures that Dante finds in the woods.

Which creature was the most horrible and why?

Dante felt fear for many reasons. What were some of these reasons?

What was Virgil's occupation? When and where did he live?

Where did Virgil tell Dante that joy and its beginning could be found?

87 the noble style that has brought me honor.
88 'See the beast that forced me to turn back.
89 Save me from her, famous sage --
90 she makes my veins and pulses tremble.'
91 'It is another path that you must follow,'
92 he answered, when he saw me weeping,
93 'if you would flee this wild and savage place.
94 'For the beast that moves you to cry out
95 lets no man pass her way,
96 but so besets him that she slays him.
97 'Her nature is so vicious and malign
98 her greedy appetite is never sated --
99 after she feeds she is hungrier than ever.
100 'Many are the creatures that she mates with,
101 and there will yet be more, until the hound
102 shall come who'll make her die in pain.
103 'He shall not feed on lands or lucre
104 but on wisdom, love, and power.
105 Between felt and felt shall be his birth.
106 'He shall be the salvation of low-lying Italy,
107 for which maiden Camilla, Euryalus,
108 Turnus, and Nisus died of their wounds.
109 'He shall hunt the beast through every town
110 till he has sent her back to Hell
111 whence primal envy set her loose.
112 'Therefore, for your sake, I think it wise
113 you follow me: I will be your guide,
114 leading you, from here, through an eternal place
115 'where you shall hear despairing cries
116 and see those ancient souls in pain
117 as they bewail their second death.
118 'Then you will see the ones who are content
119 to burn because they hope to come,
120 whenever it may be, among the blessed.
121 'Should you desire to ascend to these,
122 you'll find a soul more fit to lead than I:
123 I'll leave you in her care when I depart.
124 'For the Emperor who has his seat on high
125 wills not, because I was a rebel to His law,
126 that I should make my way into His city.
127 'In every part He reigns and there He rules.
128 There is His city and His lofty seat.
129 Happy the one whom He elects to be there!'
130 And I answered: 'Poet, I entreat you
131 by the God you did not know,
132 so that I may escape this harm and worse,
133 'lead me to the realms you've just described
134 that I may see Saint Peter's gate
135 and those you tell me are so sorrowful.'
136 Then he set out and I came on behind him.

What helped Dante to feel renewed hope?

What did Virgil say they would see and hear on the journey?

Why did Virgil explain that some sufferers were happy in their pain?

Virgil said he would guide Dante on a journey but Virgil would have to turn back at one point. Where would Virgil stop with Dante?

Who guarded the gates of Heaven?