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Canto XVII: Disingenuity

Dante and Virgil, passing through a barren, slate-colored plain stretching to the horizon, spot a dark grey cloud in the distance, twisting and turning on itself. As they approach, a snake, fangs bared, leaps from the sand at Dante's throat; Virgil strikes it out of the air. As it hastily slithers back into the sand, Virgil recognizes the SERPENT who God struck down from Eden for Adam and Eve, his once shrewd mind numbed by an eternity in the void.

The dark cloud draws nearer and winds wailing with rage begin to batter our brave explorers. A great sandstorm whirls without respite: silver-gray sands tear into everything in their path, shredding skin beyond recognition and flattening the landscape. The silhouettes of souls, skin burned down to the last layer, writhe as they are battered and swept every which way. Virgil guides Dante through the storm, which clouds his vision and threatens to cut through every inch of exposed skin. The sand ahead of them collapses into a sinkhole without warning, pulling bodies under the stifling surface. These, Virgil explains, are the DISINGENUOUS: dishonest in life, their manipulation of others earns them an eternity in a storm over which they have no control. Dante flinches at an ear-splitting blast as a geyser of abrasive sand throws souls into the sweltering whirlwind, and watches them writhe in their descent. One NIGEL FARAGE lands at Dante's feet, interrupting his trek through the sandstorm.

Circle guardian: **The Serpent who guarded the Tree of Knowledge.**

Sinner: **Nigel Farage**

My guide and I trudged through a barren wasteland
Which sapped me of my strength and made me sweat,
Virgil's tireless bare feet scorched by the sand. 3

We'd trekked so long, if not for Virgil's guidance
And knowledge of our route through the circle
I would have lost myself in the great expanse. 6

Our silence broke when Virgil noticed a sign:
A hazy cloud on the horizon, turning
in on itself mercilessly, time and time 9

Again. Dragging onward, I mused silently
On how Virgil withstood the sweltering heat
When a viper, fangs bared, darted out at me 12

From below the sand. The scaly snake unwound
At my throat with murderous intent. Mere inches
From my face Virgil swatted him to the ground 15

With a half-chop squarely behind the beast's head.
Landing in a heap, the sharp but feeble snake
Slithered off to soothe an ego quite wounded. 18

"What pitch-black serpent could survive a desert
So lifeless?" I inquired. My guide replied,
"That monster's fate is far less than he deserved: 21

His words and fangs alike injected poison
In life, cursing our first progenitors with
Forbidden knowledge. Now under the hot sun 24

Which numbed his wits long ago he lies in wait
Vainly for any living prey." On we went.
An eerie wind groaned, lifting sharp, dark grey 27

Grains of sand up, nipping my sweaty, red face As we approached that cloud, a sandstorm so fierce It rended the landscape down to these flat plains	30
We traversed. Wrapping my robes 'round exposed skin, I ducked into the fray. Wild winds yowled and tore Me down every which way. I braced and turned in	33
To Virgil's shadow. He remained tall despite The great torment; near him the storm subsided So I could recover a few metres' sight.	36
Silhouettes of obscured figures half buried In the ground wailed without respite, their bare limbs Swept back and forth by thick sheets of sand carried	39
On the wind like torrential rain. "Good Master?" I pleaded, "Which poor souls lie here in the thick Of this storm, all granite and alabaster?"	42
He explained: "Before the bell rang out for these Sinners, they feigned ignorance and goodwill with Each breath. In life, they earned whatever they pleased	45
Through manipulation and crocodile tears. Now, powerless to bluff themselves out of their Hardship, their cries of agony fall on deaf ears.	48
The rough sand strips their skin to the last layer; Belowground sand creeps into every crevice, Its blistering heat melting their nails and hair	51
Onto their bodies. They remain there captured In the ground, powerless to escape their plight 'Til the ground spews them into this cursed rapture."	54
No sooner had the storm swept these advice Off, than the ground turned to quicksand and drew in All my guide and I could see and more, drawn like	57

Sugar cubes into tea. A sinkhole swallowed The mass of souls like we might tea or coffee – Without a second thought as it fell below	60
The throat into an abyss. Bodies plunged down, Their screams trailing behind them as they went. Then Silence. Even the raging wind made no sound	63
For a blink, the sand floating in its absence. I'd scarcely opened my mouth to ask Virgil What happened when a great crack broke the silence,	66
Throwing sand and mangled bodies out with such Force I lost my footing. Metallic shards cut My raw palms anew. I looked up: a corpse rushed	69
At me, the fleshy meteor threatening to Knock my weak knees out and bury me below The scorched earth. Landing in a heap, burnt and bruised	72
At my feet, the sinner wailed loudly. His skin Had long since been stripped from him but his nasal, Whinging voice reminded me of him within	75
Moments. "Nigel", I spoke, "you putrid, rotting harpy Of Hades, worm of worms, toady almighty, I gaze on you without a mote of pity."	78
He swiftly replied, "Blathering trespasser, Had my limbs not failed me in my eternal Punishment, I would soon eject you and your	81
unwelcome holy ward alike from this land Upon which you trespass." I shot back: "shame that Your foul mouth wasn't blasted by sand	84
Like the rest of your pitiful frame, liar." "Steady", warned Virgil, "you must not succumb to your wrath in Satan's realm, else the hellfire	87

Awaits you. But which man could strike such anger Into a heart honest as yours? Your face glows Hotter than the fire pits still deep under	90
Our feet." Fuming, I explained myself. "Seldom Has a wolf in sheep's clothing spat vitriol As bitter and dishonest as his; kingdoms	93
Drank his hatred like warm beer on Sunday night, A mass of imagined misdeeds he thought up To further a sick agenda at the plight	96
Of those he claimed to serve. Yet when his motives Were questioned or lies exposed, he whipped up some New outrage to amnesiac audiences,	99
Or worse, disappeared outright. No Ghibelline, Guelph or other snake spat forth a venom so vile Upon a populace quite so coarsely keen	102
To swallow it." Once I'd let my vindictive Complaints out, the half-corpse, prone in the sand, had Ceased to respond, new dunes collecting on his	105
Limp body, flooding his mouth and nose up. "Shall we Move on? Mid-tirade your robes' seams already Began to unravel; even my holy	108
Form grows weary." Aware once more, I followed Ahead, trailing my guide. My voice and body Weak, I braced myself 'gainst the storm and sorrow	111
That followed my outburst. Exhausted, the ground sagged Underfoot like my body, heaving under My own weight. A sinkhole. Virgil fell; I lagged	114
Behind him. The sand pulled me into a dark hole, And I lost my footing as the cruel wind died. No light followed; the void had swallowed me whole.	117

The storm, the fall, and the fatigue
Clouded my mind until it escaped me.
My body plummeted down, limp and asleep.

120