

Belmont University

Belmont Digital Repository

Honors Theses

Belmont Honors Program

Spring 4-20-2020

LIMBOLAND: A one-act play about Death, for kids

Megan Huggins

meganhuggins20@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.belmont.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [Acting Commons](#), [Dramatic Literature, Criticism and Theory Commons](#), [Other Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#), [Performance Studies Commons](#), and the [Playwriting Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Huggins, Megan, "LIMBOLAND: A one-act play about Death, for kids" (2020). *Honors Theses*. 8.
https://repository.belmont.edu/honors_theses/8

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Belmont Honors Program at Belmont Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Belmont Digital Repository. For more information, please contact repository@belmont.edu.

LIMBOLAND
A one-act play about Death
For kids

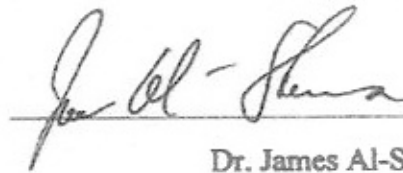
Megan Huggins

A Senior Honors Thesis project submitted to the Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Bachelor of Fine Arts

Belmont University Honors Program

May 2, 2020

 Date April 13, 2020
Dr. James Al-Shamma

 Date 4/4/2020
Shawn Knight

 Date 4/15/2020
Jessica Mueller

Accepted for the Honors Council and Honors Program:

Bonnie Smith Whitehouse Date 4/20/2020

Dr. Bonnie Smith Whitehouse, Director
by Megan Huggins

The Honors Program

LIMBOLAND

A one-act play about Death
for kids

Megan Huggins

Cast of Characters

DANTE:	At 6 years old, DANTE is curious and confused about anything outside of his world. Everything is a game to him.
BEATRICE:	DANTE's 11-year-old sister, who likes to play and likes to learn.
VIRGIL:	The rebel, slipping under the system, probably 12 years old, who knows his world but doesn't understand it yet.
SHADOWS:	People in Limbo, stuck in between.
MONSTERS:	Not what they seem but equally as scary.
BARTENDER 1:	Just doing their job.
BARTENDER 2:	Still doing the job, with more perks.
BEDS:	Stuck in their place and strapped down.
PATRONS:	Selling the last of their lives to try to find them again.
OUR LADY OF SPRING:	The queen of the bar.

Setting

The afterlife

Notes: There are many scenes and settings in this play. As such, a minimalistic set allows the most flexibility. I have included what each location would look like, but please suggest the idea of each. The most important thing to remember is to keep the play flowing. Feel free to get creative. DANTE is six, and this world is observed through his filter.

Casting is flexible. Any characters beyond BEATRICE, DANTE, and VIRGIL may be doubled or tripled. Feel free to explore the ensemble scenes with creativity. Perhaps not all the people are represented by people, but by puppets or projections. This story is told through a child's eyes. Allow what DANTE might see and interpret at six years old to inform artistic decisions.

Nighttime

Setting: A bedroom.

At rise: DANTE and BEATRICE play in the room. It is past their bedtime.

DANTE

I want to play, I'm too awake to try to sleep.

BEATRICE

I know, I am, too. But we've got to be quiet if we're going to play. We could read a book, or tell ghost stories.

DANTE

OR... we could play tag...

BEATRICE

That'll be too loud, silly.

(DANTE starts inching towards her, arms outstretched.)

DANTE

I'm gonna tag you.

(DANTE chants as he sneaks closer.)

BEATRICE

Don't, Dante, we'll get in trouble.

(Even as she says it, she starts to back away.)

DANTE

I'm gonna catch you, I'm gonna catch you!

BEATRICE

Shhhh! Slow down! They'll stop us if we're too loud.

DANTE

I'm not scared of anything, I'm gonna tag you!

BEATRICE

I mean it! We'll get in trouble if we wake them up.

DANTE

If you run too slow so that your feet aren't loud...

BEATRICE

Dante...

DANTE

I guess I'll CATCH YOU!

(BEATRICE squeals and jumps on a bed across the room.)

BEATRICE

You will NOT!

(DANTE continues to chase BEATRICE. She is older and a little bigger, and much faster.)

You will never, NEVER catch me!

(BEATRICE puts distance between them. DANTE begins to slow down, fall behind.)

DANTE

No, no, I'll catch you, I will.

(BEATRICE is moving too fast now. She flies out the bedroom door, laughing.)

Wait!

(BEATRICE screams. Something falls down the stairs, thuds and cracks.)

Bea, wait!

Down the Stairs

Setting: A stairwell.

At rise: DANTE runs to the top of the stairs, hands on the banister. He's laughing.

DANTE

Bea, wait, I have to catch you! I will, I will!

(He looks down.)

I won't fall for it, you know. Pretending to be asleep.

(He starts down the stairs, a little timid at first. BEATRICE seems very still.)

What are you doing, silly?

(He creeps down the stairs and reaches the floor. The ground is a little wet, like a puddle of jam on the floor.)

Bea?

(He reaches to touch her...and she jumps up, grinning.)

BEATRICE

You'll never catch me!

(She runs into the next room, laughing. DANTE tries to follow, but trips. He stands back up and runs into the next room. He turns the corner, and BEATRICE is standing in the middle. She isn't laughing anymore.)

DANTE

Bea, are we still playing?

(She doesn't hear him. She walks over to the door in the corner and walks out into the garden. She doesn't look back.)

Where are you going, Bea? It's nighttime. It's too cold and wet. Come back!

(DANTE rushes out the door to follow her.)

In the Garden

Setting: The garden.

At rise: DANTE climbs out of the door. BEATRICE is already halfway across the garden, headed towards the set of swings and treehouse where they play together during the day. She's moving a little like she is asleep. She stops. DANTE hears her talking. He decides to follow, but to be sneaky. Maybe she made a secret meeting and forgot to tell him.

BEATRICE

...don't want to go, I don't think. This doesn't quite make sense.

(DANTE hears a soft murmuring that BEATRICE seems to be listening to but can't catch the words. He moves closer.)

I can't just leave! Dante needs me—

DANTE

You can't take her!

(DANTE bursts from wherever he was hiding and runs toward BEATRICE. She turns to him.)

BEATRICE

Wait, Dante—

(DANTE races across the lawn. As he gets closer, something grabs his ankle and yanks him. He trips and falls.)

(As DANTE falls, something puts BEATRICE onto the swing. She starts swinging higher and higher.)

DANTE

Let me go, let me go!

(He rolls over to fight off the creature at his ankle. Nothing is there.)

BEATRICE

Dante, help—

(BEATRICE jumps off the swing, DANTE scrambles to his feet to see where she has landed—she's gone.)

DANTE

Bea, where are you?

(DANTE approaches the swing she was just on, still swaying.)

Bea, I'll-I'll find you...

(He clutches the swing ropes and pulls himself into the seat.)

I've never jumped before, but maybe if I do, I'll find her...

(Determined, DANTE starts swinging. He pumps faster, swinging higher and higher.)

Gotta jump, gotta jump. Okay, three, two—

(DANTE jumps off the swing. He does not land in the grass.)

The Tunnel

Setting: A dark tunnel.

At rise: DANTE lands. Rather hard, it was a big jump off the swing. He sprawls on the ground.

DANTE

Bea?

(He looks around, and at first doesn't see anything. As he stares into the gloom, he starts to notice shapes moving, shadows of people, big and small. He sees a friendly face.)

Excuse me, have you seen my sister? I can't find her anywhere.

SHADOW 1

Get away from me!

DANTE

Her name is Beatrice, I think she's looking for me too?

SHADOW 1

I said, leave me alone!

SHADOW 2

This way, dear.

(SHADOW 2 has the vague features of an older woman. She ushers DANTE out of the way.)

DANTE

Hi, I'm Dante. Who are you?

SHADOW 2

I—think you must be lost.

DANTE

This isn't my backyard so... Yes, I think I *am* lost.

SHADOW 2

Let's see, maybe we can...

(As she speaks, DANTE'S eyes drift. Suddenly he jumps to his feet.)

DANTE

Beatrice!

(Is it her? Yes... Yes! Shining bright in the gloom around him, DANTE runs to catch BEATRICE, a beacon in the tunnel.)

MONSTER 1

Hey! You're not supposed to be here!

(A huge MONSTER growls at DANTE and begins to pursue him.
DANTE runs faster.)

MONSTER 2

Intruder! Catch him!

BEATRICE

Dante?

(BEATRICE looks at him across the tunnel, still so far away. She stands near a large gate that blocks the whole tunnel, about to go through.)

DANTE

Bea, I'm coming!

MONSTERS 1 and 2

Get him, catch him, STOP HIM!

(One of the MONSTERS grabs DANTE. DANTE yells in panic and loses sight of BEATRICE.)

BEATRICE

Dante, run!

(DANTE fights the MONSTER as best he can. He lands a smart kick and scrambles away. BEATRICE is pushed through the gate.)

DANTE

Bea, wait for—

(DANTE approaches gate, and in a panic to avoid the MONSTERS, ducks in and runs through. The MONSTERS shout behind him but are stuck in the line.)

Circle One: Welcome to Limbo (Denial)

Setting: A dim hall with a low ceiling. There's a bar in one corner, and all the shadows wander around. Waiting.

At rise: DANTE begins searching for BEATRICE.

DANTE

Bea?

(A new, taller *something* tackles DANTE to the ground.)

Help, h—

VIRGIL

Shhh!

(The something is VIRGIL, who covers DANTE'S mouth with a hand.)

DANTE (mumbling.)

Gerroff meh lemme goo—

VIRGIL

Be quiet and listen! Look, look! I won't hurt you I promise. I'm not like those guards chasing you. I saw you sneak through and I can help you. You're not supposed to be here, and I can help you, but not if you keep drawing attention to yourself, okay?

(DANTE nods his head slowly, and VIRGIL removes his hand with caution.)

That was brave of you to sneak through like that. Now, I don't normally help anyone, but anyone who fights against those goons is someone I want to be around. Where are you trying to go, anyway?

DANTE

Bea and I were just playing, but she kept telling me to slow down and be quiet, but I didn't want to, and then she went outside, and I followed her on the swing, and now I'm here, but I don't know where here is. I want to go home, and I want Bea, Beatrice, to go with me.

VIRGIL

Did she go through the gate?

DANTE

I think so.

VIRGIL

Then she can't leave.

DANTE

She *has* to. She belongs at home, with me.

VIRGIL

We need to get moving, they're still looking for you. We can hide in here, that's what I do.

DANTE

Take me to Bea so I can take her home.

VIRGIL

I don't have time to explain it now but let me find us somewhere safe and I'll tell you later. Or else the guards—the *monsters*—will come find us. Do you want that?

DANTE

No.

VIRGIL

Then let's go.

DANTE

Let's...go.

VIRGIL

Finally. Come on.

(VIRGIL pulls DANTE to his feet. They walk quickly to the edge of the cavern. The edges have piles of old boxes and bins. Trash. VIRGIL weaves through and tucks into a small collection of boxes, arranged into a small room.)

DANTE

Woah.

VIRGIL

You get used to it.

DANTE

Is this where you live?

VIRGIL

I guess so, yeah. Mostly I just spend my time wandering around. Usually, they don't notice me, but when they do, I come and hide in here.

DANTE

Where are we?

VIRGIL

I told you, this is my hiding spot.

DANTE

No, what is... here? That big room.

VIRGIL

Everyone comes here. Sometimes people leave from here, and new people come in all the time. Some people call it “purgatory”, but most just call it “limbo.”

DANTE

“Limbo?”

VIRGIL

It’s a weird place, but that’s okay.

DANTE

How long have you been here?

VIRGIL

A long time.

(Beat.)

DANTE

What’s your name?

VIRGIL

Oh. I’m Virgil.

DANTE

I’m Dante. Thanks for showing me your finding spot. But I have to find Bea now.

VIRGIL

You mentioned.

DANTE

She’s my sister, and I’ve got to find her, because she—she—

VIRGIL

They probably separated you for a reason. Wait. What’s “sister”?

DANTE

It’s... we play together, and sometimes she teaches me things, and she loves me, always.

VIRGIL

She sounds annoying.

DANTE

She is not!

VIRGIL
Voice. Down. Remember?

DANTE
I need to find her. We've gotta go home.

VIRGIL
This is home now, and if they took her somewhere else, there's a reason. You won't find her.

DANTE
Yes, I will!
(He stands and crawls out of the boxes. He walks across the hall.)
Maybe I can find a grown-up who will help me.
(VIRGIL follows behind him, a little more sneaky than DANTE.)

VIRGIL
You have to wait for me.

DANTE
Not if you won't help me.
(VIRGIL stops DANTE.)

VIRGIL
I'll help you, okay? I don't think we'll find her, but I'll help you look.

DANTE
Why?

VIRGIL
Because you're sneaky like me. And sneaking around is more fun with other people. But if I help you, you have to listen to me. Got it?

DANTE
I don't wanna listen.

VIRGIL
I'll show you how to stay away from the guards.
(DANTE looks over his shoulder.)

DANTE
You'll keep the monsters away?

VIRGIL
Yes.

DANTE

Okay. I'll listen.

(VIRGIL leads DANTE to a cluster of shadows to hide between. VIRGIL is much sneakier than DANTE, but DANTE does his best.)

(DANTE observes the gloom. The shadows are more distinct now, people of different ages wandering about. There's a heaviness, as if everyone is weighed down by every sorrow or shame they've ever carried.)

DANTE

It's boring.

VIRGIL

It's fine.

DANTE

They look sleepy.

VIRGIL

Nobody sleeps here.

DANTE

I'm going to look around.

VIRGIL

I *just* told you to listen to me.

DANTE

You're too slow. I think a grown-up will help me most.

(DANTE begins to walk away. VIRGIL tries to stop him. DANTE breaks into a run.)

VIRGIL (deadpan.)

Oh no. Don't go.

(VIRGIL shrugs.)

Oh well, I tried.

(VIRGIL looks over his shoulder at DANTE. He sighs and turns to follow DANTE.)

(DANTE, meanwhile, wanders the room. He gravitates to the bar and hops up on a stool.)

DANTE

Can I have something?

(BARTENDER 1 takes time reaching DANTE. He keeps putting glasses in front of other patrons, but nothing comes out of the pitchers when he goes to fill it. The patrons drink from the empty glasses, silent.)

BARTENDER 1

Look a little young to be up there.

DANTE

I'm just kind of hungry, is all.

BARTENDER 1

Don't have any food, kid. Try somewhere else.

DANTE

Then can I have some juice?

BARTENDER 1

Sure. Why not?

(BARTENDER 1 pours DANTE an empty glass and slowly slides it in front of DANTE.)

Anything else for you?

DANTE

I'm looking for my sister. We're lost.

BARTENDER 1

Can't help you there. We don't have any of those.

DANTE

Any of whats?

BARTENDER 1

Sisters.

DANTE

I don't understand.

BARTENDER 1

Or brothers or parents or friends. Nothing. They don't exist.

DANTE

That can't be right. Everybody has *somebody*. I know it.

BARTENDER 1

Nobody has anybody here. Don't need them.

DANTE

This is all wrong.

BARTENDER 1

Welcome to hell, I guess. Well, Limbo, really. But sometimes it feels more like hell.

DANTE

You look sad.

BARTENDER 1

Some people, young ones, talk about “being alive,” which just isn’t true anymore. We don’t do that either. Not here.

DANTE

Have you seen Bea?

BARTENDER 1

Don’t need names, either.

DANTE

I’m just looking for—

BARTENDER 1 (yelling.)

We can’t. HELP YOU. STOP ASKING QUESTIONS.

(DANTE jumps off his stool, scared. He runs away. Find BEATRICE.)

(DANTE sees a playset.)

DANTE

No swings, but maybe Bea went over there.

(A group of SHADOW KIDS play. They do not do much, dangle from the monkey bars, or slide down the slide over and over again. They do not laugh. DANTE tries to join.)

Hi, I’m Dante! Can I play, too?

VIRGIL

That’s enough.

(DANTE starts at VIRGIL’s voice.)

DANTE

Stop following me!

VIRGIL

We don’t have time for games. And anyway, they’re not playing anything fun.

DANTE

No. I want to play.

(in a loud whisper, to VIRGIL.)

Maybe they'll tell me where Bea is. Maybe they've seen her.

(to the group.)

So, what game are we playing?

SHADOW CHILD 2

We...we're playing... I don't remember.

(She starts to cry.)

I don't remember. I don't remember!

DANTE

That's okay, that's okay. Let's... let's play tag!

SHADOW KIDS

Tag? What's tag?

DANTE

You know, you have one person be "it" and try to chase everybody, and if you get tagged you become "it" and have to tag people.

(SHADOW KIDS agree. There are five or six. The one crying stops.

DANTE points to her.)

You go first.

SHADOW CHILD 2

Okay.

(She begins to run slowly, and the kids begin to understand the game.

Soon they are laughing together as they go. VIRGIL joins in. The kids yell and shout as they play. VIRGIL is tagged. He tags DANTE. DANTE chases VIRGIL.)

DANTE

I'll get you for that!

VIRGIL

You'll never catch me, I'm too fast for everyone!

DANTE

I guess, now, I'll HAVE to catch you!

VIRGIL

You'll never take me alive!

DANTE

You sound just like—

(DANTE sees BEATRICE running away from the group and takes off after her.)

Bea, wait, I'm going to get you!

(She screams and disappears. DANTE stops. Maybe he trips, maybe he sits. VIRGIL comes to him.)

VIRGIL

You are terrible at tag.

DANTE

I saw her. I saw Bea. But I don't see her anymore.

VIRGIL

Dante, you're crying.

DANTE

I am? No, I'm not!

(DANTE scrubs away the tears, confused now more than ever.)

I just need to find Bea and go home.

(Suddenly, an alarm blares. VIRGIL grabs DANTE.)

VIRGIL

We need to go.

(The MONSTERS descend on the game of tag, break up the group.)

They noticed. That's not good. It's time to move on.

DANTE (scared.)

Where can we go? Will they hurt us?

VIRGIL

Not if you're as fast as me.

(VIRGIL tries to lead DANTE towards the boxes, but a MONSTER gets in the way.

This way!

(VIRGIL grabs DANTE's hand. They weave through shadow people and come to a small door. VIRGIL opens it.

In you go.

(They disappear through the door.)

The Hallway

Setting: A narrow hallway.

At rise: VIRGIL guides DANTE through the hallway. It is dark and hard to see where they are going.

Everything here is so scary.

DANTE

Don't be a baby, it's not that bad.

VIRGIL

We were just playing tag.

DANTE

You get used to it. They don't care about anyone down here, but you have to follow the rules.

VIRGIL

But you don't follow the rules at all.

DANTE

Because I'm smarter than everyone else.

VIRGIL

Do you think Beatrice came this way?

DANTE

Nobody comes this way, it's a shortcut. She would have gone through the big hallway at the end of the last room.

VIRGIL

Will we find her soon?

DANTE

We'll stay here until things calm down and then go back.

VIRGIL

No.

DANTE

What do you mean?

VIRGIL

You said you would help me find Bea.

DANTE

VIRGIL

I said I would *help* you. I didn't say anything about her.

DANTE

That's not fair!

VIRGIL

Look, I'm trying to keep us out of trouble—

DANTE

She tried to keep me out of trouble, and I didn't listen. It's...she wouldn't have left if...Help me.

VIRGIL

They are not friendly if they catch you—

DANTE

Please.

(VIRGIL stares at DANTE. He has not heard “please” in a long time.)

VIRGIL

I can take you part of the way. I don't know what's in all of the rooms, but I will show you what I know. We can look for her in each room.

(DANTE starts to smile.)

But you *have* to listen to me, got it?

DANTE

Okay. I promise.

VIRGIL

Don't make promises we both know you won't keep.

DANTE

But I always keep my promises—

VIRGIL

Nevermind. Come on. They're not very nice in the next room, so we'll need to go through quickly.

Circle Two, Part One: Concrete (Anger at Others)

Setting: A concrete room. When DANTE and VIRGIL enter, there is no one in the room. Everything is silent. DANTE laughs.

DANTE

I thought you said they wouldn't be nice. There isn't even anyone here!

VIRGIL

Usually this one is...louder. Maybe we got lucky.

DANTE

This will be easy.

(DANTE confidently starts to cross the middle of the room.)

VIRGIL

No, Dante, we need to go around the sides. That's the safest way.

(DANTE ignores him.)

Dante, listen to me!

DANTE

We will be fine. There's nobody here.

(VIRGIL moves to the side wall, refusing to join DANTE in the center.)

VIRGIL

Dante—

(A war cry in the distance. VIRGIL clings to the wall. DANTE freezes.)

DANTE

What was that?

VIRGIL

Get over here, NOW.

DANTE

What if it's Bea? What if she needs help?

VIRGIL

NO!

(DANTE, indecisive, stands in the middle. A rumble starts to grow, faster and faster, echoing around the chamber. More screaming mingles in. VIRGIL clings to the wall. DANTE looks to VIRGIL, panicked.)

(Massive doors open, one on either side of DANTE, and hordes of people spill out. They run at each other, screaming. DANTE screams too. He starts to run but doesn't know how to get out of the way. The people ram

into each other, fighting. They scream, pull hair, bite, punch, wrestle, and choke. No one has weapons, and no one seems to need them. They are vicious and crazed. No one looks human, and VIRGIL can no longer see DANTE in the crowd.)

(DANTE falls to the ground and begins trying to crawl through the mass of warriors. As people fall beside him, he recognizes ordinary people: not warriors. DANTE cries as he tries to crawl away, tries to find VIRGIL in the chaos.)

(VIRGIL still clings to the wall, eyes closed now. He cannot look.)

DANTE

Virgil! VIRGIL!

(VIRGIL cannot hear him.)

Beatrice, help me!!

(DANTE is drowned out by the noise of the war. DANTE takes a deep breath and screams as loud as he can.)

VIRGIL HELP ME!

(VIRGIL's eyes pop open. He begins to scan the swarm, searching for the source of that voice. Finally, finally, his eyes find DANTE. He takes a deep breath and charges into the fray, giving a small battle cry of his own.)

VIRGIL

Dante, I'm here! I'm coming for you!

(DANTE hears him and begins crawling towards the sound of his voice. Someone falls over him and grabs him, wrestling.)

DANTE

Let go of me!

WRESTLER

Have to—fight this! I will destroy you!

DANTE

I said, let go!

(DANTE tries to bite the WRESTLER but fails. He tries again and succeeds. The WRESTLER howls. VIRGIL arrives and pulls DANTE out of the WRESTLER's arms.)

VIRGIL

I think it's this way!

(VIRGIL and DANTE crawl through the crowd, staying close together. Finally, they reach the other side. They continue to crawl away, too scared to stand. They stop to rest.)

Are you okay?

I bit him. DANTE

Oh. VIRGIL

I didn't mean to, I just got so scared. DANTE

He deserved it for trying to fight you like that. You hadn't done anything to him. VIRGIL

I wasn't just scared though, I was... I was... DANTE

What? VIRGIL

Mad. Really mad, at all of them. Mad that they were fighting, mad that they were keeping me from finding Bea. DANTE

Wow. VIRGIL

What if they hurt Bea? DANTE

She wasn't there. VIRGIL
 (They sit in silence for a while. VIRGIL reaches over to put an awkward hand on DANTE's shoulder and bumps his knee.)

Ouch! DANTE

I barely touched you! VIRGIL
 (VIRGIL looks down. DANTE has scraped his knee. It's bleeding. DANTE starts crying again.)

It hurts, my knee hurts. DANTE

VIRGIL

You don't belong here.

DANTE

What?

VIRGIL

Nobody else does that. Bleeds, like that.

DANTE

It really hurts.

(VIRGIL sighs, annoyed, but rips a strip of cloth off his shirt to stop the bleeding. Then he stands up.)

VIRGIL

I shouldn't help you anymore. You aren't like me. I don't do that, bleed like you. You'll get me in trouble.

DANTE

I don't want to get anyone else in trouble.
(DANTE sniffles.)

But I'm scared to go alone.

VIRGIL

I was scared, too. I thought you were gone.

(VIRGIL makes a decision.)

We need to figure out how to get you back to where you belong. I don't know what they'll do if they find you, and I don't know how to get you back, but we can't go through the gate. We have to keep going. I know most of the way through.

DANTE

You were scared?

VIRGIL

Only a little. I didn't want to get my shoes dirty.
(DANTE is silent for a long time.)

DANTE

Are they all going to be like that?

VIRGIL

Like what?

DANTE

Scary and red-angry.

VIRGIL

Scary, maybe. But I'll get you through it, I guess.

(An alarm rings, and MONSTERS come out to wrangle the distant fighters
back through the doors. Everyone leaves; no bodies left.)

Let's move on. This is a long room, and the next shortcut isn't until the end.

DANTE

I thought you knew all the shortcuts.

VIRGIL

I *do*. There just aren't *that* many shortcuts.

(VIRGIL pulls DANTE to his feet. The two turn the corner into the next
room.)

Circle Two, Part Two: Table (Anger at Circumstances)

Setting: A long table. Along each wall are small alcoves. Some people stand in the alcoves, some sit at the table.

At rise: As VIRGIL and DANTE move closer, the noise grows. Everyone here is arguing, yelling across the table at one another. The people in the alcoves scream but nobody listens to them. DANTE looks to VIRGIL.

DANTE

Do we have to?

VIRGIL (grinning.)

Closest thing to a shortcut I have in this one.

(VIRGIL crawls under the table, and DANTE follows. Together they crawl again, under the noise of shouting. People scream about things that do not make sense. DANTE realizes most people are speaking incoherently. There is no food on the table.)

Almost there.

DANTE

What if Bea is here?

(DANTE has stopped moving under the table. VIRGIL looks back at him.)

VIRGIL

I really don't think she'd be here.

DANTE

I should check.

VIRGIL

You should not. You should follow me so we can get out of this place.

DANTE

Just one quick peak...

(He starts to wiggle out to investigate. VIRGIL grabs his heel to pull him back.)

VIRGIL

She's not here. I know where she is. I can take you to her, okay?

DANTE

Why didn't you say so before?

VIRGIL

We have to go through some hard things, and I didn't know if you'd be tough enough to make it through them.

DANTE

I *am* tough enough.

VIRGIL

Now I know. You wrestled. You are tough. But for me to take you to Beatrice, you have to follow me, and *actually* listen to me. Can you?

DANTE

If it gets me to Bea. Fine. I'll do it.

VIRGIL

This way.

(VIRGIL guides DANTE towards the end of the table, and just before they reach it, he crawls out between the chairs and cuts to the side of the room, to a small door. He stops DANTE before he opens the door.)

This is another shortcut.

DANTE

Why aren't we going through?

VIRGIL

Because I have a very important rule if we're going to go in.

DANTE

What is the rule?

VIRGIL

You can't stop walking, no matter what. You can't talk to anyone.

DANTE

Okay.

VIRGIL

They will ask for help, and you can't give it to them. You cannot stop to help them.

DANTE

And if—

VIRGIL

Bea is not in here, I *promise*.

(DANTE nods. VIRGIL opens the door.)

Circle Two, Part Three: Beds (Guilt)

Setting: A long room, with rows and rows of white hospital beds. Strapped into each bed is a person. And they are strapped in tightly.

At rise: VIRGIL pauses for a long moment before speaking.

VIRGIL

Time to move.

(DANTE follows VIRGIL, staying close. At first, none of the people in the beds notice them. Some of the people do not move at all. VIRGIL and DANTE move swiftly and quietly, two small kids in a scary hospital.)

DANTE (whispering.)

They don't seem as angry in here.

(VIRGIL puts a finger to his lips, shushing DANTE.)

BED 1

Help, there. Y-you, let me out of here.

DANTE

I can't, I'm—

VIRGIL

Keep moving.

BED 1

Please, you've gotta let me out of here. I have to get out of this bed, I have to get out of this life, I have to—

BED 2

Come over here, I'll do anything! Just make it all stop, just make it stop!!

DANTE

I'm sorry—

BED 2

If you let me out of here, I can do it myself, please, please!

BED 3

It's my fault, it is it is it is.

DANTE (to BED 2)

I can't, and you shouldn't, and—

BED 3

It's MY FAULT, I hurt her, so LET me FIX IT!

DANTE

NO!

(He freezes.)

It is *not* your fault!

(VIRGIL tugs on DANTE's arm.)

VIRGIL

We need to keep moving, now!

DANTE

It is not your fault. Please no.

BED 3

It is, and I hate myself for it! Hate!

DANTE

Hate! It is, it's my fault, it's my FAULT!

(The people in the beds start crying, screaming, struggling, wailing. They all have the same thing to say: "It's my fault." DANTE weeps, fists clenched.)

I hurt her! She got in trouble, and it's my fault, I couldn't listen, I couldn't slow down, I hurt her, it's my fault, it's my fault, it's my fault—

VIRGIL

Dante, listen—

DANTE

IT'S... MY... FAULT—

VIRGIL

No, it's not!

DANTE

Yes, it is!

VIRGIL

No. It's not your fault. It's not. You're just a kid, you didn't do this to her.

(An alarm starts. MONSTERS enter, but as they move closer, they look more and more like NURSES. VIRGIL pulls DANTE down to hide near a bed.)

They're scared, Dante, but this isn't your fault.

(NURSES begin shoving gags on the patients, tying their straps tighter.)

We need to move quickly, now, so they don't see us.

DANTE

I can't. My feet don't work anymore.

VIRGIL

I have an idea.

(He grabs one of DANTE's hands, takes a deep breath, and begins
singing.)

One day I climbed a tall tall tree
And fell back down and skinned my knee
Momma came out but didn't make a fuss
She watched me as I flailed like an octopus
I cried big tears
But she said, "Don't cry;
I will fix your knee and make you a pie."

I screamed at her, "I'll never climb again!
I ripped my pants and I'm bleeding everywhere!"
She smiled real sad and held my hand.
She picked me up and carried me inside,
And as she did Momma said,

"Don't be scared
We all fall sometimes
It's not your fault
It's not your fault
Don't you see I will help you in time
It's not your fault
I'm not mad at all.

Not about the pants
And not about the knee
I don't want you to feel pain
But can't always keep you free.
I'll clean your knee and fix it all up
And I'll hold you close til all the tears stop..."

(As VIRGIL sings, he guides DANTE through the shadows of the room.
His voice carries, and soon, before NURSES reach the beds, the people
have calmed again. Some cry, some close their eyes. The NURSES do not
cover those mouths. VIRGIL lets his voice drop to a quiet hum, as he pulls
DANTE through the next door.)

Hallway Part II

Setting: Another dim hallway.

At rise: VIRGIL guides DANTE and has him sit against the wall.

The song. DANTE

Did you like it? VIRGIL

Yes. Where did you learn it? DANTE

I don't know. I just know it. VIRGIL

Why did you sing it? DANTE

I just figured... songs help when things are scary or sad. That makes me feel better when I'm sad. VIRGIL

You get sad? DANTE

I used to. And when I did... I wanted a song.
(DANTE wipes his eyes.) VIRGIL

You're... not mad at me? I broke the rule. DANTE

No, I'm not mad. It's okay. That room scares me, too. VIRGIL

I'm glad Bea wasn't there. I'm excited to find her and get her back home. DANTE

Yeah. We'll find her soon. I'm sure. VIRGIL

Circle Three: The Club (Bargaining)

Setting: A restaurant with a dim red bar and smoky stage.

At rise: VIRGIL pulls DANTE into the room gently, staying to the edge. DANTE continues their conversation from the hallway.

What if we missed her? DANTE

We didn't. VIRGIL

How do you know? DANTE

I'm older. I know. VIRGIL

Do you know where she is? DANTE

Sure, yeah. Somewhere soon.
(VIRGIL is distracted, not reassuring.)

Where is Bea? DANTE

I told you. I know. We'll find her soon. VIRGIL

But where is she? DANTE

I DON'T KNOW.
(DANTE shrinks, scared.)

What does that mean? DANTE

I don't know where she is. I—you wouldn't keep moving unless I told you I knew, and we have to get you out of here. You don't belong here, and you need to be somewhere safe. VIRGIL

DANTE
You lied to me.

VIRGIL
No, I just, I just—

DANTE
I don't want you to help me anymore.

VIRGIL
You can't do this alone.

DANTE
I'm not. Bea is waiting for me. And I will find her. I know I will. I don't want you to help if you lie.

(Someone starts playing piano on the other side of the curtain. It sounds like jazz.)

FEMALE VOICE (singing.)
Why don't you come a little closer?

VIRGIL
Uh oh.

DANTE
Maybe that lady will help me. She won't lie to me. She sings songs.

VIRGIL
It's not what you think.

DANTE
Songs make you feel better when you're sad.
(DANTE parts a curtain and runs through.)

(VIRGIL follows DANTE through the curtain to see a full bar and lounge. Red velvet cushions. Smoke everywhere. People clink glasses. They crowd around the woman playing at the piano onstage. She has a glass and drinks from it constantly. She is deeply drunk. Deeply unhappy.)

DANTE
Now to find a real grown-up.
(He runs up to the bar and hops onto a stool. VIRGIL keeps his distance and wanders closer to the stage. The board announcing the act says, "Our Lady of Spring," although VIRGIL cannot read it the whole thing.)

Excuse me, friend?

What do you want?
BARTENDER 2

Have you seen my sister, Bea?
DANTE

A little young for the bar.
BARTENDER 2

Please tell me where she is.
DANTE

Only got drinks up here.
BARTENDER 2

But could you help me?
DANTE

It'll cost you.
BARTENDER 2

Cost me?
DANTE

A memory or a secret. Give something of your old life to recreate it.
BARTENDER 2

Like sharing?
DANTE

You can't get it back.
BARTENDER 2

No take-backs.
DANTE

A memory for some help.
BARTENDER 2

Bea wouldn't like it.
DANTE

She's not here, is she?
BARTENDER 2

DANTE

No...

BARTENDER 2

Give me a memory of her and I'll help you.

DANTE

If it'll help Bea.

(DANTE takes a deep breath.)

One time, we went to the river past the woods, and we swam all afternoon.

BARTENDER 2

Need more detail than that.

DANTE

Well, it was springtime...

BARTENDER 2

Paint me a picture.

DANTE

It was spring, and we snuck away from the house. We were supposed to do some reading, but the sun was out.

(BEATRICE appears, and the sun breaks in the bar. BARTENDER 2 and other PATRONS linger in the corners, but DANTE and BEATRICE in the garden are the central focus. His memory comes to life.)

BEATRICE

You *have* to focus on reading, Dante.

DANTE

But look at the sunshine. It's too pretty and shiny and bright!

BEATRICE

Then I need to focus, I actually like learning things.

DANTE

We could learn more outside...

BEATRICE

If you don't learn at least some of your letters and words, at least tell me what you remember of the constellations.

DANTE

Not the stars *again*.

BEATRICE

You had fun last time! Remember, the stories about Orion and his magical belt, Hercules, and his adventures. And the North Star! That always points the way back home.

DANTE

Boooringgg.

(Beat.)

But...why does the North Star do that?

BEATRICE (in victory.)

Because it never moves in the sky, based off its location on close to the Earth's axis—

(She realizes she is starting to lose DANTE.)

So you can always find it in the sky and use it to figure out your way home. You usually have to know a few other stars to help, but it's position in the sky over home will never change.

DANTE

Okay, too many words.

BEATRICE

Dante. If you don't try to learn something, they'll never let you out of the house again.

DANTE

You can't keep me locked up forever!

BEATRICE

I'm not keeping you, but you know one of the grownups will ground you.

DANTE

But I can't *focus* with the sunshine and everything else!

(BEATRICE sighs and smiles. She sits quietly while DANTE looks at her.)

BEATRICE

I know.

(She watches him as he rolls around in his chair, too restless to focus.)

Okay. Enough.

(DANTE shoots up to sitting.)

You *must* be quiet, but if you are, we can go down to the river.

DANTE

YES—

BEATRICE

Quietly.

DANTE

Sorry.

BEATRICE

Now, you MUST SIT AND DO YOUR READING. WE WILL BE READING HERE ALL AFTERNOON.

(As BEATRICE throws her voice across the room, she guides DANTE towards the door. DANTE fights to hide his giggles. They reach the door and the two sneak out. Once in the lawn, they cackle as they run through the garden. They pass the swing set and keep running. DANTE trips and rolls through the grass, then gets back up to run with BEATRICE.)

You'll NEVER catch me!

DANTE

Yes, I will!

BEATRICE

Almost there!

(As they reach the river, BEATRICE jumps in and splashes around.)

I did it, I won!

(DANTE finally arrives and jumps into the water. He and BEATRICE splash water back and forth. As they do, OUR LADY OF SPRING begins to sing a song about memories. The song is heavy with nostalgia, and there's both bitterness and sweetness in the words.)

OUR LADY OF SPRING (singing.)

Sunlight
Sparkling on water
In gutters on the street
And moonbeams
Filling the night air
We'd stumble home from the bar
And wander out in the morning
What I
Wouldn't give
To go back there...

(OUR LADY OF SPRING sings the above song as DANTE and BEATRICE enjoy the water. They play together through the end of her song, and as she ends, they collapse onto the bank, giggling.)

DANTE

You're the best sister ever.

BEATRICE

I love you too, Dante.

(OUR LADY OF SPRING starts her next song, a sad and sloppy song. This one is slow, messy, and overflowing with the bitterness and anger she feels.)

OUR LADY OF SPRING (singing.)

When I was a girl
I thought I'd always have fun
I'd never grow old and die

(BEATRICE disappears. The memory is gone. DANTE is suddenly back
in the bar, lying on the floor. BARTENDER 2 stands over him, grinning.)

DANTE

Bea?

BARTENDER 2

Thank you for that. Haven't had a story that good in ages.

OUR LADY OF SPRING (singing.)

Then I died young
And proved that girl wrong
And now I get to fight for a taste of that *life*

It ain't fair
But that's life, isn't it?
It ain't fair, none of it fair

(DANTE begins to sit up, confused. VIRGIL appears above DANTE.
OUR LADY OF SPRING continues the song under the dialogue.)

VIRGIL

What happened?

DANTE

I don't—

VIRGIL

Not you, *him*.

(VIRGIL steps up to BARTENDER 2, accusing.)

What did you do to my friend?

BARTENDER 2

Simple exchange.

(He laughs at DANTE.)

I haven't seen her. That's the answer.

DANTE

You said you'd tell me where she was!

BARTENDER 2

I said I'd tell you what I know. Which is this: I don't know where she is. Thanks for making *me* feel better.

VIRGIL

Go away! Get out of here!

(BARTENDER 2 returns to his bar. VIRGIL helps DANTE sit.)

What did he do to you?

DANTE

I don't want to talk to you.

VIRGIL

Did he make you drink something?

DANTE

Leave me alone!

VIRGIL

Let me help you.

DANTE

No!

(DANTE runs from VIRGIL into the crowd of people. He starts dancing with them. Flailing his arms as hard and wild as he can. DANTE is crying but trying to ignore it. OUR LADY OF SPRING laughs when she sees him and stops playing.)

OUR LADY OF SPRING

Dear child, what on earth are you doing here?

(The band keeps playing, but OUR LADY OF SPRING walks off stage and comes down to DANTE.)

DANTE

Dancing.

OUR LADY OF SPRING

Well, if you're going to dance, you cannot do it that way.

DANTE

Why not?

OUR LADY OF SPRING

You're using too much energy; you'll waste your life away.

DANTE

No, I won't.

OUR LADY OF SPRING

I guess you're right...we're all dead here, aren't we? That's the worst of it all, isn't it? We know we're dead and can't do anything to make it better.

DANTE

You don't look dead.

OUR LADY OF SPRING

No, I look much better, don't I?

DANTE

And you sing.

OUR LADY OF SPRING

Yes, I do. Would you like to hear more?

(DANTE nods. He takes one of her hands. He goes onstage and stands with OUR LADY OF SPRING as she sings.)

We're all just dead here
 We're all just trying
 But a drink don't get you drunk
 And a song don't get you happy
 And a dance don't mean a thing to me

We're all just dead here
 Just wasting away
 Wishing for the sunshine
 Or even the rain
 Anything but this soulless awful place
 But instead we drink ourselves to death
 Pretending we've still got a stake in that race

We're all just dead here
 We're all just trying
 But a drink don't get you drunk
 And a song don't get you happy
 And a dance don't mean a thing to me
 (OUR LADY OF SPRING giggles at DANTE, who cries quietly.)
 There's no need to cry.

DANTE

We're not all dead.

OUR LADY OF SPRING

That's the best lie we ever tell ourselves.

DANTE

I don't like lying.

OUR LADY OF SPRING

Lies help.

DANTE

No, they don't. And *I'm* not dead.

OUR LADY OF SPRING

It doesn't matter if I'm dead or not. I know that I don't want to be down here but can't find my way back up there.

DANTE

I need to find someone.

OUR LADY OF SPRING

You do, do you?

DANTE

My sister, Bea. She's...not dead.

OUR LADY OF SPRING

Oh. How marvelous. Tell me about her.

DANTE

I can't...remember.

OUR LADY OF SPRING

You can't?

DANTE

I told that man something about her. Bea and I, we went somewhere, and we were so happy, but I can't remember it anymore.

OUR LADY OF SPRING

That's okay. Tell me something else. Give as much detail as possible.

(She leans closer. Too close. DANTE starts to back away.)

DANTE

I...I don't think I want to. I don't think you care about Bea. Or me.

OUR LADY OF SPRING

Tell me about her. Stay with me and tell me everything.

DANTE

I can't stay here. I have to find her and leave.

(The music stops. OUR LADY OF SPRING freezes.)

OUR LADY OF SPRING

Nobody can leave from here.

DANTE

I don't want to stay.

OUR LADY OF SPRING

And you should listen to me.

DANTE

I don't want to tell you anything. I don't like you anymore.

OUR LADY OF SPRING

You're breaking the rules, and I don't like *that*.

(OUR LADY OF SPRING grabs DANTE by the arm.)

VIRGIL

Leave him alone!

(VIRGIL has been trying to get to the front of the stage through the crowd of people. He finally reaches them.)

OUR LADY OF SPRING

Oh, good, what kinds of memories do you have?

VIRGIL

Leave us alone!

(VIRGIL jumps onstage and pulls DANTE away from OUR LADY OF SPRING. She screams and tries to catch them, but they are too quick.)

OUR LADY OF SPRING

Follow them!

(VIRGIL leads DANTE backstage. They slip through a door and collapse against it.)

Hallway Part III

Setting: A hallway.

At rise: VIRGIL and DANTE. Together.

VIRGIL

They can't follow us through here.

DANTE

Good.

(They stand in silence. DANTE wipes the tears off his face.)

VIRGIL

I'm sorry I lied to you. I wanted you to listen to me, and I was scared. But I shouldn't have told you I knew where Beatrice was. I promise I won't lie to you again. I still want to help.

DANTE

Thanks for getting that lady to leave me alone.

VIRGIL

I did not like her.

DANTE

Me neither.

(DANTE scoots a little closer to VIRGIL.)

It's okay. I'm not mad at you anymore.

VIRGIL

Thanks, Dante.

DANTE

Thank you.

VIRGIL

What for?

DANTE

Being my friend.

VIRGIL

You're welcome. It's scary without friends.

(Beat.)

DANTE

None of these rooms are happy ones, are they?

No. VIRGIL
(They do not move.)

Where do you think Bea is? DANTE

I don't know. VIRGIL

What's at the end? DANTE

I don't know. I've been too scared to go there. VIRGIL

How will we know when we get there? DANTE

I've heard it gets cold. VIRGIL

What if we never find Bea? DANTE

We will. VIRGIL

How do you know? DANTE

I Hope. VIRGIL

What's "Hope"? DANTE

You don't know? VIRGIL

I've heard it before. Do you know? DANTE

I've never really felt it before. But I think I feel it now. VIRGIL

DANTE

Can you explain it to me?

VIRGIL

It's like... a good thing, but sometimes not. It's good but it can hurt if it...ends up being wrong. Like right before it becomes spring. And you want the sun to shine really bright and the flowers to bloom. And there's some blue sky in the morning, and a little sunshine, and a little wind. It feels like it might get warmer, and you start planning how you'll play outside in the afternoon. But you have to stay inside to do homework and you keep imagining how great going outside to play will be, but by the time it's afternoon? The sun is gone, and the wind brought in the clouds, and it's cold again. And instead of getting to play, you're sad that it's too cold to go outside again.

(Beat.)

And even after all of that, when you go to bed, you start imagining what will happen when the sun comes up tomorrow. Maybe it'll be warmer tomorrow. Maybe we'll have sunshine tomorrow. Maybe we'll get to play all afternoon by the creek. And that's what you dream about, and it makes you happy.

(Beat.)

I think that's "Hope." At least that's what it should be.

DANTE

So it could be good or bad?

VIRGIL

I think it *is* always good, it just doesn't always *feel* good.

DANTE

Why do you feel Hope now?

VIRGIL

Because of you.

DANTE

Me?

VIRGIL

You fighting to find Beatrice.

DANTE

Oh! Bea will need our help to escape, when we find her.

VIRGIL

Probably.

DANTE

It could be a rescue mission. Me and Bea haven't played that game yet, but I bet it will be fun.

VIRGIL

I Hope so.

DANTE

...I don't think I like "Hope."

VIRGIL

I think you have to like Hope. It keeps us moving. We Hope to find Beatrice and the way out, so we'll keep going.

DANTE

It gives us energy?

VIRGIL

Yeah.

DANTE

And power?

VIRGIL

I think so.

DANTE

Okay. Then I Hope so, too.

VIRGIL

Ready?

DANTE

Yes.

Circle Four: Hospital (Depression)

Setting: A padded room.

At rise: VIRGIL guides DANTE into the room. Every surface has padding on it. Their feet make little sound. As they move, they begin to see shapes of people, huddled in corners. They rock back and forth, and as DANTE and VIRGIL continue moving, they notice more and more people, rocking back and forth.

DANTE

They don't look so good.

VIRGIL

It'll be okay.

(They walk in silence.)

DANTE

They're so quiet.

VIRGIL

We need to be quiet, too.

DANTE

None of the rooms have been this quiet.

(One of the people stands suddenly, breathes sharply, and runs at full speed from one side of the room to the other. They slam into the wall and fall over. They roll on the ground, giggling, even though their nose looks crooked. DANTE moves to help, to check on them. VIRGIL stops him.)

VIRGIL

Don't.

DANTE

But I can help.

VIRGIL

We can't help.

(Another cries and rocks themselves quickly in the corner.)

DANTE

But what if I want to help?

VIRGIL

We don't have time.

DANTE

If Hope is right and Bea is down here, I would want someone to help her...
 (VIRGIL comes to a door.)

VIRGIL

See? We're already here. Time to go.
 (He tries the handle. It's locked.)

What?
 (He tries the handle again. Still locked.)

No. No no no no no, this is not right.
 (VIRGIL continues trying to open the door, hitting it, yanking on the handle. Nothing works.)

We have to leave now; we have to go. I can't get stuck here again.

DANTE

Virgil?

VIRGIL

I can't get the door open. It won't open. I don't know what to do.

DANTE

I'm scared.

VIRGIL

I know! And I don't know how to help you. I can't make you feel better, because I'm scared, too, and I don't know how to get us out of here! I'm lost, Dante.
 (VIRGIL sags against the door.)

DANTE

We'll find another way out.

VIRGIL

There aren't any.

DANTE

You'll find one, you always do. You know every shortcut.

VIRGIL

I've never made it past this room.
 (DANTE absorbs this.)

I came here once and got so scared that I left. I saw this door but never went through. I can't do this anymore.

DANTE

Virgil, why are you crying?

VIRGIL

I'm not!

DANTE

What's wrong?

VIRGIL

I'm too tired. I can't keep doing this. I don't know where we are, and I don't know how to get out of here.

(VIRGIL curls onto the ground.)

DANTE

Don't do that.

VIRGIL

Leave me alone!

DANTE

We still have Hope, that will help us keep moving.

VIRGIL

I don't know if Hope will help this time.
(He crawls away.)

DANTE

I need your help. Please, Virgil.
(VIRGIL faces the wall.)

We have to try.

(VIRGIL will not turn around. DANTE looks around. These people scare him more than any others. They are unpredictable and confusing. They do not speak to him. They are too quiet. Too alone.)

Virgil?

(VIRGIL sits facing the wall. Alone.)

(Beat.)

(DANTE walks over to VIRGIL. Tries to touch his shoulder. VIRGIL flinches and scoots away. DANTE tries to ask a question. No answer. Finally, DANTE sits down beside VIRGIL.)

You are not alone. I'm here.

(They sit in silence for a long time. Periodically, one of the people will wail or laugh or run across the room. DANTE does not look away from VIRGIL.)

VIRGIL

You lied to me. You're not my friend.

DANTE

I didn't lie, I didn't! You *are* my friend.

VIRGIL

If you were my friend, you wouldn't leave me.

DANTE

I'm right here.

VIRGIL

I mean, if we make it to the end. I kept thinking you would give up, and then I could take you back to Limbo, and we could hide in my hiding place forever. But you didn't give up, because of stupid Hope.

DANTE

But you're coming with me.

VIRGIL

I don't know if I can.

DANTE

That's silly, of course you can.

VIRGIL

What if they make you choose between me and Beatrice?
(DANTE is silent for a long time.)

DANTE

I don't know.

VIRGIL

Exactly.

DANTE

But Hope would tell us to try.

VIRGIL

Hope is going to hurt me.

DANTE

I Hope not.

VIRGIL

Me, too.

(Beat.)

And I'm scared.

(VIRGIL turns to DANTE.)

I'm scared. I don't want you to leave, because then I'll be alone.

DANTE

And that's why you'll come with me. Like Hope says.

VIRGIL

What if Beatrice doesn't like me? What if you don't have space in your house?

DANTE

You'll share my room. Then you'll never have to be alone.

VIRGIL

Okay.

DANTE

And Bea will like you. I know it.

VIRGIL

Okay.

DANTE (standing.)

You and me and Bea.

(He offers a hand to VIRGIL, who takes it and stands.)

Let's try to leave this room. I don't like it.

(They continue to hold hands. Young people trying their best to comfort each other in a scary place.)

(VIRGIL and DANTE wade through the bodies of lonely people. They try to keep together, but the further they move, the more bodies exist. At some point, someone notices them. The way they work together to try to cross the room. She moves towards them, focused for the first time, craving closeness. Once she starts, a man across the room does the same. One by one, people begin to crawl closer to DANTE and VIRGIL. At first, the two don't notice, so determined to make it through this room and into the next room.)

DANTE

We're getting closer already. And you can come and live with me and then we can have sleepovers every night and then Bea will teach you how to read and all about the stars and then—

VIRGIL

—and then we can leave here. And be safe.

DANTE

And be safe.

(DANTE turns to smile at VIRGIL when he feels a touch on his ankle.
The first woman looks up at him, a finger on his ankle.)

Please let go.

WOMAN

I can't.

DANTE

Don't touch me, please.

WOMAN

I have to.

(Her hand wraps all the way around his ankle.)

DANTE

Let. Go.

WOMAN

You know how not to be alone. You know how to keep trying. I need that.

DANTE

You mean Hope?

WOMAN

It will be mine.

DANTE

You don't get it by stealing.

WOMAN

I can't be alone anymore.

DANTE

I want to help you, I do. But I have to help Virgil and Bea first.

WOMAN

Help *me*.

(Her hand inches up his ankle. VIRGIL clings tighter to DANTE's hand.)

VIRGIL

Dante, what's wrong?

DANTE

She's—my foot, I don't—

Where? Where?
 VIRGIL

Let go!
 DANTE

I don't want to get lost.
 VIRGIL

Everyone let go!
 DANTE
 (The rest of the people move closer and closer, instead of backing away. VIRGIL lets go of DANTE's hand, to try to get the woman off DANTE's ankle, but it doesn't help, because everyone else is still *there*. Someone grabs VIRGIL, his leg, an arm, and he screams.)

Let go! Let go of me!
 VIRGIL

Let go, please!
 DANTE

I don't know what to do.
 DANTE

Let me help, let me try.
 VIRGIL
 (DANTE and VIRGIL are being dragged to the ground and pulled away from each other.)

Dante, I'm scared!
 DANTE

Virgil? Come back! Come back!
 (to the people.)

Let go of me!
 (Suddenly, the people are gone, and it's just DANTE and BEATRICE. Wrestling on the floor.)

Let go of me!
 (He's giggling now, and so is BEATRICE.)

Never, ever, ever!
 BEATRICE
 (She pins him to the ground.)

Surrender, I've got you pinned!
 DANTE

Fine, fine, fine.

(She lets him go, and he sits up, giggling.)

I would have won if it was a thumb wrestle. You only won because you're taller.

BEATRICE

You wanna thumb wrestle?

DANTE

Yes! I'll show you!

BEATRICE

We'll see.

BEATRICE and DANTE

One, two, three, four—

VIRGIL

—I need help, please!

(BEATRICE and DANTE stop. BEATRICE looks at VIRGIL.)

DANTE

Virgil?

BEATRICE

He needs help.

DANTE

He's scared to be alone.

BEATRICE

He needs *your* help.

DANTE

I'm too little.

BEATRICE

That's not what I taught you. You have to help him.

DANTE

But I found you.

BEATRICE

I'm not really here, yet.

DANTE

But I want to stay with you.

BEATRICE

Virgil needs you more. I'll be okay.

DANTE

I'll find you soon.

(DANTE snuggles up into his sister for a moment.)

(Beat.)

(Then he gives her a kiss on the cheek. And pulls away from her. She disappears, and DANTE wiggles his way out of the pile of lonely people.)

Virgil? Where are you?

(VIRGIL's hand shoots up. DANTE wades over to him. It's hard work, but DANTE makes sure he doesn't step on anyone in the pile.)

Almost there!

(DANTE grabs VIRGIL's waving hand and tugs on his arm until VIRGIL can wiggle out, too.)

VIRGIL

You didn't leave me.

(VIRGIL throws his arms around DANTE in a hug. DANTE hugs him back, quickly, then grabs his hand. They pick their way through the puddle of people and run away as soon as they clear the bodies. The padding bounces under their feet. WOMAN cries behind them. DANTE turns back to look. VIRGIL does not. DANTE watches the people separate and return to their own corners and spaces. This time, they are loud, crying out for help. Rolling, begging for someone to come and help. No one does. No monsters, no nurses. Totally alone.)

(Beat.)

(DANTE keeps holding VIRGIL's hand.)

DANTE

Time to go.

(VIRGIL nods.)

VIRGIL

There!

(He points to a door. They walk to it. It is unlocked.)

Ready?

(DANTE nods, and they go through.)

Hallway Part IV

Setting: A dark hallway, darker than the others.

At rise: VIRGIL and DANTE cannot see. They continue holding hands and use the other hands to follow the wall.

Are you doing okay? VIRGIL

Yes. DANTE

Good. VIRGIL

It's cold. DANTE (shivering.)
(VIRGIL stops.)

This must be the last room. They said it was cold. VIRGIL

I'm scared of this one. DANTE

It'll be okay if we do it together. VIRGIL

And we'll find Beatrice? DANTE

And we'll all leave here together. VIRGIL

And we'll all leave here together. DANTE
(Beat.)

(In the dark, all either can hear is the sound of their breathing and their footsteps on the ground.)

Did you feel that? DANTE

VIRGIL

What?

DANTE

The wind—

VIRGIL

Yeah, I do.

DANTE

It's cold.

VIRGIL

I know.

DANTE

Really cold.

VIRGIL

Stay close.

(A blue glow begins to grow as they move. DANTE stumbles.)

VIRGIL

Are you okay?

DANTE

My feet hurt.

VIRGIL

Rock in your shoe?

DANTE

No, the cold hurts my feet. I don't have any shoes on.

VIRGIL

You don't?

(In the dim blue glow, VIRGIL stops. He sits down on the ground.)

DANTE

Virgil, we can't stop now.

VIRGIL

One second.

(VIRGIL pulls his shoes off his feet and hands them to DANTE. DANTE shakes his head, but VIRGIL drops the shoes on the ground in front of DANTE and crosses his arms.)

DANTE
No.

VIRGIL
I don't need them, I don't think.

DANTE
Yes, you do.

VIRGIL
You're the only one who bleeds here, and look—
(VIRGIL puts his bare feet on the icy ground and grins up at DANTE.)
See—it doesn't hurt at all.

DANTE
But you said you can feel the cold, too.

VIRGIL
I'll be fine. I'm older, remember?

DANTE
Okay.
(DANTE sits down across from VIRGIL. He pulls one shoe on, then the other. He grabs the laces of one, fumbles with them. He does the same with the other set of laces, then looks at VIRGIL.)
Do you know how to tie shoelaces?
(VIRGIL laughs and scoots closer. He starts tying the shoes, trying to teach DANTE.)

DANTE
You're not a very good teacher.

VIRGIL
No, I'm not.
(DANTE and VIRGIL giggle. VIRGIL finishes the shoes.)

Time to go.

DANTE
Okay.
(VIRGIL and DANTE stand and walk together towards the wind. Towards the door.)

Circle Four: Lake (Isolation)

Setting: A large, frozen lake.

At rise: VIRGIL and DANTE walk through the door and emerge on a large frozen lake. The lights are brighter, reflecting on the lake surface.

DANTE

Let's leave.

(DANTE turns to go back through the door.)

VIRGIL

We've come all this way. And look, there's a door, across the lake. It looks frozen, so I think we can walk across.

DANTE

All the way across?

VIRGIL

Unfortunately.

DANTE

What if we fall?

VIRGIL

We'll figure it out. And I don't know if the ice breaks.

(BEATRICE appears in the center of the lake, although DANTE and VIRGIL do not see her.)

BEATRICE

Dante?

DANTE

Bea?

BEATRICE

Dante!

DANTE

You're here. We found you.

VIRGIL

Do you see her?

DANTE

You don't see her?

I don't see anyone.

VIRGIL

She's right there, right at the center.

DANTE

I don't see her.

VIRGIL

Let me go closer. Come with me. I'll introduce you!

DANTE

Wait, I don't think you should—
 (DANTE steps forward. VIRGIL disappears. BEATRICE appears
 brighter.)

VIRGIL

I'm so glad you made it.

BEATRICE

I've seen a lot of scary things to find you.

DANTE

You have been so brave. I'm so proud of you.

BEATRICE

I was so worried we'd never find you.

DANTE

I knew you would.

BEATRICE

It was hard work. But we've got to figure out how to get us out of here.

DANTE

You're so clever.

BEATRICE

We're going to figure it out together. And we'll all get to go home.

DANTE

We don't have to worry about that. We are home.

BEATRICE

DANTE

And—and then—wait, we're not home yet.

BEATRICE

Yes, we are. We're together. That's home.

DANTE

I know, but it's not safe here. And we're not together yet.

BEATRICE

What do you mean? Of course, we're all here.

DANTE

No, we're missing Virgil. I've been wanting you to meet—where is he?

BEATRICE

Oh, Dante. He can't come with you.

DANTE

I promised him I would try.

BEATRICE

Try what?

DANTE

Try to bring him with me.

BEATRICE

He does *not* belong here with you and me.

DANTE

Why not?

BEATRICE

He doesn't understand family like we do.

DANTE

That's not true! He was there for me!

BEATRICE

Only because I couldn't be there. Now that I am, you don't need him.

DANTE

Why did you leave me? Why didn't you come find me?

BEATRICE

I didn't mean to go. They needed me. And now I need you.

DANTE
We can't leave Virgil behind.

BEATRICE
We don't need him. I already have a brother.

DANTE
But—

BEATRICE
You trust me, don't you? I'm your sister.

DANTE
Yes, of course I trust you.

BEATRICE
Then come to me.
(DANTE takes a tentative step towards her.)
You did learn something, didn't you? Follow the North Star to find your way home. To me.
(DANTE stops.)

DANTE
Why don't you want to meet my friend?

BEATRICE
Come on, Dante. Come home to me.

DANTE
I can't.

BEATRICE
Of course, you can.

DANTE
You can't see the North Star here. I can't follow it home.

BEATRICE
It's just a saying—

DANTE
And *my* sister Beatrice would want to help my friend.

BEATRICE (stern.)
Dante. Leave him. Trust me.

DANTE

You're not my Beatrice.

BEATRICE

What? That's not true, I've been waiting for you this whole time!

DANTE

I don't know where Beatrice is, but she's not here.

BEATRICE

How dare you!

DANTE

I can't go home without helping first. That's not the way you showed me.

BEATRICE

Get over here!

(DANTE starts backing away.)

DANTE (shouting.)

Beatrice! My Bea! I know I have to leave you here. That makes me sad, but Virgil needs me right now. Wherever you are, I love you and I miss you.

(DANTE turns his back on BEATRICE, closing his eyes. He wipes away his tears. VIRGIL appears. He's been calling for DANTE the whole time. He runs to DANTE and hugs him.)

VIRGIL

I didn't know where you'd gone, you just—

DANTE

Disappeared. You did, too.

VIRGIL

Is she here?

DANTE

I thought so, but I was wrong.

VIRGIL

Oh. I'm sorry.

(Beat.)

I was really excited to meet her.

DANTE

I wanted you to meet her, too. I don't think I'll see her again.

VIRGIL
What do you mean?

DANTE
She belongs here, somewhere. She's not like me anymore, and I'll miss her a lot.
(The door disappears.)

VIRGIL
The door is gone!

DANTE
Where do we go now?
(A light starts shining below the ice, and the ice starts to break and melt in the center of the room.)

VIRGIL
That's it, Dante.

DANTE
How did that happen?

VIRGIL
I don't know, but it looks like sunshine.

DANTE
Come with me, we've done it.

VIRGIL
Can you feel it?

DANTE
What?

VIRGIL
The sunshine.

DANTE
Yes, yes! It feels warm!

VIRGIL
I can't feel it.
(Beat. VIRGIL realizes what he has to do. He has to say goodbye.)
You need to go quickly, Dante.

DANTE
You're coming with me.

VIRGIL

I can't. Look. The ice is still frozen around me. But not you. I have to stay.

DANTE

But I'll miss you.

VIRGIL

I'll miss you, too. But that's okay. You need to go; this is the best thing for you. And I need to stay.

DANTE

Will you make it back to your hiding place?

VIRGIL

I know the way, thanks to you.

(VIRGIL smiles.)

Do you think I'll meet Beatrice somewhere?

DANTE

I think you'll see her again before I do.

VIRGIL

I'll say hi to her for you.

(DANTE starts walking backwards to the hole in the center, smiling at VIRGIL as he goes. Finally, he turns and jumps into the hole.)

(Suddenly, the world flips upside down, and DANTE falls and floats at the same time. He's too surprised to yell.)

The Garden, Again

Setting: The garden.

At rise: DANTE lands in the garden. The sky is full of stars. DANTE is crying, but he can't tell what kind of tears they are. A light goes on in the house upstairs, and then another light comes on behind the front door. A scream.
DANTE lies down in the grass. BEATRICE appears above him.

BEATRICE

Hey, Dante.

DANTE

Bea! Where have you been?

BEATRICE

I had to go. I didn't want to. It was an accident.

DANTE

You're not coming back, are you?

BEATRICE

No.

DANTE

And I can't save you.

BEATRICE

No. You can't. I wish you didn't have to do this alone.

DANTE

I won't be alone.

BEATRICE

They won't be able to help as much as you'd think.

DANTE

They won't?

BEATRICE

They understand less than you do. And they'll be more sad. You'll have to be strong for them.

DANTE

I'm not good at being strong.

BEATRICE

I know it's not fair. But you can be. Sometimes. And they'll need it sometimes. Not always. But sometimes.

DANTE

I miss you a lot.

BEATRICE

I miss you too, but I'm doing okay, and you will be okay, too.

DANTE

Can you do me a favor?

BEATRICE

I can try.

DANTE

Will you check on Virgil for me?

BEATRICE

I was glad to hear he had helped you.

DANTE

You've seen him?

BEATRICE

He's helping me now. He's nice. I like him.

DANTE

Good.

BEATRICE

I'm sorry I left you.

DANTE

It's not your fault. It was an accident.

(BEATRICE lies down in the grass with DANTE. They do not make contact.)

BEATRICE

The stars are beautiful tonight.

DANTE

Yup. You can see all the people in the stars. There's Orion, and Hercules. Oh look, there's you! You're shining so bright...And—there's Virgil! He's there too!

(DANTE giggles as he continues talking. BEATRICE stands, smiling. She steps towards an exit.)

BEATRICE

He'll be okay.

(DANTE sits up, registers that he's alone. He goes silent. He lies back down in the grass.)

(Beat.)

(After a moment, he gets up and walks towards the audience.)

DANTE

And that one, that's the North Star way over there, do you see it?

(He waits for an answer.)

Now you can find the way home.

(Beat.)

I have to go. Time to help.

(He exits. Blackout.)

Appendix

The following are additional scenes that focus on the journey Beatrice takes, should you wish to include them in the narrative. These scenes can also serve to add a slightly longer run time to the production, should you choose to include them for older audiences. This creates a dynamic character in Beatrice but may change the impact of Dante's arc.

Beatrice: Welcome to Limbo Land (insert after page 6)

Setting: A dim hall with a long ceiling.

At rise: BEATRICE enters the hall, still looking over her shoulder for DANTE.

GUIDE

You looking for someone?

BEATRICE

Um, no. No. I'm not.

GUIDE

Good. All of that is behind you.

BEATRICE

Yes. I know.

(BEATRICE refuses to glance over her shoulder again. The GUIDE leads her into the large hall and stops.)

GUIDE

Off you go.

BEATRICE

That's it? You're not going to explain anything else? You came to get me, took me through the door, all without saying goodbye to my brother, and now you won't tell me anything else?

GUIDE

I have nothing else to tell. My only job is to bring you here. That's it.

BEATRICE

Oh. I see.

GUIDE

I'm not going to fight with you, I have other people to gather.

BEATRICE

No. I mean, I understand. I'm dead, aren't I?

(The GUIDE had turned to leave but stops.)

GUIDE

Yes. Yes, you are.

BEATRICE

Right. Thank you.

(Beat.)

Why are you still staring at me?

GUIDE

Just rare for people to actually understand what “dead” means.

BEATRICE

Oh, I don’t totally understand what “dead” means, not yet. But I do know that that’s what I am.

GUIDE

Um, cool. Cool.

(GUIDE begins searching for someone, someone with more authority.)

BEATRICE

What are you looking for?

GUIDE

Can you stop asking questions?

BEATRICE

No. I’m eleven years old. That’s what I do.

GUIDE

I just need a moment to—

BEATRICE

I’ll find my own way, if you don’t want to help anymore. I get it.

GUIDE

No, wait!

(BEATRICE walks away. She is impatient, and curious, and trying to avoid something bubbling up inside her that she has never felt before. She goes to the bar.)

BEATRICE

Hi, how are you?

BARTENDER 1

What do you want to drink?

BEATRICE

Nobody else is drinking anything.

BARTENDER 1

Yes, they are.

BEATRICE

Do you understand what you're doing here?

BARTENDER 1

I mind the bar.

BEATRICE

How long have you been here?

BARTENDER 1

Who knows?

(BEATRICE turns and walks away. Mind thinking quickly.)

BEATRICE

For a dead person, I seem to have a way better idea of what's going on.

(A massive GUARD and the GUIDE block her path.)

GUARD

Come with me.

BEATRICE

Why?

GUARD

You need to come with me.

GUIDE

Please?

BEATRICE

No.

GUIDE (sighing.)

Fine, fine. Usually, when people come here, they don't understand they're dead. You know you are. You don't seem angry, or sad, or even hopeful you'll be alive again. You seem to remember things from life, but it doesn't seem to bother you. So, we've decided to fast-track you through the cycle, see if we can get you on the team.

BEATRICE

The team?

GUIDE

When you fully understand your death, you become a Guide, like me. Bringing new souls to the afterlife. Very few make it to that stage. We're very understaffed.

BEATRICE

I get to help other people?

GUIDE

Eventually. There's training first.

BEATRICE

Oh, there's school? Oh good, I'm glad it's not all over yet.

GUIDE

No, go with the Guard.

BEATRICE

So...no school?

(BEATRICE follows the GUARD. She turns to wave to the GUIDE, but she is already gone.)

Beatrice: Learning Curve (insert after page 24)

Setting: A dim hallway, with lots of windows.

At rise: BEATRICE follows the GUARD, who leads her stoically down the hallway. They have just left Limbo, and BEATRICE is curious about everything.

BEATRICE

Oh, what's this place?

GUARD

We need to keep moving.

BEATRICE

If I'm going to be "fast-tracked" to training, I should know what else happens here.

GUARD

You'll learn that in training.

BEATRICE

Or... I could get a head start now!

(She peeks into the first window. It's a large concrete room, and a mass of people are lumped in the center. She cannot tell if they are fighting or dancing.)

Like this one. What's happening here?

GUARD

Making too much noise, is what. Who told them they could be so loud when they fight?

BEATRICE

Why are they fighting?

GUARD

Rules of the room. Need to get their aggression out somehow.

(GUARD laughs like he's told himself a funny joke. BEATRICE does not understand the punchline.)

BEATRICE

They shouldn't be fighting. It's not safe!

GUARD

They can't die twice, can they?

(BEATRICE moves to the next window. She glimpses a long table.)

BEATRICE

They're arguing down there, aren't they?

GUARD

If any of them had food, we'd be cleaning that room all the time.

BEATRICE

Why doesn't someone tell them to remain calm? Or explain what's going on?

GUARD

Not my job.

BEATRICE

I know, but someone else could.

GUARD

We've all got jobs, and none of them have to do with coddling people.

BEATRICE

Explaining a situation is not "coddling."

(BEATRICE goes to a third window. This room is dark. She cannot make out much. She thinks she hears wailing and screams.)

What...happens down here?

GUARD

Best to move on.

BEATRICE

Tell me what happens here.

(GUARD grabs her arm and attempts to drag her away. BEATRICE clings to the window frame.)

GUARD

Time—to move...on!

BEATRICE

Tell me what happens—first!

(GUARD gives up trying to drag her away.)

GUARD

It's better not to talk about it.

BEATRICE

I need to know!

GUARD

You're only a kid, and that's an ugly room. So, I won't tell you, and we will be leaving.

I'm not scared of ugly things.

BEATRICE

You haven't seen what I have.

GUARD

Beatrice: Training (insert after page 28)

Setting: A fluorescent-bright room.

At rise: BEATRICE hums a nursery rhyme. She sits at a desk, restless. The PROFESSOR enters, talking already. The PROFESSOR is a middle-aged man in a classic tweed jacket. He is used to his status as the expert in every room.

PROFESSOR

Today, we start the first day of training, it will be *thrilling* material that I am *delighted* to share with you and—

(The PROFESSOR looks up at BEATRICE, startled. She is the only student in the room.)

Are you lost?

BEATRICE

No. I'm here for training.

PROFESSOR

You're the only one?

BEATRICE

Yes, I am.

PROFESSOR

And you're, what, nine?

BEATRICE

Eleven.

PROFESSOR

Ah. I see.

BEATRICE

I'm ready to learn, and ready to help.

PROFESSOR

No, no, I can't teach you. It's bad enough that *no one* understands death or prepares for it, or tries to move on, but I will not accept a *child*. They must have made a mistake.

BEATRICE

I know that I'm dead. I know that I fell while playing with my brother and that I'm dead. I know that he tried to follow me, and I couldn't help him because I'm dead. I know that nobody else really understands what's going on, despite also being dead, except for the Guide who brought me in, and you. And the guards. And I guess there are probably other dead people who know they're dead, but not any that I met.

PROFESSOR

And you *want* to be a Guide?

BEATRICE

Yes. Well, at first, I was told to, but I want to help, so I don't mind.

PROFESSOR

And who would you Guide?

BEATRICE

Whoever you need.

PROFESSOR

No, no, it doesn't work like that.

BEATRICE

Why not?

PROFESSOR

Well, mostly because we've never had a *child* as a Guide before.

BEATRICE

Well, I'll be the first.

PROFESSOR

They never understand in the same way.

BEATRICE

I understand.

PROFESSOR

You know what—fine. We're understaffed, and it seems I won't be getting any other options today. Let's begin.

(BEATRICE beams and settles into her seat. Finally. Something to do.)

Beatrice: Losing Hope (insert after page 39)

Setting: The classroom.

At rise: BEATRICE lies across a desk. She's frustrated.

PROFESSOR

We've been over it a hundred times—

BEATRICE

I *know* that, but I don't understand why I'm not ready yet.

PROFESSOR

You don't train in a day.

BEATRICE

Right, but I'm ready to go. I know I am.

PROFESSOR

No, you aren't.

BEATRICE

You're just trying to hold me back because I understand so quickly and you're jealous.

PROFESSOR

That's just the thing, I don't think you *really* understand what goes into this work—

BEATRICE

Yes, I do. I'm assigned a person. I explain what's happened to them. I show them the way in and then make sure they get to Limbo. And then, for some reason, I leave them. Even though they're confused and it will take them forever to get through the circles without help.

PROFESSOR

Everyone moves at their own pace.

BEATRICE

And I'm ready to go in the field.

PROFESSOR

It can be scary, or upsetting, and you can't show them any of that, or they will get upset and confused and too scared to pass on. We are not in the business of making ghosts.

BEATRICE

If I wasn't scared of my own death, I won't be scared of others. I can do it.

PROFESSOR (yelling.)

NO you can't. Everything is just a game to you, because you died in the middle of a game and you are *ten* years old—

BEATRICE

I'm *eleven*—

PROFESSOR

The afterlife isn't a game!

BEATRICE

It should be! Then it would end when I win!

(BEATRICE begins to cry.)

But I won't win. I know that I'm dead, I know that it was all an accident. That's the whole terrible thing. I know that I'm dead, I understand it all, and it makes me want to punch something or throw a fit because none of it is fair. I should not have died! It was a stupid game I was playing with my stupid brother, and I tripped down the stupid stairs, and my stupid brother needs me! And I don't *want* to be dead. I'm stuck in this stupid system that doesn't care about anybody but the numbers. Nobody cares about anybody else, and it's stupid and I hate it. Death is not *fair* and death *should* be *fair*!

(The PROFESSOR sighs and sits down beside her.)

PROFESSOR

You're young. Maybe it's not time for you to work yet.

BEATRICE

It's not my fault I died young.

PROFESSOR

It's not your fault you died, period.

BEATRICE

I thought death would be more fair than life.

PROFESSOR

Alas, not so.

BEATRICE

I don't want to be dead.

PROFESSOR

Nobody does. The whole thing is completely unfair.

BEATRICE

But if I have to be dead, I want to do something to help. But it doesn't matter if you never put me on a job. I won't be able to help when being a Guide is so messy.

PROFESSOR

Yes, I see that now.

BEATRICE

Can't we just... change the system?

PROFESSOR

This is how it's been for... forever, I think.

BEATRICE

But we know life is unfair. Shouldn't we try to do something to make death a little easier?

PROFESSOR

I do not make those rules.

BEATRICE

But you do teach them. What if you started teaching something new?

PROFESSOR

I wouldn't know what to teach.

BEATRICE

Ask them not to have the fighting circle. Instead, they play really frustrating games of chess or dominoes or something.

PROFESSOR

I hate chess. I never win.

BEATRICE

Exactly. And instead of the bar (which isn't appropriate for kids anyway), why not make it a sandwich shop or something. And they don't trade memories, they relive as many as they can as they learn to let go.

PROFESSOR

We're not allowed to miss things.

BEATRICE

That's stupid, too. That's a part of letting go. My mom always said.

(The PROFESSOR chuckles.)

And instead of Limbo, we could actually explain to people what's happening, and then really guide them through how to accept it. It would take more Guides, and we couldn't do it right away, but then people would feel better and move faster. Then more people could become Guides, and help new dead people find their way.

PROFESSOR

Maybe you should teach that class.

BEATRICE

I'm too young. Nobody would take me seriously.

PROFESSOR

True.

(Beat.)

You know we can't really change the system, yes?

BEATRICE

I hope we can, one day.

PROFESSOR

Maybe.

(Beat.)

BEATRICE

Is this what happens if you make it through all the circles? You become a Guide?

PROFESSOR

They say, there's a true Acceptance, where you pass on.

BEATRICE

What happens there?

PROFESSOR

If I knew, I would not be teaching here.

BEATRICE

Do you wish you had reached it?

PROFESSOR

Sometimes.

BEATRICE

Acceptance sounds lonely. I'd rather be somewhere I can help.

PROFESSOR

I suppose helping still attaches you to living on earth.

BEATRICE

Fine by me. I want to help people, and I don't care if that means I never find "acceptance".

PROFESSOR

Let's see what we can do to help then, yes?

Epilogue: Beatrice (insert after page 62)

Setting: The Limbo chamber.

At rise: BEATRICE supervises a game of hide and seek with the SHADOW CHILDREN. They scatter and hide and giggle. She sighs. The PROFESSOR approaches.

PROFESSOR

You won't change everything overnight.

BEATRICE

I know. I just wish I could help them understand...sooner.

PROFESSOR

This is a good start.

(The PROFESSOR goes to the bar, to begin talking with the people gathered there. First step of the new system: start explaining. Actually explaining.)

(As BEATRICE watches the kids, a tall *something* wanders past. He catches her eye. VIRGIL mumbles as he moves, slower than usual. He looks tired, a strange look for a young Limbo child. She watches him. He is barefoot and holds a small scrap of fabric in his hand.)

VIRGIL

I told you, this is where we need to be. That's what you told me. That I needed to go back where I was safe. And look, I got to bring you with me.

(He does not smile at his joke.)

You do? You want to hear the song again, Dante? Okay...

(At the mention of DANTE's name, BEATRICE returns her full attention to VIRGIL. He begins his song, and the tree and the mother, the one he sang in the room with the beds.)

(As he sings, BEATRICE moves closer, slowly so as not to alarm him.)

BEATRICE

That's a nice song.

VIRGIL

I'm not singing to you.

BEATRICE

I know, and that's okay.

VIRGIL

I don't want you spying on me.

BEATRICE
I just wondered who you were singing to.

VIRGIL
Myself.

BEATRICE
Oh.
(VIRGIL, wary, starts to slip away.)

BEATRICE
I have to ask...did you say "Dante"?

VIRGIL
No...

BEATRICE
I know a Dante. He's my little brother.
(VIRGIL's eyes go wide.)

VIRGIL
You're Beatrice.

BEATRICE
How do you know me?

VIRGIL
Dante is my friend. I took him through every room, to get him back home.

BEATRICE
Thank you. Thank you for keeping Dante safe for me.

VIRGIL
I miss him a lot.

BEATRICE
I do, too.

BEATRICE
Hey, I've put myself in charge of keeping an eye on all the kids here. Do you want to help me?

VIRGIL
Yeah, I'd like that.
(He stands a little closer to her.)

BEATRICE

Good. We just have to make sure they don't get into trouble.

VIRGIL

A little trouble isn't that bad...

(BEATRICE smiles as they walk towards the kids.)

From “Welcome to Hell” to “LimboLand”: Reflecting on Adapting Dante’s *Inferno*

Megan Huggins

During Dr. Byrne’s Medieval World course over two years ago, our class read sections of Dante’s *Inferno* and explored the themes presented in the text. We dissected selected cantos and discussed the turmoil surrounding the writing, we discussed Dante’s exile, his Catholic faith, and the complex political situation of Italy during the fourteenth century. As we debated, all I could focus on was an image of a tired, confused Dante wandering around a stage, confronted with flames and red sets. As we moved through the end of the text, I saw Dante suspended above a stage, falling, and landing under a sky of stars. I realized as I envisioned Dante under the stars that I wanted to adapt Dante’s *Inferno*. At the time, it seemed like a daunting and unreasonable task, and I tabled the idea for a few months. I had never written a play before and would not be able to successfully start with an epic poem from the 1300s. The idea sat in the margins my notes, waiting.

Approaching the final days of my creative thesis project, I am sometimes shocked by how far this idea has grown and evolved. When I originally considered this idea, I did not think it was practical to attempt adapting Dante’s *Inferno* as my first full-length script, nor did I anticipate the kinds of artistic liberties I would take in the process. I have never felt confident in my writing skills. Beyond writing some terrible poetry in middle school and attending a few creative writing workshops in elementary school, I have had little experience or courage to pursue writing in any context. By the end of April, I will have completed a two and a half year long creative process, which is the single longest creative commitment I have ever made. I have a greater understanding for the complex, frustrating, and rewarding work of artists, and recognize that crafting a story does not happen overnight. What started as a thirty-page, narration-heavy

modernization of Dante Alighieri's first installment of the *Divine Comedy* has become an eighty-page play for children that talks about death and saying goodbye.

It was not until the end of sophomore year that I returned to the margins of my notes to look at the early ideas of a stage play adapting Dante's classic poem. At this point in the semester, the conversations about thesis track and project were beginning. I knew I wanted to work in the Artist's Studio and develop a creative thesis but had no idea what I would create. I wanted to incorporate acting into my thesis; as an actor, it felt essential to me, but I worried it would not challenge me in a way that interested the Honors Council. As I pondered my options, I shared my ideas with my roommate. The first and only idea rolling around in my mind was a modernization of Dante's *Inferno*, bringing the ideas of Dante's writing and metaphorical journey to contemporary audiences. I explained why I was interested, but also every reason why I should *not* write a script, primarily that I was not a playwright, but an actor. She was the first person to hear this idea, and encouraged me to pursue it despite my reservations, gifting me a lovely translation of the narrative poem and telling me to re-read it. I took my time re-reading it, reminding myself of the complex narrative and rich imagery present in Dante's words. I could not resist the pull to adapt the story.

That summer, I took a Maymester to London and Belfast with the theatre department. As we traveled and experienced a wide variety of storytelling and theatrical experiences, I absorbed everything we learned with enthusiasm. Returning to the US, I felt full of creative potential and motivation. I took an online writing class as a part of my Maymester programming, and a draft of my thesis prospectus was the final project. In order to complete this draft, I had to include a sample of my writing. I wrote the first two pages of "Welcome to Hell", a modernization of Dante's *Inferno*. In them, Dante spoke primarily in first person narration, speaking to the

audience about his experience as he went through it. Virgil, his Guide, left him at the center of Hell, telling him he had to complete the final part of the journey alone. Dante walked closer to the center of Hell, fighting against the wind. “I do not feel that hope anymore,” Dante told the audience as he walked. “Fear gnaws at my heart, at my stomach. I know longer have the light of wisdom to guide me through this Hell, and I begin to drown in the roil of feelings swimming through me as I walk.” At the end of the scene, Dante reached the center of Hell and Satan greeted him with a “Welcome home.”

Inspired by those early snippets of scenes, I completed the very first draft later that summer. This draft kept the long stretches of narration with only a handful of dialogue scenes. Virgil took Dante through Hell because Beatrice instructed him to do so. Dante ended the play by holding his hand out to the audience, standing in the grass under the stars and begging them to understand that there was “still time”. The draft was thirty pages long, and I used as many of the circles of Hell as I could. Each circle was directly based on the original, updated slightly for contemporary audiences. All the characters used modern language, but there was not much about Virgil or Dante that felt human. I wrote the script in a night. Just before junior year began, the script received some adjustments in which Dante was haunted by Voices that kept him awake at night. He agreed to go to Hell to make the Voices leave him alone. As classes started, my focus turned to schoolwork and rehearsals in the evenings, and the script hibernated again.

A few months into fall semester of junior year, after explaining the idea to one of my readers, I realized a major problem of the script was the narration. Having so much narration slowed down the action of the story, and made the script feel like history, as if it had already happened. In modernizing the piece, I wanted the story to feel dynamic, and narration was not helping that goal. I rewrote each scene as a dialogue, modeling a more traditional style of

playwrighting. Virgil received a major re-imagining. He needed a legendary status; the Virgil of the original is the epic poet. While modern society has very little epic poets, it has a lot of musicians, and from that idea I modeled Virgil in design after David Bowie during his Ziggy Stardust era. Virgil continued to serve as Dante's Guide through Hell but developed a sarcastic sense of humor and disliked Dante for most of the play. Dante was still motivated to take the journey to stop the Voices in his head, which now included Beatrice. Beatrice sent Virgil to take Dante on this journey to "save his soul". Unfortunately, I did not know why Dante's soul needed saving, and decided to ignore the problem for the time being. I hoped it would resolve itself as I continued working on the project and allowed it to hang in uncertainty for the time being.

In a Scriptwriting class later that year, I started trying to tackle the start of the script, to make a dynamic introduction that drew the audience into the story. I workshopped the early pages of the script with more focus, leaning into the humor Virgil provided and outlining more of the rules of the Hell Dante finds. A part of the class involved reading our scripts as a class, which gave me the opportunity to hear sections of my story out loud for the first time. This proved crucial to my understanding of how the dialogue flowed and which conversations were clunky. I also acquired more supportive readers with ideas for how to progress and improve the story, which I recognize as an invaluable part of the creative process. I need collaboration and outside perspectives to provide honest feedback to my work.

The script was renamed "Dead or Dreaming", and in it, Dante and Virgil jumped through a manhole in a park to enter Hell. I focused on the first thirty pages for the class and worked hard to flesh out Dante's conflict and purpose in Hell. I realized that something about the Voices haunting Dante did not work effectively. It did not give him enough of a reason to follow Virgil. I also realized that I did not know how to properly structure the circles of Hell. At this point, my

thesis director encouraged me to take more freedom and move away from the original circles of Hell. He told me to try developing my own circles, in which I could decide what should be condemned in modern society.

Picking my own circles proved challenging, because each decision felt political, more than anything else. Dante Alighieri, when he wrote the *Divine Comedy*, used it in part as an opportunity to comment on the political turmoil in his society at the time. He threw members of opposite political parties into Hell and explained why they belonged there. As I considered this, I decided that putting actual people that I knew of would alienate my audience in a way I did not want. I also realized that putting a Virgil who looked like David Bowie into Hell made a strong statement that I did not agree with. I developed a “limbo” as the first circle of Hell, which became a holding place for all the souls to gather before judgment. This inclusion changed the title again, this time to “Welcome to Limbo”.

As I began defining my circles of Hell, I grew uncomfortable with choosing what to condemn. One of my readers suggested that my system of judgment in Hell was corrupt and outdated. Perhaps in the resolution of the play, Dante learned that Hell is not a place of justice anymore. Maybe Dante learned to focus more on living a good life than worrying about the afterlife. This was a direction I wanted to pursue, and confidently pitched to the Honors Council in my updated prospectus. After a successful defense, I left my meeting with helpful feedback and new challenges to tackle. First, I still did not really have a good reason for Dante to choose to go to Hell. Second, I was asked a lot about the opportunity for political commentary in my modernization, and the more I considered it, the less I liked the idea. Third, the ending of the script did not resolve in a satisfying way. In fact, I had no idea how to come to a resolution to the story.

I began trying to address these problems while in rehearsals for my acting capstone. I played John in *And the Word Became Flesh*, a re-imagining of the Gospel of John. As John, I carried much of the lines of narration, since I filled the role of the author and eyewitness to the story. I struggled with this role, because it was important to me that John functioned as a three-dimensional, dynamic character with an arc and journey. As I crafted this arc, I realized the Dante in my script did not have a clear or engaging arc. He still had no motivation to pursue his journey and was not a compelling character. Encouraged by the arc I developed for John and inspired by the collaboration I found in that rehearsal room, I attempted to resolve the conflict of Dante's non-existent arc.

I re-evaluated the script and discovered I was not utilizing Beatrice as a character at all. She hardly served a purpose in the script. I wondered what might happen if Dante was searching for Beatrice in Hell. I did not want her to become a romantic interest and struggled to decide on why Dante needed to find her. To avoid a romantic storyline, I explored the idea that Dante's journey was a metaphorical one. In this iteration of the story, Dante traveled to Hell and had to confront different parts of his soul, personified by characters like Beatrice that corresponded to each circle. As he moved through a circle, he confronted the piece of himself and became more self-aware. I knew Beatrice would be the portion of Dante's soul that was unconditional love but was not sure how to personify the other parts of him. By this point, I had reached the end of fall semester of my senior year and took a brief break from the script to consider my options moving forward. I had no idea this project would be so challenging and began to feel discouraged that I would not develop the story in a way that made sense to me.

As my final semester started, I returned to the script, concerned I would not uncover the elements I needed to complete the script successfully. I had a very scary realization, at this point,

which was that I did not like Dante. I did not like the script, or the plot, or any character besides Virgil. I began to panic, not sure what direction to adapt this story that would satisfy the storyteller in me. I wanted to prove to myself that I could write a successful, full-length play, but felt I was moving further and further away from that goal.

A conversation with one of my readers sparked an idea. What if this wasn't a play for adults, but for children? I love theatre for young audiences. I love performing for kids and sharing stories with them. But how would I justify a child's need to go to Hell? The answer turned my script from a modernization to a loose adaptation inspired by the original Dante's *Inferno*. Dante needed to be a young child, and instead of traveling to Hell, he travels to the afterlife to find his older sister, Beatrice, who has died. Dante learns about death and finds a way to understand both death and the grief process as he searches for Beatrice. I wanted to teach children about what goodbye can look like, and how to be okay when something changes. I adjusted the number of circles so that they corresponded to the five levels of grief- denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

This decision felt so right to me, and as I began experimenting with this new direction, I enjoyed writing for a six-year-old Dante. Identifying my audience clarified my writing, and the feedback from the Council clicked for me. I started having fun writing this script, and that was a relief and a delight. Adjusting the dialogue was difficult, and I worked through multiple variations of the relationship between Virgil and Dante, moving from friends of the same age to Virgil functioning as an older brother to Dante. Changing the narratives and character ages so close to my deadline (about two months out) was scary at first, because it was a massive rewrite. This new direction needed multiple drafts, but approaching the final product, and feeling it is a script that I could produce, has kept me motivated through the final stages of my work.

With the new target audience of young people with shorter attention spans, I decided to cap the main script at around seventy pages. To complete the Honors requests for an eighty page script, I wrote an appendix of scenes for Beatrice, offering potential companies the opportunity to build another character into the story if necessary. These additional scenes add context and clarity to Beatrice, and give her different lessons to learn, so that her journey can resonate more with older children in the audience.

When I started trying to write this script, I felt overwhelmed and did not believe I had the correct tools to achieve my goal of a full-length script for the stage. The whole project seemed massive and nearly impossible to achieve successfully, especially since the text I wanted to adapt was a pretty epic classic. I learned that completing a project like this is possible but requires a lot of patience. I had no idea how many drafts I would have to go through to find a story in which I can take pride. The saying is true: writing is re-writing, and re-writing, over and over again.

As I reflect on this project, I realize now how complicated the artistic process can be. Creating something new requires patience, dedication, and determination. Writing is particularly difficult. I am proud of challenging myself to try a new skill. I am beyond grateful for a Committee, thesis director, and community of readers who has supported me through the uncertainty and changes. I have learned and experienced the value of collaboration at every level of the theatrical process and believe that collaboration is essential to any artistic endeavor. I wanted to give up many times during this process, but thankfully I had a community to offer me new ideas and support. I wanted to change my topic more than once, believing that I had taken on too large an adaptation, but then I would remember Dante under the stars. The final image of Dante surviving the circles of Hell resonates with me; Dante comes out of a trial and sees

something beautiful. He finds hope, and that hope sustains him and helps him move forward in his journey through Purgatory and Paradise.

My Dante comes to terms with death. He does not have all the right words for the situation, but he understands that Beatrice has gone somewhere he cannot follow. He must process his confusion, grief, and guilt, and makes a friend in the process. Virgil learns to help Dante, because helping Dante gives him hope. Goodbye can be a difficult concept for children to understand, and this script offers an opportunity to help kids understand something that is scary and confusing.

As I write this, the world is in chaos. Most of the country is practicing social distancing in response to COVID-19. I graduate in May, which was already a daunting prospect. Now, I will graduate virtually, far away from the family and community I have made at school. I am twenty-two years old, and there are so many things I do not understand about what is happening right now. I feel powerless to help the healthcare providers on the frontlines, powerless to stop the unemployment claims from going up, powerless to do anything other than stay at home and wait. I feel as confused as Dante, and I wish I had the imagination of a six-year-old to pretend this is not my reality.

Writing this script for the past two years has taught me about perseverance and the work ethic required for successful creativity. Writing this script during a global health crisis has taught me that creativity occurs in strange places and during strange times. I am putting the final pieces of a play about death, written for kids, into place and wishing there was more I could do for this world. I have developed a respect for any artist trying to improve their craft and create at any point in time.

Writing a story is hard. Writing for children is hard. Towards the end of the play, Virgil teaches Dante about Hope. He tells Dante that sometimes Hope is wrong, and that hurts a lot. He explains that Hope sends us to bed with dreams and wakes us up in the morning. Hope is always good, even if it doesn't feel good sometimes. That conversation was something I wrote for myself, because I need hope. I needed someone to tell me that I must have hope that things will get better, even if it takes longer than I thought it would. I never imagined how personal this project would become.

Dante asks questions on almost every page of this script, and that is because more and more each day I ask questions of the world and people around me. My thesis director told a class of new aspiring playwrights in Scriptwriting I to write what we know, and I know how to ask more questions. When I was younger, I thought that I would find more answers as I grew up. The more I learn and grow, the more I come to accept that life is not about answers. Life is about asking questions and seeking answers. Dante's questions are my questions, ones to which I am still seeking the answers. Right now, they are daily questions, and writing this script reminds me to accept that reality. I am proud of the ways this script has evolved, and grateful for the comfort it has provided me in uncertain times. I am looking forward to sharing this script with the Belmont community and beyond, and hope that it offers some comfort in its story.