

GO TO HELL

It is a warm, sultry day. The type of day that makes your body feel heavy and your skull pressured. The type of day that makes your limbs and your soul yearn for an explosion of the skies to release the earthly tension. Though you are not sure it is only the elements that are making you implode. A cure has been found, you are told. A cure that could have saved them. A cure that came too late. You think of them, your person. You think of them in disbelief. You think of them in pain. The type of pain that makes you pinch your skin because your only desire is to be in a dream. The type of pain that makes your cheeks twinge and cramp. The type of pain that makes you want to pull out your heart. Maybe, now, you think, you can bring them back. So, you travel. You travel to the place of the stories. You travel to the place of evil. You travel to the place that, for you, is the last place of hope. You are told to enter near a lake. Near a lake, near the New City. So, you go.

On the journey from the New City to the lake, walking, and walking, pain and exhaustion overcome you. You lie down.

Later, unsure of how much time has passed, you are woken up by a man's voice in a tongue you do not know. You sit up. In front of you, there is an entrance to what appears to be a cave. In the mouth of the cave, leaning against the wall stands a man. He says “veniam et te adiuvet sed non possum”, shrugging and pursing his voluptuous lips. You slowly sit up and look at him, void of understanding. “Hic est introitus inferni. Sed vide. Lupa ostium custoditur.”, he pursues. You shake your head in confusion. “I don't understand”, you explain in your tongue. “Oh!” he exclaims. “My bad. This is the entrance you are looking for. But be careful, it is guarded by a Great and Dangerous She-Wolf. And I would help you up but I can't.” You nod, stand up, and dust yourself off. The man smiles.

Do you

A) thank him and go home? → Go to page 2

B) ask him if he knows a way past the animal? → Go to page 4

You give him a small, grateful smile back. You wonder if the dangers you might be about to put yourself in are worth it. If losing your life while trying to bring back another when there is no guarantee is worth it. After some time reflecting, you decide against pursuing your quest. Your pain may be great but being faced with danger makes you realise the importance of your own life. You thank the man in the cave for his help and turn around, back towards the New City.

The END

GO TO HELL

“Who are you?”, you ask the man who now mysteriously speaks your tongue. “My name is Publius. Or was.” His smile does not fade. “Oh”, he realises your missing pieces of information. “I am dead but I am an honorary member of” – he motions towards the ground – “you know, *them*. So, I am allowed up here and can talk to passing strangers such as yourself.” Of course, you have heard the stories. You have heard them enough to come all the way here. You believed enough. And even though you did not expect the stories to realise themselves in this way and you are doubting your sanity at this moment, you have not come all this way to turn back now. “You mentioned a wolf?”, you ask the man. “Oh, yes. She’s greatly dangerous”. “How do I get past her?”, you ask. Your interlocutor smirks. “Good thing I’m here, am I right?” and he points towards the trees to your right. Following his gaze, you spot a hound in a cage, a fire, and a golden bough hanging from a nearby tree that you had not noticed before. Or that had not been there before. “One will chase her away, the other two will make her stronger.” You swallow a heavy lump in your throat. You take a closer look.

You look at the hound. It is sleeping, yet its legs and jaw are twitching in its sleep. It seems to be running and biting. As you approach, it wakes up and starts barking. You are startled and you can hear the barks echo through the forest.

You look at the fire. It is burning steadily. A number of heavy logs and long branches are feeding it. It seems far less of a danger to you than the hound. Yet, you think, if the Wolf acts in any way like any animal you know, it will avoid fire.

Finally, you look at the golden bough and its magical shimmer. “It is carved and reads ‘death is gold’”, Publius explains to you from the mouth of the cave. You think.

GO TO HELL

Do you

A) thank Publius and go home? → Go to page 10

B) use the hound? → Go to page 12

C) use the fire? → Go to page 6

D) use the golden bough? → Go to page 8

You consider your options once again. The bough? You are unsure of its powers. You might inadvertently touch a part of it that you shouldn't and be turned into a statue of gold for eternity. The growling hound? How would a simple hound be able to go against an otherworldly wolf? The fire? You think about the place where you are going. According to the stories, there is fire. Yet, the Great and Dangerous She-Wolf lives in the cave that guards the entrance to the place, where there is – as far as you can see – nothing ablaze. What - if not fire - could be her weak spot? You near the flames and pick up a branch. Nothing happens to you. You are reassured. You take a deep breath and approach the cave, happy to get away from the aggressive hound and to start your journey. Publius grins at you. You enter the darkness and become its light. You walk slowly in order for your steps not to cover the sounds of your enemy. You are scared but confident in your weapon: the oldest weapon of all. You hear something and stop. You lower your torch to train your eyes to see better in the dark. In the distance you see two flames, two small floating flames, close to one another, not moving apart. You recognise the flames. Too late. The burning eyes followed by an enormous body jump at you. You raise the torch to keep the wolf away but she springs up your chest, puts her two front paws on you and forces you down to the ground. You hear a growl, the fabric covering your body catches fire. You roll around on the hard floor and the last thing you see are two evil sparks before you burn to death.

The END

GO TO HELL

You consider your options once again. Fire? You remind yourself of where you are going and realise that there might be more than enough fire. You look at the growling hound. It is still showing you its teeth. You shudder at its sight. *Can evil beat evil?* You wonder. You turn around to the bough. *What is the most heavenly looking weapon here?* Of course, the golden bough. You approach it. Looking at it from underneath you carefully determine where you can touch it safely, without touching the gold, the effects of which you are unsure of. You see the inscription 'death is gold'. You gather your courage. You lift up your hand to the part of the branch that is not golden and try to detach it from there. The entire branch falls into your fingers as easily as a feather. Nothing happens to you. Reassured, you enter the cave. Publius smiles as you pass him. The bough's shine slightly illuminates the darkness. You trust the bough's magical abilities. You go deeper and deeper into the cave while listening out for the beast. All of a sudden, you hear breathing. You hastily turn around, holding the bough tight in your hand. The She-Wolf jumps at your throat. You brace yourself and try to fall back to escape her bite. Too late. The second her teeth enter your skin, your whole body turns into gold, leaving you as a frightened golden sculpture forever to remain at the gates of purgatory.

The END

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You give him a small, grateful smile. You wonder if the dangers you might be about to put yourself in are worth it. If losing your life while trying to bring back another when there is no guarantee is worth it. After some time reflecting, you decide against pursuing your quest. Your pain may be great but being faced with danger makes you realise the importance of your own life. You thank Publius for his help and turn around, back towards the New City.

The END

GO TO HELL

You consider your options once again. The bough? You are unsure of its powers. You might inadvertently touch a part of it that you shouldn't and be turned into a statue of gold for eternity. The fire? No, the 'Great and Dangerous She-Wolf' sounds too otherworldly for something as earthly looking as fire. You hit your forehead, reminding yourself of where you're going and that fire might not be so earthly. You look at the growling hound. You take a deep breath. You take a long branch out of the fire and raise it above the cage. The hound shies away. *Very good*, you think. You can at least guide the hound with the fire and chase it away if it comes too close. With the torch in hand, you climb onto the cage above the cowering dog, so as to leave the opening and the way to the cave free while releasing the animal. With one hand you reach down to the lock and open it at once. The hound sprints off and in a moment runs past Publius and into the dark cavity. You carefully climb back down and start following the dog. At the entrance to the cave, with Publius still wearing an un-descriptive smile, you listen out. If the She-Wolf beats the hound, you might need to stay safe outside, or turn to fire or the golden bough. You hear cries and wincing. Later, you see the hound happily trotting towards you, tail wagging, tongue drooping, blood dripping from its flews. You cannot but feel sympathy for the previously aggressive dog. "I think you did it!" exclaims Publius and pets the dog. "Shall we go?" You cannot help but smile back, following your first success on your journey to the underworld...

The further you go down, the warmer the cave seems to become. It is not as dry as you imagined this place to be. You are not sure what you imagined, but the stories always gave you the impression of unbearable heat and dryness. Though it is hot, it is humid. Severely humid. You start perspiring. The hound is panting more and more. Publius seems unbothered, striding next to you with his immutable smile. "You know, life – I mean death – down here isn't so bad. Why are you here, actually?" he asks. You hesitate. It has always been difficult for you to talk about this. "I might be able to bring someone back.", you say. "Someone who did not deserve to go so soon." Publius looks at you. "How do you know they're down here, and not, you know" – he motions towards the ceiling – "up there?". The answer is shameful. It is an answer that you have been trying

to erase from people's minds for a long time. Yet, you do not seem to have anything to lose. "The person in question was never baptised and according to the books..." you motion towards the ground in the same circular motion you have observed Publius to be in the habit of doing. "I see", Publius acknowledges your words. "I am here for a similar reason. Neither was I! Because it didn't exist then." He laughs. "But apparently, I was still a good person, which is why *they*" – circular motion towards the ground - "made me an honorary member." You nod, pretending to understand. You keep walking in silence. The hound wags its tail in appreciation of you, its new travelling companion. Lost in your thoughts, you continue further down.

The fabric on your body feels wet. You start seeing a light at the end of the tunnel and soon you do not need the torch to light the way. Energised by the apparition of light, you walk faster. The closer you get to the glow, the more plants are winding themselves around the walls of the cave.

Suddenly, you trip. You catch yourself and look up. Rabbits, innumerable rabbits, are streaming from the cave walls towards the light source. The hound starts and chases after them. You call after it. To your surprise, it obeys and reluctantly comes back to you. "Ah yes", Publius notes from behind you. "This will be important. Follow the rabbit". You turn around to him, wondering just which rabbit you are supposed to follow, but when you look up, your dead companion is gone. You feel less safe without him but accompanied by your hound and the torch still in hand, you keep going.

You keep walking for a short distance and you find yourself exiting the cave. You look around. Everything is green, warm, moist, tropical. There are hills and trees and you see a long-winding river. You see rabbits again! A black rabbit runs to your left, a white one to your right, and a brown one straight ahead.

Do you

A) Follow the black rabbit? → Go to page 16

B) Follow the brown rabbit? → Go to page 20

C) Follow the white rabbit? → Go to page 22

GO TO HELL

Brown rabbits are common. You think about which rabbit to choose, whether to go left or right. “Let us go to the dark side, to the left”, you tell your hound. You are in the underworld, after all. The hound happily starts following the black rabbit. You chase it through a thick forest. The path is difficult. You climb over, around and under roots and fallen trees. You almost lose sight of the rabbit several times. You find this exhausting. Finally, you reach the river. It is wide, and dark, and reaches as far as the eye can see. The water is in the shade up to about two thirds of its width. You believe you see rays of sunshine past that point. You are not the best swimmer and are afraid of potential dangers lurking in the water, so you hope that you do not need to cross the river. You look around, searching for the black rabbit. You pause. You can hear sobs coming from further up the river. You follow the sound and find the black rabbit on a woman’s lap. Her long hair weaves around her body and her face is hidden by her hands. “Hello...”, you greet her, while holding back your hound, who is ready to jump at the rabbit again. She gasps in surprise and takes her hands off her face. “Hello, traveller.” She presents a brave smile. “I have lost my husband. He is on the other side. I have been travelling for days. I am so weak, I cannot drive my boat across the river.” She starts sobbing again. Understanding her pain and loss, you look for her boat. If her husband is on the other side, the person that you are looking for might be as well. “I need to cross the river too. Maybe I can help you”, you offer. She raises her gaze. “Of course”, her eyes twinkle with hope. “My boat is over there.” You walk even further up the stream and find a wooden boat, tied to a tree trunk. There is one paddle. You untie the boat and lead it down to the woman. It is spacious enough for both of you, the rabbit, and your hound. “I think we should not touch the water”, she says. You nod in agreement. Even with the boat touching the water, it is perfectly black and seamless, as if nothing could disturb the calm of its surface. You hold the boat while she, holding the bunny, and your hound embark. You stick your faithful torch in the soil, not knowing how to safely bring it with you across the river. You take the rope into one hand, the paddle in the other and when you step onto the boat, push yourself off the river bank with one leg. You steady yourself and start paddling. The woman smiles. “What brings you here?”, she asks. You sigh. “The

same as you, I suppose. There is someone whom I have lost.” She nods. “My husband is here. I am asked to remarry but I cannot do that. I want him back.”, she says with a quivering voice. “Has this ever worked? Bringing people back?”, you ask. She leans back. “I don’t know”, she says. “But we have to try, don’t we?”. You keep paddling across the river. You start seeing shadows, creatures, even darker than the water itself, scurrying beneath the surface. You start feeling somewhat dizzy. “Is something wrong?”, the woman asks. You do not want to worry her, so you say no. Your hound has discovered the shadows as well but the look you throw makes it stay silent and cover onto the bottom of the boat. There are more and more shadows, now coming close to the surface but never breaking it. Some of the shadows look like hands, trying to reach out to you. You need to sit down. You keep paddling. “Oh, I’m feeling so funny”, she exclaims, throws both her arms behind her and makes the boat rock. The rabbit falls off her lap and hides behind her legs. “Be careful!”, you tell her. She does not seem to hear. You start feeling thirsty. The type of thirsty when you have just eaten something too sweet and it dries your tongue and your mouth and you wish to wash away the taste. The type of thirsty that makes you keep your mouth shut so others cannot smell how dry it is. You have a quick peek at the water. You cannot see any shadows in the water in the sunlight. Maybe it is safe over there. You look at the water again and hesitate. *No, I cannot drink now.* You don’t know what touching the water with your bare hands could bring about. “Oh, I am so thirsty!”, the woman claims out. She tries to sit up but loses her balance and falls back on the planks. “I am so dizzy!” So are you, but the idea of danger makes you keep your wits about you. She tries turning around. “I want to drink.”, she says, feverishly. “No!”, you shout at her and pull her up, almost losing your balance once again. You notice that your field of view is getting more and more reduced. You hold onto the ship’s rail. You are roughly in the middle of the two river banks, thus close to the water touched by sunlight. The river without shadows. “But I want to drink!”, she shouts, and lets herself fall off the boat. “NO!”, you scream. Her body breaks the surface of the water with a great sound. Worried, you lean over the rail in search for her. Her face, turned towards you, screaming bubbles, is slowly pulled deeper and deeper. Without warning, half

a dozen shadows, creatures looking like tall cloaked men whose souls were bereaved, surface and gather above the impact point. *Quick! Light. Light. Maybe they react to light. Can I save her? Can I save myself?*

Do you

A) try going back to the initial shore for fire? → Go to page 40

B) try crossing the river to bring yourself to safety? → Go to page 42

GO TO HELL

You decide to follow the rabbit that is on the path that you are already on: the brown rabbit. You miss your friendly guide Publius but are glad that the hound is still by your side and that you are still carrying fire. You realise that you are on a hill and that the rabbit is leading you down, in the direction of the river. It is wide, muddy and reaches as far as the eye can see. As you reach the river bank, you notice that you have lost sight of the rabbit. *Where could it have gone?* you wonder. *Did it cross the river?* In your world – in the world, rather – rabbits do not swim. You remind yourself once again that you have reached a place where the laws and rules that you have identified and gathered throughout your life do not need to be respected. You look to your left. You look to your right. No rabbit in sight. Your hound seems to have lost its trail as well. *It must have crossed the river.* Nodding to yourself, you take off your shoes and hold them up with your free hand. You start wading through the river. You are not the best swimmer and are aware of potential dangers awaiting you in the water but it is not deep and the current is not strong either. The hound faithfully follows you into the water. You pull your clothes up as the water deepens. Soon, the hound is swimming. The current gets stronger. You slip and your shoes and torch fall into the water. The fire is gone.

You are not ready to let go. You are not ready to let go of hope. You are not ready to let go of that person that you love. According to the stories, you must go on. There is a place, deep, deep inside. You take strong steps, carefully placing the sole of your feet on the rocky stones of the riverbed. The hound howls. You look around. You see thick, leathery backs. Dark green scales, powerful, swimming tails. They are coming closer to you. Rapidly. Your hound howls again and swims ahead of you. You try to swim instead of walking. You want to reach the other bank fast. You do not swim well, you are panicked, you are slow. Your hound seizes your hand and tries to pull on it to help you move. You flail your arms and punch the water in order to keep the enemies away. A crocodile grabs your arm and starts twisting its body...

The END

GO TO HELL

Brown rabbits are common. So are black rabbits. You have trusted the stories until now and the stories always have a white rabbit. You look at your hound, as though looking for counsel. It seems to smile and it is wagging its tail. “Let’s follow the white rabbit.”, you say. Your hound enthusiastically jumps up and starts following the trail. The white rabbit always stays at a similar distance from you and you scarcely need to adapt your cadence. The hound is thorough and dutifully keeps its nose to the ground and follows the scent in case you might lose sight of the lagomorph. You notice the rabbit hopping up and down small hills towards the river bank. The water is wide, clear blue, and reaches as far as the eye can see. Despite it being clear, it is deep and you look for a way of crossing the river without having to swim, as you never learnt how to swim well and there might be dangers lurking around. You see a wooden pillar on the waterfront and a small boat tied to it. Ashore, there is a man who seems to be heaving cabbage onto the boat’s deck. The white rabbit jumps onto some stray cabbage leaves and eats them. The man laughs a deep laugh. He grabs the rabbit, strokes it and moves it away from the cabbage. *A boat!* That is your chance to get across the river, if that is the direction that the rabbit is indicating. You run down. “Sir! Sir!”, you call out. The man interrupts his work. He lifts his blazing blue eyes onto you. “Sir, does the rabbit want to cross the river?”, is the first question that comes to your mind. You then realise what a strange question that is, and wonder how the man could ever know the rabbit’s intentions. “Why, yes, of course the rabbit wants to cross the river”, he responds. You are confused yet everything on this journey lacks the sense you would normally attribute to things. “But it will have to wait until I have brought the cabbage over. Otherwise it will eat all of it, and the man to whom I owe the cabbage will be very angry.”, the man adds and puts the rabbit back down onto the ground, the cabbage safely stowed on his boat. Your hound was just waiting to be in proximity of the rabbit again and leaps for it. “Stop!”, you yell at it and try to grab hold of its neck. “We need the man’s boat, we can’t eat his bunny!”. Your hound listens. “I am so sorry, Sir”, you apologise. “I think my hound and I need to cross that river. Could we borrow your boat?” You are not very hopeful and scold your dog once more. The man looks sceptically from you, to your dog, to the

rabbit, to the cabbage. “Why, yes.”, he says indifferently. “That will save me the trip.” You are relieved. “But!”, the man interjects. “You need to bring my neighbour the cabbage, and bring the rabbit over.” “Sure”, you say. “And there is only room for one helmsman and the cabbage, or the rabbit, or your hound at a time. And I doubt that you can leave the rabbit alone with the cabbage, nor your hound with the rabbit.” You are confused. “If you can help me with that, I will lend you my boat.” You listen closely. The man takes a deep breath. “Can you, without my help and in as few trips as possible, bring over the cabbage, the rabbit, and the hound, when, if left alone together, the rabbit eats the cabbage and the hound eats the rabbit and you can only carry one at a time? I will give you a few moments, otherwise I will go about my day.”, and he sits down against the pillar. You and the hound sit down as well. You pet its ears while thinking about the riddle.

You

- A) think it is impossible. → Go to page 24
- B) ask the man to help you nonetheless. → Go to page 28
- C) think you have found an answer. → Go to page 56
- D) change your mind and start following the brown rabbit’s trail. → Go to page 36
- E) change your mind and start following the black rabbit’s trail. → Go to page 52

“I don’t think there’s a possible solution to this...” you utter, after careful reflection. The man stares at you. “What do you mean?”, he shouts. You stare back in surprise at his sudden change of temper. “Of course, it is possible! Are you implying that I am giving you impossible riddles or are you just stupid? I’ll say it one more time, but don’t mess with me again.” The man takes a deep breath. “How can you, without my help and in as few trips as possible, bring over the cabbage, the rabbit, and the hound, when, if left alone together, the rabbit eats the cabbage and the hound eats the rabbit and you can only carry one at a time? I will give you a few moments, otherwise I will go about my day.”, and he sits back down against the pillar. You and the hound sit back down as well. You pet its ears while thinking about the riddle.

You

- A) insist that the riddle is impossible. → Go to page 26
- B) ask the man to help you nonetheless. → Go to page 32 You think. The man insists that the riddle is possible.
- C) think you have found an answer. → Go to page 56
- D) change your mind and start following the brown rabbit’s trail. → Go to page 36
- E) change your mind and start following the black rabbit’s trail. → Go to page 52

GO TO HELL

“There is no solution to this riddle”, you insist. “ARE YOU DEAF?”, he roars. He gets up and starts throwing punches at you. “I said what I said!”, he yells. You try to calm him down. He does not listen. “Stop wasting my time!” He lands a punch on your temple. You put your hand to your face in pain and run away.

Do you

- A) start following the brown rabbit’s trail? → Go to page 38
- B) start following the black rabbit’s trail? → Go to page 48

GO TO HELL

You think. The whole matter seems difficult to you. “Are you sure you could not help me and just watch the animals while I bring over the cabbage and then I come back for them?”. The man stares at you. “What do you mean?”, he shouts. You stare back in surprise at his sudden change of temper. “I said what I said! You have to do it alone or I will not lend you my boat. Why should I waste my time watching your hound when I could just bring my cabbage and the bunny over? Either you solve that riddle and drive over yourself or I am not helping you. I’ll say the riddle one more time, but don’t mess with me again.” The man takes a deep breath. “How can you, without my help and in as few trips as possible, bring over the cabbage, the rabbit, and the hound, when, if left alone together, the rabbit eats the cabbage and the hound eats the rabbit and you can only carry one at a time? I will give you a few moments, otherwise I will go about my day.”, and he sits back down against the pillar. You and the hound sit back down as well. You pet its ears while thinking about the riddle.

You

- A) insist that the riddle is impossible. → Go to page 34
- B) ask the man for help again. → Go to page 30
- C) think you have found an answer. → Go to page 56
- D) change your mind and start following the brown rabbit’s trail. → Go to page 36
- E) change your mind and start following the black rabbit’s trail. → Go to page 52

GO TO HELL

“Are you sure you cannot help me?”, you plead. “ARE YOU DEAF?”, he roars. He gets up and starts throwing punches at you. “I said what I said!”, he yells. You try to calm him down. He does not listen. “Stop wasting my time!” He lands a punch on your temple. You put your hand to your face in pain and run away.

Do you

- A) start following the brown rabbit’s trail? → Go to page 38
- B) start following the black rabbit’s trail? → Go to page 48

GO TO HELL

You think. The man insists that the riddle is possible. Yet the whole matter seems very complicated to you. “Can you not help me?”, you ask. “ARE YOU DEAF?”, he roars. He gets up and starts throwing punches at you. “I said what I said!”, he yells again. You try to calm him down. He does not listen. “Stop wasting my time!” He lands a punch on your temple. You put your hand to your face in pain and run away.

Do you

- A) start following the brown rabbit’s trail? → Go to page 38
- B) start following the black rabbit’s trail? → Go to page 48

GO TO HELL

You think. The man does not want to help you. Maybe the riddle is not possible in the first place or the man doesn't even know the answer to his own riddle. "I think there is no possible answer to this riddle", you say, confrontationally. "ARE YOU DEAF?", he roars. He gets up and starts throwing punches at you. "I said what I said!", he yells again. You try to calm him down. He does not listen. "Stop wasting my time!" He lands a punch on your temple. You put your hand to your face in pain and run away.

Do you

- A) start following the brown rabbit's trail? → Go to page 38
- B) start following the black rabbit's trail? → Go to page 48

GO TO HELL

You think hard about the riddle. You draw in the sand to help you think. This is all not working out the way you thought. Maybe you should have followed a different rabbit. You turn around to your hound. “Do you think you could find the brown rabbit again?” It wags its tail. You take that sign as a yes. “Thank you for your time, Sir.”, you tell the man. “I have decided to go a different way.” You and your hound get up and leave the white rabbit and the man to his cabbage. You miss your friendly guide Publius but are glad that the hound is still by your side and that you are still carrying fire. The trail leads you back over hills until bringing you in proximity of the river. The water is wide, muddy and reaches as far as the eye can see. Your hound follows the rabbit’s trail, nose on the ground until you reach the river bank. *Where could it have gone?* you wonder. *Did it cross the river?* In your world – in *the* world, rather – rabbits do not swim. You remind yourself once again that you have reached a place where the laws and rules that you have identified and gathered throughout your life do not need to be respected. You look to your left. You look to your right. No rabbit in sight. *It must have crossed the river.* Nodding to yourself, you take off your shoes and hold them up with your free hand. You start wading through the river. It is not deep. The current is not strong either. The hound faithfully follows you into the water. You pull your clothes up as the water gets deeper. Soon, the hound is swimming. The current gets stronger. You slip and your shoes and torch fall into the water. The fire is gone.

You are not ready to let go. You are not ready to let go of hope. You are not ready to let go of that person that you love. According to the stories, you must go on. There is a place, deep, deep inside. You take strong steps, carefully placing the soles of your feet on the rocky stones of the riverbed. The hound howls. You look around. You see thick, leathery backs. Dark green scales, and powerful, swimming tails. They are coming closer to you. Rapidly. Your hound howls again and swims ahead of you. You try to swim instead of walking. You want to reach the other bank fast. You cannot swim very well, you are stricken with panic, you are slow. Your hound seizes your hand and tries to pull on it to help you move. You flail your arms and punch the water in order to keep the enemies away. A crocodile grabs your arm and starts twisting its body...

GO TO HELL

The END

You run away from the angry man. Never would you have expected him to lose his temper this much when you first met him. You think that maybe you should have followed a different rabbit from the start. You turn around to your hound. “Do you think you could find the brown rabbit again?” It wags its tail. You take that sign as a yes. You miss your friendly guide Publius but are glad that the hound is still by your side and that you are still carrying fire. The trail leads you back over hills until bringing you in proximity of the river. It is wide, muddy and reaches as far as the eye can see. Your hound follows the rabbit’s trail, nose on the ground until you reach the river bank. *Where could it have gone?* you wonder. *Did it cross the river?* In your world – in *the* world, rather – rabbits do not swim. You remind yourself once again that you have reached a place where the laws and rules that you have identified and gathered throughout your life do not need to be respected. You look to your left. You look to your right. No rabbit in sight. Your hound seems to have lost its trail as well. *It must have crossed the river.* Nodding to yourself, you take off your shoes and hold them up with your free hand. You start wading through the river. It is not deep. The current is not strong either. The hound faithfully follows you into the water. You pull your clothes up as the water gets deeper. Soon, the hound is swimming. The current gets stronger. You slip and your shoes and torch fall into the water. The fire is gone.

You are not ready to let go. You are not ready to let go of hope. You are not ready to let go of that person that you love. According to the stories, you must go on. There is a place, deep, deep inside. You take strong steps, carefully placing the soles of your feet on the rocky stones of the riverbed. The hound howls. You look around. You see thick, leathery backs. Dark green scales, and powerful, swimming tails. They are coming closer to you. Rapidly. Your hound howls again and swims ahead of you. You try to swim instead of walking. You want to reach the other bank fast. You cannot swim very well, you are panicked, you are slow. Your hound seizes your hand and tries to pull on it to help you move. You flail your arms and punch the water in order to keep the enemies away. A crocodile grabs your arm and starts twisting its body...

GO TO HELL

The END

She's fallen. She's fallen into the water. There are monstrous shadows around the boat on the side leading to – you hope – safety. You panic. You do not have much time now. You have no guarantee any of this will work. You grab the paddle with all your might and start rowing back to the initial shore. You want to reach the torch. The fire is still burning. Maybe you can set fire to the boat and chase the shadows away. *How will I get across?* One thing at a time. You row as fast as your muscles take you. The boat stops abruptly. The shadows have gotten hold of it. They are coming closer to you. “Jump!”, you tell your dog. It jumps, you jump. You swim faster than you ever have before. You put one arm in front of the other, push with your legs. You don't know how you are able to breathe but you are. You get to the shore. You grab the torch. “Watch out!”, you shout to the hound, to the shadows, to the rabbit that must be gone by now, to whomever will listen, and you throw the burning branch with all the remaining strength that you can muster on the wooden boat. Unbelievably, it hits. A few seconds go past and the boat is on fire. The growing number of creatures – against all odds – flee into all directions at the sight of the fire. They haste to the left, to the right, into the water, you are not sure where they go, but they go. You are panting. You are sorry for the rabbit, that you may have burned alive. You could not have taken it. Either one or both of you would have drowned. You are sorry for the woman. So sorry. You wanted to help her. She had lost someone, just like you. You wanted to protect her, just like you wanted to protect the person who left too soon. In a last stream of hope, you jump back into the water, you swim, all the way to the impact point. You look for her. You dive. You have never dived before. You do not find her. You look some more. You lose consciousness.

You feel sand under your feet. Miraculously, you have made it onto the other shore. You sit down, cover your face with your hands and cry. You look up and take in your surroundings. Your clothes are dripping with water. Your hair is in your face. You can feel sand between your toes. You turn your head and next to you the hound is sitting, happy, wagging its tail, gently holding a live, black, rabbit in its mouth.

GO TO HELL

→ Go to page 46

She's fallen. She's fallen into the water. There are monstrous shadows around the boat on the side leading to – you hope – safety. You panic. You do not have much time now. You have no guarantee any of this will work. You grab the paddle with all your might and start rowing to the shore you have been aiming towards. You circle around the shadows. You can feel their presence affecting your body and spirit. "I can do this!", you yell. You row and you row with all the strength that you can muster. The shore is not far. The sunlight is so close. The boat stops. The shadows have gotten hold of it. It won't move. In an act of desperation, you jump into the water...

→ Go to page 44

GO TO HELL

You wake up in the scorching sun. You are lying on sand. You have made it to the shore. You check all your limbs. You are safe and sound. Next to you, the hound is curled up. It has all its limbs too. You look over the river, try to recall what has happened. You are unsure of how much time has gone by since you entered the cave. Since you entered this world. Have you ever entered this world? Were you always in it? You remember the woman who had lost her husband, whom you wanted to bring safely to the shore. You are sorry for her. So sorry. You wanted to help her. She had lost someone, just like you. You wanted to protect her, just like you wanted to protect the person who left too soon. You cover your face with your hands and cry. You cry out of desperation, you cry out of exhaustion. You are not even sure why you cry. You don't know what is real. You feel a tongue licking your fingers. You remove your hands. The hound licks the tears off your face. You smile at it with appreciation. The dog goes back down to the river to drink. Nothing happens. The dark part of the river is calm. Nothing happens. You go down to the river to drink too.

→ Go to page 58

GO TO HELL

You see the black rabbit, safely dangling from the hound's mouth. You laugh. You laugh at the absurdity of the situation. At the absurdity of the world in which you are. At the absurdity of your journey. You are sad, you are relieved. You are hurting. You are laughing. "Let go", you chuckle at the dog. The dog gently puts down the black rabbit. It hops away. "Let's follow it, shall we?". The hound wags its tail.

You walk, glad to bring as much distance as possible between you and the river of shadows and death. It is scorching hot. The type of heat that makes your body feel heavy and your skull pressured. The type of heat that makes all your limbs and soul yearn for an explosion of the skies to release the tension. The sand falling through your sandals burns your feet. The hound winces at the pain in its paw pads. You walk. You think of them. You cannot believe how much you have been through on this journey. Still, you have no guarantee you can find them or bring them back. You are not sure of where you are, you are not sure of where you are going. You are not even sure it is real. For an instant, you think you might be dead. *There is no point in doubting now*, you tell yourself. *I will keep going*. Your heart wavers between the pain of loss and the strength of determination. Maybe, maybe you can bring them back. Cure them. Make them whole again. They were so young. Too young. You have missed them every day since they left and you cannot bear the thought of salvation come too late. The hound and you follow the rabbit.

"We have spent quite some time together now, haven't we?", you ask the dog. You are grateful for a companion, however unilateral the conversation. Though in pain, the hound seems to smile at this idea. It walks quickly to avoid touching the burning sand for long. You can feel your head getting hotter and feeling more and more disoriented.

You see a silhouette afar. You lift your hand to your dazed head. "Can you see that too"? The hound barks. As you approach, the silhouette becomes more and more apparent. It is a man who is writing on parchment. At his feet: three rabbits. One black, one brown, one white. For a moment, you are worried that he will be violent, angry. He mumbles "arrives on time with hound, after following the black rabbit." You stare in bewilderment. You hear the feather scratch against

GO TO HELL

the skin. “Done!”, he cheers. He rolls the parchment up. “I am writing a story on living souls coming to get dead ones. I hope you don’t mind my using you as inspiration.” *What a funny place the underworld is*, you think. “I don’t mind, I suppose.”, you tell him. “I am Durante”, the writer says. “But you can call me Dante. Would you mind if I accompanied you to the dead souls? For inspiration only of course.” You are not sure about wanting witnesses when you see them again. Yet, this man might be able to guide you. “Do you know how to get to... the dead souls?”, you ask him. “Of course! This is not my first time here, after all.”

Do you

A) go with Dante? → Go to page 64

B) go on your own? → Go to page 62

You run away from the angry man. Never would you have expected him to lose his temper this much when you first met him. You think that maybe you should have followed a different rabbit from the start. You turn around to your hound. “Do you think you could find the black rabbit again?” It wags its tail. The hound happily starts following the black rabbit’s trail. You chase it through a thick forest. The path is difficult. You climb over, around and under roots and fallen trees. You find this exhausting. Finally, you reach the river. It is wide, and dark, and reaches as far as the eye can see. The water is in the shade up to about two thirds of its width. You believe you see rays of sunshine past that point. You look around, searching for the black rabbit. You pause. You can hear sobs coming from further up the river. You follow the sound and find the black rabbit on a woman’s lap. Her long hair weaves around her body and her face is hidden by her hands. “Hello...”, you greet her, while holding back your hound, who is ready to jump on the rabbit again. She gasps in surprise and takes her hands off her face. “Hello, traveller.” She presents a brave smile. “I have lost my husband. He is on the other side. I have been travelling for days. I am so weak, I cannot drive my boat across the river.” She starts sobbing again. Understanding her pain and loss, you look for her boat. If her husband is on the other river side, the person that you are looking for might be as well. “I need to cross the river too. Maybe I can help you”, you offer. She raises her gaze. “Of course,”, her eyes twinkle with hope. “My boat is over there.” You walk even further upstream and find a wooden boat, tied to a tree trunk. There is one paddle. You untie the boat and lead it down to the woman. It is spacious enough for the both of you, the rabbit, and your hound. “I think we should not touch the water”, she says. You nod in agreement. Even with the boat touching the water, it is perfectly black and seamless, as if nothing could disturb the calm of its surface. You hold the boat while she, holding the bunny, and your hound embark. You stick your faithful torch in the soil, not knowing how to safely bring it with you across the river. You take the rope into one hand, the paddle in the other and when you step onto the boat, push yourself off the river bank with one leg. You steady yourself and start paddling. The woman smiles. “What brings you here?”, she asks. You sigh. “The same as you, I suppose. There is someone who I have

lost.” She nods. “My husband is here. I was asked to remarry but I cannot do that. I want him back.”, she says with a quivering voice. “Has this ever worked? Bringing people back?”, you ask. She leans back. “I don’t know”, she says. “But we have to try, don’t we?”. You keep paddling across the river. You start seeing shadows, creatures, even darker than the water itself, scurrying beneath the surface. You start feeling somewhat dizzy. “Is something wrong?”, the woman asks. You do not want to worry her, so you say no. Your hound has discovered the shadows as well but the look you throw makes it stay silent and cower at the bottom of the boat. There are more and more shadows, now coming close to the surface but never breaking it. Some of the shadows look like hands, trying to reach out to you. You need to sit down. You keep paddling. “Oh, I’m feeling so funny”, she exclaims, throws both her arms behind her and makes the boat rock. The rabbit falls off her lap and hides behind her legs. “Be careful!”, you tell her. She does not seem to hear. You start feeling thirsty. The type of thirsty when you have just eaten something too sweet and it dries your tongue and your mouth and you wish to wash away the taste. The type of thirsty that makes you keep your mouth shut so others cannot smell how dry it is. You have a quick peek at the water. You cannot see any shadows in the water in the sunlight. Maybe it is safe over there. You look at the water again and hesitate. *No, I cannot drink now.* You don’t know what touching the water with your bare hands could bring about. “Oh, I am so thirsty!”, the woman cries out. She tries to sit up but loses her balance and falls back on the planks. “I am so dizzy!” So are you, but the idea of danger makes you keep your wits about you. She tries turning around. “I want to drink.”, she says, feverishly. “No!”, you shout at her and pull her up, almost losing your balance once again. You notice that your field of view is getting more and more reduced. You hold onto the ship’s rail. You are roughly in the middle of the two river banks, thus close to the water touched by sunlight. The river without shadows. “But I want to drink!”, she shouts, and lets herself fall of the boat. “NO!”, you scream. Her body breaks the surface of the water with a great sound. Worried, you lean over the rail in search for her. Her face, turned towards you, screaming bubbles, is slowly pulled deeper and deeper. Without warning, half a dozen shadows, creatures looking like tall

cloaked men whose souls were bereaved, surface and gather above the impact point. *Quick! Light.*

Light. Maybe they react to light. Can I save her? Can I save myself?

Do you

A) try going back to the initial shore for fire? → Go to page 40

B) try crossing the river to bring yourself to safety? → Go to page 42

GO TO HELL

You think hard about the riddle. You draw in the sand to help you think. This is all not working out the way you thought. Maybe you should have followed a different rabbit. You turn around to your hound. “Do you think you could find the black rabbit again?” It wags its tail. You take that sign as a yes. “Thank you for your time, Sir.”, you tell the man. “I have decided to go a different way.” You and your hound get up and leave the white rabbit and the man to his cabbage. The hound happily starts following the black rabbit’s trail. You chase it through a thick forest. The path is difficult. You climb over, around and under roots and fallen trees. You find this exhausting. Finally, you reach the river. It is wide, and dark, and reaches as far as the eye can see. The water is in the shade up to about two thirds of its width. You believe you see rays of sunshine past that point. You look around, searching for the black rabbit. You pause. You can hear sobs coming from further up the river. You follow the sound and find the black rabbit on a woman’s lap. Her long hair weaves around her body and her face is hidden by her hands. “Hello...”, you greet her, while holding your hound back, ready to jump on the rabbit again. She gasps in surprise and takes her hands off her face. “Hello, traveller.” She presents a brave smile. “I have lost my husband. He is on the other side. I have been travelling for days. I am so weak, I cannot drive my boat across the river.” She starts sobbing again. Understanding her pain and loss, you look for her boat. If her husband is on the other river side, the person that you are looking for might be as well. “I need to cross the river too. Maybe I can help you”, you offer. She raises her gaze. “Of course,”, her eyes twinkle with hope. “My boat is over there.” You walk even further up the stream and find a wooden boat, tied to a tree trunk. There is one paddle. You untie the boat and lead it down to the woman. It is spacious enough for the both of you, the rabbit, and your hound. “I think we should not touch the water”, she says. You nod in agreement. Even with the boat touching the water, it is perfectly black and seamless, as if nothing could disturb the calm of its surface. You hold the boat while she, holding the bunny, and your hound embark. You stick your faithful torch in the soil, not knowing how to safely bring it with you across the river. You take the rope into one hand, the paddle in the other and when you step onto the boat, push yourself off the river bank with one leg.

You steady yourself and start paddling. The woman smiles. "What brings you here?", she asks. You sigh. "The same as you, I suppose. There is someone whom I have lost." She nods. "My husband is here. I was asked to remarry but I cannot do that. I want him back.", she says with a quivering voice. "Has this ever worked? Bringing people back?", you ask. She leans back. "I don't know", she says. "But we have to try, don't we?". You keep paddling across the river. You start seeing shadows, creatures, even darker than the water itself, scurrying beneath the surface. You start feeling somewhat dizzy. "Is something wrong?", the woman asks. You do not want to worry her, so you say no. Your hound has discovered the shadows as well but the look you throw makes it stay silent and cower at the bottom of the boat. There are more and more shadows, now coming close to the surface but never breaking it. Some of the shadows look like hands, trying to reach out to you. You need to sit down. You keep paddling. "Oh, I'm feeling so funny", she exclaims, throws both her arms behind her and makes the boat rock. The rabbit falls off her lap and hides behind her legs. "Be careful!", you tell her. She does not seem to hear. You start feeling thirsty. The type of thirsty when you have just eaten something too sweet and it dries your tongue and your mouth and you wish to wash away the taste. The type of thirsty that makes you keep your mouth shut so others cannot smell how dry it is. You have a quick peek at the water. You cannot see any shadows in the water in the sunlight. Maybe it is safe over there. You look at the water again and hesitate. *No, I cannot drink now.* You don't know what touching the water with your bare hands could bring about. "Oh, I am so thirsty!", the woman cries out. She tries to sit up but loses her balance and falls back on the planks. "I am so dizzy!" So are you, but the idea of danger makes you keep your wits about you. She tries turning around. "I want to drink.", she says, feverishly. "No!", you shout at her and pull her up, almost losing your balance once again. You notice that your field of view is getting more and more reduced. You hold onto the ship's rail. You are roughly in the middle of the two river banks, thus close to the water touched by sunlight. The river without shadows. "But I want to drink!", she shouts, and lets herself fall of the boat. "NO!", you scream. Her body breaks the surface of the water with a great sound. Worried, you lean over the rail in search for her. Her

face, turned towards you, screaming bubbles, is slowly pulled deeper and deeper. Without warning, half a dozen shadows, creatures looking like tall cloaked men whose souls were bereaved, surface and gather above the impact point. *Quick! Light. Light. Maybe they react to light. Can I save her? Can I save myself?*

Do you

C) try going back to the initial shore for fire? → Go to page 40

D) try crossing the river to bring yourself to safety? → Go to page 42

GO TO HELL

You take the dog's head into your hands. "Let's solve this riddle", you say. The hound wags its tail as excited as ever. You take a stick and start drawing in the soil. *If I take the cabbage first, the hound will eat the rabbit, so that cannot be it. If I take the hound first, the rabbit will eat the cabbage, so that cannot be it. What if I take the rabbit first?* You gasp! "I know!", you shout eagerly. "I have to go back and forth, don't I?" The man shrugs. "Yes, yes!", you exclaim. "I take the rabbit over, then I come back for either the hound or the cabbage. When I reach the other shore again, I exchange, say, the hound for the rabbit, come back with the rabbit, take the cabbage, leave the rabbit, bring the cabbage over, and come back for the rabbit!" "That is seven trips", the man mutters. You bite your lip, worried there was a better answer that you did not find. "That is correct.", the man agrees. Use my boat, bring the cabbage to my neighbour who lives in over there" – he points – "and leave it by the shore." You nod thankfully, leave your torch pushed into the soil on the bank and start paddling over the rabbit, the hound, and the cabbage. After your seven trips, you fasten the boat, the rabbit hops away, and you unload the cabbage. Bit by bit, you carry it to the place that the man indicated. This side of the river consists of sand. It is hot. There is nothing nearby, no house, no post. "Hello?", you call. "I am bringing cabbage." A door abruptly opens above the ground and from it exits a big, very big, very little-clothed man. "Did someone say CABBAGE?", he roars and goes on swearing, insulting, and shaming – you infer – the man who lent you his boat. "I am only the messenger", you raise your arms in sign of innocence, and hand him the cabbage. In the doorframe, behind the big man whose stomach covers his crotch, a number of naked and giggling women appear. They watch the man, hiding their laughing mouths and whisper to you, "He was always like this but it got worse when his neighbour got him sentenced to death." You look over to the raging man who is gathering the cabbage around him. You shiver. You remind yourself of where you are and of the fact that Publius was dead too. *At least Publius was nice and even-tempered.* "Oh, look! He is about to eat.", the women whisper. You turn your gaze to the more than well-fed man. He takes a deep breath, raises a first piece of cabbage to his mouth and devours it. In a heartbeat, the entire load of cabbage is gone and swallowed by the man. You rub your eyes. He slaps his

stomach and burps. The man seems appeased. “Shall we?”, he smirks at the women. They giggle, and they all disappear behind the door and the door disappears as well. You lift your eyebrows in incredulity. The hound sniffs the ground where the cabbage lay just an instant ago. “Well.”, you state. “Shall *we*?”, you ask the hound and the two of you start trotting land-inward, still following the trail of the rabbit.

→ Go to page 60

After having refreshed yourself by the river, you get up and start walking. You want to put as much distance between you and the river of shadows and death. You go land-inward, trying to guess the black rabbit's itinerary if you had not burned it alive. It is scorching hot. The type of heat that makes your body feel heavy and your skull pressured. The type of heat that makes all your limbs and soul yearn for an explosion of the skies to release the tension. The sand falling through your sandals burns your feet. The hound winces at the pain in its paw pads. You walk. You think of them, your person. You cannot believe how much you have been through on this journey. Still, you have no guarantee you can find them or bring them back.

You keep moving. You are not sure of where you are, you are not sure of where you are going. You are not even sure that what you are seeing is real. For an instant, you think you might be dead. *There is no point in doubting now*, you tell yourself. *I will keep going*. Your heart wavers between the pain of loss and the strength of determination. Maybe, maybe you can bring them back. Cure them. Make them whole again. They were so young. Too young. You have missed them every day since they left and you cannot bear the thought of salvation come too late. The hound and you follow the path that you think the rabbit might have taken.

"We have spent quite some time together now, haven't we?", you ask the dog. You are grateful for a companion, however unilateral the conversation. Though in pain, the hound seems to smile at this idea. It walks quickly to avoid touching the burning sand for long. You can feel your head getting hotter and feeling more and more disoriented.

You see a silhouette afar. You lift your hand to your dazed head. "Can you see that too?" The hound barks. As you approach, the silhouette becomes more and more apparent. It is a man who is writing on parchment. At his feet: three rabbits. One black, one brown, one white. You stare in bewilderment. It is there. The black rabbit is there. You wonder if it was ever alive in the first place. You feel relief in the notion that you were not responsible for its death. Then, you pull your focus on the man. For a moment, you are worried that he will be violent, angry. He mumbles "arrives on time with hound, did not keep up with the black rabbit." You hear the feather scratch

against the skin. “Done!”, he cheers. He rolls the parchment up. “I am writing a story on living souls coming to get dead ones. I hope you don’t mind my using you as inspiration.” *What a funny place the underworld is*, you think. “I don’t mind, I suppose.”, you tell him. “I am Durante”, the writer says. “But you can call me Dante. Would you mind if I accompanied you to the dead souls? For inspiration only of course.” You are not sure about wanting witnesses when you see them again. Yet, this man might be able to guide you. “Do you know how to get to... the dead souls?”, you ask him. “Of course! This is not my first time here, after all.”

Do you

A) go with Dante? → Go to page 64

B) go on your own? → Go to page 62

It is difficult for the dog to follow the white rabbit's trail in the sand. There is not much wind but enough to scatter the remaining scent. Sometimes you are lucky and are able to see the white rabbit in the distance. It is scorching hot. The type of heat that makes your body feel heavy and your skull pressured. The type of heat that makes all your limbs and soul yearn for an explosion of the skies to release the tension. The sand falling through your sandals burns your feet. The hound winces at the pain in its paw pads. You walk. You think of them. With a pinch to your heart, you realise that you have not thought of them in some time. You tell yourself that you were focused on the journey. Still, you cannot shake the feeling of guilt. They have been down here for years while you were alive and solving riddles. But you are here for them, because they did not deserve to go. Yet, you have no guarantee you can find them or bring them back. You are not sure of where you are, you are not sure of where you are going. You are not even sure it is real. For an instant, you think you might be dead. *There is no point in doubting now*, you tell yourself. *I will keep going*. Your heart wavers between the pain of loss and the strength of determination. Maybe, maybe you can bring them back. Cure them. Make them whole again. They were so young. Too young. You have missed them every day since they left and you cannot bear the thought of salvation come too late. The hound and you keep following the trail to the best of your abilities.

“We have spent quite some time together now, haven't we?”, you ask the dog. You are grateful for a companion, however unilateral the conversation. Though in pain, the hound seems to smile at this idea. It walks quickly to avoid touching the burning sand for long. You can feel your head getting hotter and you feel more and more disoriented.

You see a silhouette afar. You lift your hand to your dazed head. “Can you see that too”? The hound barks. As you approach, the silhouette becomes more and more apparent. It is a man writing on parchment. At his feet: three rabbits. One black, one brown, one white. For a moment, you are worried that he will be violent, angry. He mumbles “arrives on time with hound, after following the white rabbit.” You stare in bewilderment. You hear the feather scratch against the skin. “Done!”, he cheers. He rolls the parchment up. “I am writing a story on living souls coming

GO TO HELL

to get dead ones. I hope you don't mind my using you as inspiration." *What a funny place the underworld is, you think.* "I don't mind, I suppose.", you tell him. "I am Durante", the writer says. "But you can call me Dante. Would you mind if I accompanied you to the dead souls? For inspiration only of course." You are not sure about wanting witnesses when you see them again. Yet, this man might be able to guide you. "Do you know how to get to... the dead souls?", you ask him. "Of course! This is not my first time here, after all."

Do you

A) go with Dante? → Go to page 64

B) go on your own? → Go to page 62

You have come this far with little help, and you are unsure whether privacy-intruding-Dante will be of much help anyway. “We’re fine”, you say, pointing at your loyal canine friend and yourself. Dante seems insulted. “But it was really nice meeting you”, you add, worried. “And good luck with your writing.” “Sure”, Dante lifts his nose. “It’s over there”, he raises his hand in a very general direction. You thank him and leave. *What a weird fellow*, you tell yourself. Thankfully, it is steadily getting cooler and darker. Really, it feels to you as though your environment is losing all its colour. Everything seems to be turning to a dark grey, blue. The ground is not sand anymore. It consists of something whose touch you could never explain. It is as though there was no real ground at all and you could simply choose to float at another level. Bodies start appearing. Gloomy, livid bodies. Floating. They have faces, or so you think. Dark, sunken faces. In their surroundings, you feel positively empty. Devoid of all emotions. Even the hound is not wagging its tail. “Why are they all like this?”, you wonder, referring to the souls’ horrific expressions. You look around for your person. The bodies are scarce and widely scattered out. You cannot find them. Your heart sinks at the idea of not being able to recognise them. They must be further away. You see a palace. Monumental doors protect its entrance. Huge creatures, big, big creatures are guarding them. The hound growls at them. “Shhh”, you say, “let’s not make them angry.” You stand up tall and approach them with all your bravery. “Hello, I am looking for someone. I would like to enter the palace.” The creatures stare at you and for a moment you are afraid that they will get violent. They stare at you. Intently. Then they break out in roaring laughter. One of them slaps – what you believe to be – his thigh. They roar while pointing to their mouths and tongues and then laugh some more. You are unsure of what is happening. Should you feel afraid? You mainly feel humiliated. “Would you like me to ask them if they can let you in?”, you hear a voice from behind. You jump. It is Dante, grinning, conscious of your needing him. “They are laughing about your modern tongue.” Reluctantly and cursing both Dante for following you secretly and yourself for the humiliation, you agree. He approaches the guards and speaks to them in a language that you do not understand. He

GO TO HELL

seems to be making jokes. “They’ll let you in!”, he smirks. “Goodbye, traveller. Our paths part here. I’ll write that down, if you don’t mind.” Shaking your head, you enter the palace.

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“I think it might be helpful if you show me the way”, you tell Dante, and accept that he come with you. Dante seems very pleased with himself and leads the way. Dante asks you questions about your journey. He wants to know your thought process in making choices when you had different options. You do not love his pressing curiosity but you are grateful for the distraction. Thankfully, it is steadily getting cooler and darker. Really, it feels to you as though your environment is losing all its colour. Everything seems to be turning to a dark grey, blue. The ground is not sand anymore. It consists of something whose touch you could never explain. It is as though there was no real ground at all and you could simply choose to float at another level. Bodies start appearing. Gloomy, livid bodies. Floating. They have faces, or so you think. Dark, sunken faces. “Ah, our first souls!”, Dante exclaims. He scribbles something onto his parchment. Not really caring but looking for conversation you ask: “What will you do with all your notes?” “Oh”, he responds. “I might write a play, a tragedy, or even better: a comedy!”, he laughs. Looking around at all the souls, you cannot understand why anyone would be able to laugh in this environment. You feel positively empty. Devoid of all emotions. Even the hound is not wagging its tail. You wonder if Dante is dead or alive. “Why are they all like this?”, you wonder, referring to the souls’ horrific expressions. “These are the souls that have not yet accepted that they are dead”, Dante confirms, sounding terrifyingly happy. “You might want to start looking for your person”, he adds. In the distance, you see a building resembling a palace. You ask him if there are more souls, souls that have accepted death. “Yes”, he assures. “They are in there,”, he points at the palace. “But you might want to let me speak. There are guards and they may be offended by your modern tongue. Have you found your person yet?” You shake your head. You don’t know what you expected. Maybe you were wishing that you would find them here, not accepting, wishing to come back, confirming the necessity for your journey. Have they accepted death? Are they here at all? You approach the palace. Monumental doors protect its entrance. Huge creatures, big, big creatures are guarding them. “Would you like me to ask them if they can let you in?”, Dante grins, conscious of your needing him. You agree. He approaches the guards and speaks to them in a language that you do not

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understand. He seems to be making jokes. “They’ll let you in!”, he smirks. “You’ll find more souls in there. Goodbye, traveller. Our paths part here. You were very useful to me.” You enter the palace.

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The palace is dark. Dark, yet bright enough for you to see. You are not sure of how to describe what you are seeing. Are you seeing a new colour? No, it is just shades of blue and grey, is it not? There are no usual features of a building. You are in a pit. A dark pit. There are souls everywhere. There is no up. There is no down. It is as though the place were filled with water and you could choose the height at which you wanted to stand, or float. You go forward, not using your legs the way you generally would. Souls are flying around, some of them laughing, some of them dancing. You had prepared yourself to see suffering, punishment, torture, fire. There is none of that here. On your left, you spot a woman's soul. She is embracing a man's soul, they are twirling and you can hear her shout "my husband! Oh, my husband! I have found you at last!" You cannot help but smile. All the souls around you seem content. Yes. Content and serene. Does that mean your person is... happy here? You float around some more, discovering the pit, floating up and down, watching souls, blue, almost transparent bodies talking, playing games. You are so astonished to see this place not at all the way you imagined it. Yet, you feel more serene than you have since starting this journey and cannot but feel happy for the souls. You wonder if you can talk to them. You try to ask around, ask if they have seen them. They can hear you. They can talk to you. You can even touch them. They feel cold and light but you can touch them. Some of them do not know about whom you are talking, shrug and say, "There are so many of us here". You feel a little discouraged by that. But, some of the souls believe that they know who you mean. You describe them more thoroughly, remembering all the details on their face of the day on which they left you. They point you in certain directions. You follow them. The hound is still by your side, following your every floating step.

You are nervous. You wonder how you will react to seeing them. Can you bring them back? You grow more and more nervous. You don't know whether you would like to find them now or maybe never. *Oh, what a horrible thought*, you think. You visualise their face, look all around you. There! There! There they are! It is them! You are sure! You call their name. They turn around, face you. Their eyes widen with astonishment. They call your name. They run to you. You embrace.

You dance, you laugh. “I am so happy to see you!”, they exclaim. They have not aged a day since they left you. You put their face between your hands. Their expression darkens. “You are not dead yet, are you?”, they ask. You reassure them, looking at your more than colourful complexion. “No, no, I came here for you!” They tilt their head in bewilderment. “They’ve found a cure”, you continue, “to the illness that took you. I came to bring you home. Oh, please tell me I can bring you home.”

They close their eyes, shake their head. They say your name. “My dear, I love you. Thank you for coming all the way here. We cannot leave together. One living soul cannot bring out two living souls.” They smile at you. You cry. “Oh, please!”, you remove the tear drops from your face. “I miss you so, I have missed you since the day you left. You were so young... So young...” They put their cold hand on your chin, lift your head up. “I miss you too, but that is okay. People reunite. There might even be something after this.”, they motion all around them. “I am okay here. Hell isn’t bad”, they laugh. “How long can we both stay?”, you ask. “I don’t know. That depends on how much the guards liked you.”, they chuckle.

You tell them about the cure. About things at home. About what has happened on earth since they left. The two of you play with the hound.

You do not know how much time has passed but a guard approaches you and nods towards a door. You cry again.

Do you

A) leave them and go back home? → Go to page 70

B) convince them to go and stay in their stead? → Go to page 68

“I cannot leave you here”, you weep. The guard grunts and lifts one finger of each hand. A soul for a soul. “I’ll stay here instead of you!”, you shout in despair. They contemplate your eyes. “Are you sure you want that?”, they ask, with a trembling voice. “Please, yes. Go! Go back up, take my soul and heal your body, whatever you need to do, go!” They slightly shake their head at you. “Are you sure?” “Yes!”, you shout. “Why won’t you go! Take the hound with you.” They nod slowly. Very slowly. “If that is your wish...” You catch another last glance at them. “Tell everybody that I love them”, you say. “I will”, they say with a heavy voice. You embrace. They tell the hound to follow them. It winces as the distance between you grows greater. They go. They leave through a big doorway. They turn around one more time, wave at you. You wave back. You cry.

You are pulled down. Everything around you pulls you down, down into the darkness.

You wake up. Or at least you open your eyes. Your body feels light but your heart has never felt this heavy and you have never felt this miserable. You sit up. Afar, you see the great palace. Around you are a few scattered souls. You look at your hand. You can see through it.

The END

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“I cannot leave you here”, you weep. The guard grunts and lifts one finger of each hand. A soul for a soul. “Yes, you can.”, they counter. “Of course, you can. Listen to me.” They take your face into their hands. They wipe your tears away. “People meet again. I promise. Look at all these people around us.” You shake your head. “I love you and I will always love you, but I am down here and you belong up there. Please go back.” “No.” “Yes, you will. I appreciate you so much for coming here for me but I am not suffering. People up there are. Help them. Use the cure on them instead of me. They need it more. Please.” You nod. Your cheeks are sore. “Tell everybody that I love them.” You nod again. You embrace. “Now you go. I love you.” “I love you too”. You catch another glance at them. You tell your hound to come with you. You approach one of the big doorways. You turn back. You wave, they wave back. They smile. You try to. The doors close. All of a sudden you are pulled up. Everything around you seems to pull on your body and to pull you upward. You become dizzy. Everything becomes bright. Too bright. You lose consciousness.

You wake up. You open your eyes. It is dark. You feel grass underneath your hands. Your eyes adjust to the light. You are in front of the cave but you are alone. All alone. There is no Dante, no Publius, no hound, no them. You cannot even see the golden bough. There is, however, a fire. You crawl towards it, curl up and cry. You sleep until sunrise. You get up and start making the journey back to the New City. You feel strange. Different, maybe? You are still sad. But differently. The sadness within you feels uplifting. You feel love. You feel relief. Your body feels heavy from exhaustion but your heart feels lighter with every step and with every rising ray of sunshine. Yes, you feel love. And you feel more happiness the further you go. You realise how hopeless you had felt down there. It all feels like a dream. A bad dream. The closer you get to the New City, the more you can shake the feeling off. You get to the city walls. You walk along them, looking for an entrance. There is one not far away. You go around a bush. A stray dog jumps at you. It is a hound. A very happy hound.

The END