The Incredible Six Thousand-Foot Ladder To Heaven

A New Musical Fairy Tale

(excerpt)

Words and Music by
Ryan Martin
CHARACTERS
Hadley . . . female; 12 (to be played by 16+); headstrong and resourceful; grieving her deceased father

Spider . . . female; 12 (to be played by 16+); brilliant but socially inexperienced; steadfast and loving

Mom . . . female; late 30s/early 40s; trying and failing to help her daughter Hadley

Principal/Psychiatrist/Gatekeeper/Dad . . . male; late 30s/early 40s; played by one actor

PLACES
Scene 1 . . . The Principal’s Office, The Psychiatrist’s Office, Hadley’s Room

Scene 2 . . . Hadley’s Room

Scene 3 . . . The forest behind the Breaker home

Scene 4 . . . Heaven: The Meet-and-Greet, the Naturezone

Scene 5 . . . The Breaker Home

Scene 6 . . . Heaven: the Naturezone, the outskirts of the City

Scene 7 . . . The Breaker home, The forest behind the Breaker home
Scene 2

*In the prior scene Mom, Principal, and Psychologist encourage Hadley—with varying degrees of gentleness and tact—to find a way to move on from her father’s death (“What’s Best For You”). Fed up with all of them, Hadley locks herself in her room. That’s where we find her at the top of this scene:*

**3. “Turning Around”**

Mom

Hadley?

Hadley

Go away!

Mom

Hadley, will you please open up?

Hadley

It’s my room!

*Hadley grunts and kicks around the room, finding comfort in making a mess.*

Mom

What on Earth are you doing in there? Will you please just let me –

Hadley

THEY THINK THAT EVERYTHING’S SO EASY
IT’S LIKE THEY ONLY SEE THE
WORLD IN BLACK AND WHITE
PRESCRIBING ANTIDOTES PRECISELY
WOAH

THEIR CONDESCENSION MAKES ME QUEASY
IT’S LIKE THEY’RE SOMEHOW ALWAYS
CERTAIN THAT THEY’RE RIGHT
AND THEY EXPECT ME TO PLAY NICELY
NO

WELL SORRY I’M SO DAMN CONFUSING
THAT THEY CAN’T GET WHAT MY DEAL IS
THAT I’M NOT GETTING BETTER
BECAUSE I REALLY WANT TO FEEL THIS

SO I JUST KEEP TURNING AROUND
AND I TRY TO SEE YOU
Hadley
I SEARCH FOR YOU IN EVERY SOUND
SO EVEN THOUGH I KNOW
THEY SAY TO LET YOU GO
I HOLD MY GROUND
AND I KEEP TURNING AROUND
AND I KEEP TURNING AROUND
AND I KEEP

LET ME FLY
LIKE AN ANGEL THROUGH THE SKY

TAKE ME FAR
SEND ME UP TO WHERE YOU ARE

‘CUZ I JUST KEEP TURNING AROUND
AND I TRY TO SEE YOU
I SEARCH FOR YOU IN EVERY SOUND
SO THOUGH THE ODDS ARE ROUGH
I KNOW YOU RAISED ME TOUGH
TO HOLD MY GROUND
SO I KEEP TURNING AROUND
AND I KEEP TURNING AROUND

BUT I’LL ADMIT THAT IT GETS LONELY
WAITING AROUND FOR A MIRACLE TO COME
I KNOW THAT PEOPLE SAY I’M CRAZY
EVEN SO...

THINGS COULD BE WORSE THAN BEING LONELY
BETTER LONELY THAN TO LET MYSELF GO NUMB
SO LET THEM SAY THAT I’M CRAZY
THEY DON’T KNOW

THIS IS ME AND I DO THINGS MY WAY
IN CASE YOU NEEDED A REFRESHER
ENJOY, SIT BACK, GET COMFY
BECAUSE I’M TURNING UP THE PRESSURE

YEAH, I’LL JUST KEEP TURNING AROUND
UNTIL THE DAY I SEE YOU
I’LL SEARCH FOR YOU IN EVERY SOUND
AND EVEN THOUGH THERE’S GRIEF
IN KEEPING UP BELIEF
I HOLD MY GROUND
AND I KEEP TURNING AROUND
Hadley
AND I KEEP TURNING AROUND
AND I KEEP TURNING AROUND

Mom finally unlocks the door and sees the mess Hadley’s made through the course of the song.

Mom
What's going on in here?

Hadley
Huh. I thought I locked that door.

Mom
This mess! Your room is completely trashed! Hadley, you can’t just wreak havoc whenever you’re having a bad—

Hadley
Fine! Then I’ll just play outside so I don’t screw up your perfect house.

Mom
Hadley, don’t—

Beat, as Mom tries to swallow her anger.

I didn’t mean to yell. I didn’t mean to upset you—

Hadley
Well congratulations, you did.

Hadley grabs her bow and sulks offstage. Mom looks after her.

Mom
Don’t go too far… Hadley? Be home by six, ok? Hello?

Mom makes a sound somewhere between a sigh, a groan, and a suppressed yell. Then to Dad, who is unseen:

I know you’d know what to say.

No answer. Alone, she begins to clean Hadley’s mess.

Lights fade.

4. Into Forest Transition
Scene 3

_Lights up on the expansive woods beyond Hadley’s house. Hadley is deep within, sharpening new arrows. Her bow rests beside her. She works silently like this for a moment, then suddenly there’s a crunching noise offstage. In one fluid, practiced motion Hadley grabs her bow and points it in the direction of the noise, drawing an arrow._

_Hadley_  
Who’s there? Show yourself. Don’t try anything funny: I’m armed.

_Spider slowly emerges from the woods, petrified._

Who are you?

_Spider_  
Nobody.

_Hadley_  
What are you doing in my forest?

_Spider_  
This is your forest?

_Hadley_  
Yep.

_Spider_  
By inheritance or conquest?

_Hadley doesn’t know how to answer. Spider misreads her confusion:_

Oh my god, both?

_Hadley_  
Why were you spying on me?

_Spider_  
I wasn’t spying! I was just…staring at you. In secret.

_Hadley realizes this person probably isn’t a threat to her. She lowers her bow._

_Hadley_  
Why were you staring at me?

_Spider points to her bow._
Hadley
My bow?

Spider
I think it's awesome.

Hadley
I made it myself. Well, my Dad showed me how. But then I did it all myself.

Spider
Do you think he could show me how to make one?

Hadley
He’s dead.

Spider
Oh.

Pause.

Hadley
So what are you doing out here anyway?

Spider
We just moved here from Colorado. My parents are rocket scientists. I thought I’d check out the scene. Thought I might go a-lookin’ for some grizzly bears. To fight.

Hadley
You fight grizzly bears?

Spider
Psh! Yes. You don’t fight grizzly bears?

Hadley
I’ve been around every part of this forest pretty much, but I haven’t ever seen any bears.

Clearly relieved:

Spider
Oh, thank God.

Hadley
So what’s your name, anyway?
Spider

My name?

*Spider mumbles inaudibly.*

Hadley

I didn’t hear what you said.

*A little louder:*

Spider

Spider.

Hadley

Your name is Spider?

*Spider nods her head, “yes.”*

Really?

*Spider shakes her head, “no.”*

Then why did you say your name was Spider?

*Spider shrugs, embarrassed.*

Well…do you want me to call you Spider?

*Spider nods her head vigorously, “yes.”*


*Spider’s mouth goes agape.*

What is it?

Spider

You made yourself a bow and arrow, you have a dead parent, and your name sounds like a girl Harry Potter.

Hadley

I guess…

Spider

I’m sorry, it’s just that you’re literally the coolest person I’ve ever met in my life.
Hadley
Ok… Thanks.

5. “Someone To You”

Spider
Oh my god. I’m doing it again. I’m totally doing it again –

*Begin underscore.*

Hadley
Doing what?

Spider
I just made things weird. I did, I can tell by your face. Why do I always – great going, Amber!

*Remembering herself:*

I mean, “Spider.”

Hadley
Spider, it’s ok –

Spider
I’M NOT LIKE HISTORICALLY SPEAKING
THE AWESOME BADASS JENNIFER LAWRENCE
KIND OF PERSON
OFTEN, SPENDING TIME WITH ME MEANS PEOPLE SEE
THEIR SOCIAL STATUS WORSEN
NO I’M NOT TRYING TO SCARE YOU
BUT I SHOULD STILL PREPARE YOU

CUZ I’M NOT WHAT A PERSON MIGHT CALL “Sought
AFTER”
OR EVEN “BEGRUDINGLY INCLUDED”
BUT THEN AGAIN NOBODY CALLED ME “SPIDER” WHEN I
ASKED THEM TO ‘TIL YOU DID
JUST TELL ME IF I MISREAD YOU
BUT YOU CAN’T SAY THAT I MISLEAD YOU

CUZ I’VE NEVER BEEN ANYONE TO ANYONE BEFORE
NO I’VE NEVER BEEN ANYONE UNLESS IT’S SOMEONE TO
IGNORE
BUT I GUESS THAT’S THROUGH
‘CUZ YOU JUST MADE ME SOMEONE TO YOU
Spider

I’LL GO WHEREVER YOU GO
I’LL KNOW WHAT YOU NEED ME TO KNOW
I’LL BE YOUR RIGHT HAND ANYTIME OF DAY
I’LL HEED YOUR COMMAND—DO ANYTHING YOU SAY

SORRY, WAS THAT WEIRD OF ME? CUZ YOU’RE
LAUGHING AND I DON’T THINK IN A GOOD WAY
IT’S JUST THAT THIS IS BASICALLY BRAND NEW FOR ME
SO I DON’T KNOW WHAT FRIENDS SAY
BUT I’LL LEARN QUICKLY OR I’LL TRY TO
CUZ I REALLY, REALLY LIKE YOU

AND I’VE NEVER BEEN ANYONE TO ANYONE LIKE YOU
I HEARD THAT EVERYONE DESERVES A FRIEND BUT I
NEVER THOUGHT THAT’S TRUE
CUZ I NEVER KNEW
THAT YOU COULD MAKE ME SOMEONE TO YOU

AND YOU JUST MADE ME SOMEONE TO YOU

Hadley hugs Spider. Spider hugs her back. When they pull apart, Spider notices something in Hadley’s expression:

Spider

Oh no. You’re upset. You already regret taking me on as your friend and confidant. Well, I knew this day would come. I have to say, it’s been a wild, fantastic journey over these past twenty-seven seconds—I have absolutely no regrets—

Hadley

Spider, stop. No, I’m not – I mean, yeah, I’m upset, I guess. But not because of you. I miss my Dad.

Of sharpening her arrows:

He’s the one who taught me how to do this.

Spider

Maybe we should do something else then? So you don’t think about him?

Hadley

No! I want to think about him!
Spider
But it’s making you upset –

Hadley
Yeah, but it’s—never mind, you don’t get it. No one gets it. It’s fine; I’m fine.

They’re quiet. Then an epiphany:

Spider
Ohhhh. You miss your Dad so you want to do something that makes you feel connected to him like making arrows. But then feeling connected to him just makes you miss him more because it reminds you that he’s gone and never returning. All the same, you’ve decided that missing him is worthwhile as long as it keeps you connected to him. Gocha.

Hadley
Yeah. Yeah, that’s pretty much – yeah. How did you—

Spider
I’m very intelligent. If I’m weird it’s not because I’m—it’s just because I’m weird.

Hadley
Cool.

They sit together. Hadley, working on her arrows, missing her dad, and Spider wanting to help.

Spider
What if there’s a better way?

Hadley
What do you mean?

Spider
What if there were a way to connect you to your Dad without making you more upset?

Hadley
I can’t bring him back.

Spider
True.
Beat.

Spider
But what if you could go to him?

Hadley
Are you talking about…

Spider
A giant ladder that would reach all the way up to Heaven!

Hadley
Oh.

Beat.

Wait, what?

Spider
I said, a giant ladder that would reach all the way up to –

Hadley
No, I heard what you said. I’m just…surprised you said it.

Spider
You don’t think it would work?

Hadley shrugs.

Your Dad taught you to make the bow and arrow. Did he teach you how to make other stuff?

Hadley
All kinds of other stuff! He was a carpenter, he could make anything. He used to always say, “If it’s a woodworking trick or a David Bowie song, I know it!”

Spider
Did he ever teach you how to make a ladder?

Hadley
Well not exactly. But I could probably figure it out.

Spider
So what’s the problem?
Hadley
Do you really think a ladder could reach Heaven?

*Spider thinks for second.*

Spider
It would need to be very tall.

Hadley
Yeah. But…

Spider
Let’s consider it logically: it seems to me that either Heaven *is* a place or it *isn’t*, correct?

Hadley
Correct.

Spider
And if it’s a place, then it’s got to be somewhere we could get to, right?

Hadley
I guess so…How did you—

Spider
I told you, I’m very intelligent.

*Begin underscore:*

Hadley
It’s just – Earth’s atmosphere extends thousands of feet from where we are here on the ground. I’m not even sure I could build a six-foot ladder—let alone six thousand! And besides, we’re not even sure that’s where Heaven is. What if it doesn’t work?

Spider
Then we’ll go to Plan B.

Hadley
What’s plan B?

Spider
Plan B is to figure out a different plan—we’ll call that, “Plan C.” But we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.
6. “How You Climb”

Spider
HAVEN’T YOU CLIMBED UP A TREE BEFORE LIKE FORTY FEET OR MORE
IN ORDER TO HANG AN EPIC TIRE SWING?
WELL LISTEN UP, AND MAYBE WRITE THIS DOWN OR RECORD MY VOICE
CUZ THIS IS LIKE THE SAME THING

FROM THE BOTTOM IT’S A SCHHELP TO THE TOP
BUT ONLY ONE THING TO DO
JUST KEEP IT GOING STEP BY STEP AND DON’T STOP
YOU GOTTA KEEP PUSHING THROUGH
TIL YOU CHECK OUT THAT VIEW

THAT’S HOW YOU CLimb
ONE BRANCH AT A TIME
WHEN THE ROAD AHEAD SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE
AND YOU’RE JACK OUT OF LUCK
YOU JUST TAKE A BREATH AND A TINY STEP
TO PROVE THAT YOU’RE NOT STUCK
SURE, IT TAKES TIME
BUT THAT’S HOW YOU CLimb

Hadley
Climbing a tree, building a six thousand-foot ladder to the sky: basically analogous.

Spider
Now you’re getting it! It’s all the same thing:

WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT THE EMPEROR SAID TO DARTH VADER
WHEN THEY FIRST SHOWED HIM THE DEATH STAR PLANS?

Hadley
WEREN’T THOSE PLANS KINDA HALF-BAKED AND DEFECTIVE SINCE IT BLEW UP?

Spider
LOOK, MY POINT STILL STANDS
Spider
FROM THE STARTING LINE A MARATHON MAY SEEM PRETTY FAR

Hadley
IGNORE THE HATERS, KEEP YOUR EYES TO THE GROUND AND FORGET WHERE YOU ARE

Both
‘TIL YOU’VE BUILT THE DEATH STAR!

Hadley
THAT’S HOW YOU CLIMB ONE WRUNG AT A TIME WHEN THE WORLD IS TELLING YOU TO QUIT AND YOU WONDER IF THEY’RE RIGHT

Spider
KNOW THAT NOTHING TRULY WONDERFUL HAPPENS OVER NIGHT

Hadley
NO, IT TAKES TIME BUT THAT’S WHY YOU CLIMB

Hadley
Ah, crap. It’s way past six. My mom’s gonna be pissed. Meet back same time tomorrow?

Spider
Meet like, you and me?

Hadley
Yeah.

Spider
Ok!

Hadley
See ya!

Hadley turns to leave.

Spider
Bye, friend!

She immediately clamps her mouth shut.
Spider
Spider, what have you done?

Hadley
Bye, friend!

*Thrilled:*

Spider
Bye, frien—wait, I already…Spider, what have you done?

Segue back to the Breaker House.

Mom
There you are! It's almost dark, Hadley. Where were you?

Hadley
Making a mess.

Mom
Hadley…

Hadley
I promise I didn’t get into any trouble. I even made a friend.

Mom
Oh! You did? That’s—that’s wonderful! What's your friend’s name?

Hadley
Spider.

Mom
Oh – is that…French?

Hadley
I think it’s arachnid.

Mom
I see…And what did you and “Spider” do all day?

Hadley
We’re building a six-thousand foot ladder.

Mom
What's six-thousand feet away?
Hadley
Heaven. Maybe.

Mom
Oh, sweetie…Are you going to tell Doctor Bernstein about the ladder?

Hadley
See, this is why, as a rule, I don’t tell you things.

Segue back to the woods, the next day.

There you are! Did you get more lumber?

Spider
As much as I could carry! You?

Hadley
Yep! You can set it down by the pile over there!

Spider
Whoa—what’re those?

Hadley
My Dad’s tools.

Spider
You know how to use power tools?

Hadley
You will too—how else are we gonna build a six thousand-foot ladder?

Beat.

Spider? You ok?

Spider
It’s just every day you literally get cooler and cooler and I don’t know how to handle –

Hadley
Thank you, Spider.

Spider
Right, back to work.

They build the ladder:
Both
FROM THE BOTTOM IT’S A SCHELP TO THE TOP
BUT ONLY ONE THING TO DO
JUST KEEP IT GOING STEP BY STEP AND DON’T STOP
YOU GOTTA KEEP PUSHING THROUGH
TIL YOU CHECK OUT THAT VIEW

THAT’S HOW YOU CLimb
ONE BRANCH AT A TIME
WHEN THE JOURNEY SEEMS TOO DAUNTING AND
THE ODDS ARE WAY UNFAIR
YOU JUST INCH YOUR WAY ALONG THE PATH
TILL SUDDENLY YOU’RE THERE
SURE, IT TAKES TIME
BUT THAT’S HOW YOU CLimb

Enter Mom.

Mom
Hello, hello! Just interrupting for a sec. I thought you two might be hungry, so I made you a little snack. Apples with lemon for Spider and apples with cinnamon sugar for Hadley—did I get that right?

Spider
Ms. B, you can do no wrong.

Hadley (not looking up from her work)
Thanks.

Mom
How’s the ladder coming? You’ve been at it for what, a month now? It’s getting pretty big. Probably big enough for now, wouldn’t you say?

Spider
If you climb up to the top you can see over the forest and into town. Actually, you can see into the next couple towns if you kinda squint.

Mom
That’s wonderful! And I know you’re being safe…

Spider
Oh we’re super safe. In fact, you could say we put the “af” in safe. Like “safe af?” That stands for “safe as—friends.”
Mom

Hadley
I’m actually good, thanks.

Spider
You should eat your apples before they brown. See that’s why I like the lemon: a natural and delicious preservative.

Mom
I can bring you some apples with lemon if you’d rather—

Hadley
I don’t need lemon! Sorry—I’m just trying to concentrate. You know, “safe as friends.”

Mom
Ok. Let me know if you need anything. I’ll just be inside.

Exit Mom. The music continues as the continue working on the ladder. It grows even taller.

Spider
How big do you think it is now? I mean, it was tall before but this is…

Hadley
Heavenly? I can’t believe it, Spider. We’re doing it! We’re really doing it.

Spider
Yeah.

Beat.

How much farther do you think we have left?

Hadley
I can’t quite tell.

Spider (overlapping with Hadley’s singing)
But like if you had to say…just ballpark? Like close-ish? I mean at least more than halfway, right? Wouldn’t ya say? Hadley?

Hadley
KEEP IT GOING
Hadley
KEEP IT GOING
KEEP IT GOING
KEEP IT GOING
KEEP IT GOING
KEEP IT GOING
KEEP IT GOING
RUB YOUR EYES
GET YOUR RHYTHM FLOWING
POWER THROUGH
CUZ YOUR WORK IS SHOWING
KEEP IT GOING
KEEP IT GOING
KEEP IT GOING

Both
KEEP IT GOING
KEEP IT GOING
KEEP IT GOING
RUB YOUR EYES
KEEP THE RHYTHM FLOWING
EVERY DAY
SEE THE LADDER GROWING
KEEP IT GOING
KEEP IT GOING
KEEP IT GOING

The ladder is immense, reaching way up to the sky.

Spider
How tall do you think it is now?

Hadley
I lost count weeks ago. To tell the truth, I’m not really sure.

Spider
Do you think it’s done?
Hadley
I guess there's only one way to find out.

Hadley
FROM THE BOTTOM IT'S A SCHLEP TO THE TOP
WE'RE TALKING THOUSANDS OF FEET

Spider
JUST KEEP IT GOING, STEP BY STEP AND DON'T STOP
CUZ WE DIDN'T BUILD A SEAT
IF WE FALL WE'RE DEAD MEAT

Hadley
WE JUST HAVE TO CLIMB
ONE WRUNG AT A TIME

Both
WHEN THE PATH BEFORE YOU FREAKS YOU OUT
AND YOU THINK YOU'D LIKE TO QUIT
YOU JUST TAKE A BREATH AND DON'T LOOK DOWN
GO ON A LITTLE BIT
JUST TAKE YOUR TIME
THAT'S HOW YOU CLIMB

End of song.

Hadley
Ready? Here goes nothing.

She reaches for the ladder. End of excerpt.