

Scene Three:
Up There

(A celestial clothesline is seen stretching back through infinity, but one portion of it is strung across as far downstage as possible. There is a celestial stepladder standing right center upstage of the line. It resembles our own stepladders except that it shimmers with a silvery light. The clothesline is quite full of shimmering stars. There is a basket full of stars on the shelf behind the ladder.)

(AT RISE. The STARKEEPER is seated on the top of the stepladder, and as the lights come up, he can be seen hanging out stars and dusting them with a silver-handled white feather duster.)

(BILLY and the TWO HEAVENLY FRIENDS are seen making their way through the clouds from stage left to right, emerging a moment later through entrance down right into the back yard. The 1ST HEAVENLY FRIEND enters. He stops, stage right center, faces front, and speaks.)

1ST HEAVENLY FRIEND. Billy!

BILLY. *(Entering.)* Hey, what is this!

(Crossing and speaking to STARKEEPER.)

Who are you?

STARKEEPER. Never mind who I am. Big low.

BILLY. *(To FRIEND.)* Where am I?

STARKEEPER. *(Although question was not addressed to him.)* You're in the back yard of heaven.

(Pointing off right.)

There's the gates over there.

BILLY. The pearly gates!

STARKEEPER. Nope. The pearly gates are in front. Those are the back gates. They're just mother-of-pearly.

BILLY. I don't wanta go in no back gate. I wanta go before the highest –

STARKEEPER. You'll go where we send you, young man.

BILLY. Now look here!

STARKEEPER. Don't yell.

BILLY. I didn't yell.

STARKEEPER. Well, don't.

(He takes a star off the line.)

(To 1ST HEAVENLY FRIEND.) This one's finished. Brother Joshua, please hang it over Salem, Mass.

1ST HEAVENLY FRIEND. *(Crossing over and taking star.)*
Ay-ah.

(Exits off left.)

STARKEEPER. *(Taking a notebook out of his pocket.)* Now, this is a routine question I gotta ask everybody. Is there anythin' on earth you left unfinished? The reason I ask you is you're entitled to go back fer one day – if you want to.

BILLY. I don't know. *(Doggedly.)* Guess as long as I'm here, I won't go back.

STARKEEPER. *(Jotting down in a notebook.)* "Waives his right to go back."

BILLY. Can I ask you somethin'? I'd like to know if the baby will be a boy or a girl.

STARKEEPER. We'll come to that later.

BILLY. But I'm only askin' -

STARKEEPER. Jest let me do the askin' - you do the answerin'. I got my orders. You left yer wife hevin' thet baby comin' - with nothin' fer 'em to live on. Why'd you do thet?

BILLY. I couldn't get work and I couldn't bear to see her -

(Pause.)

STARKEEPER. You couldn't bear to see her cry. Why not come right out and say it? Why are you afraid of sayin' the right word? Why are you ashamed you loved Julie?

BILLY. I ain't ashamed of anything.

STARKEEPER. Why'd you beat her?

BILLY. I didn't beat her - I wouldn't beat a little thing like that - I hit her.

STARKEEPER. Why?

BILLY. Well, y'see we'd argue. And she'd say this and I'd say that - and she'd be right - so I hit her.

STARKEEPER. Hmm! Are you sorry you hit her?

BILLY. Ain't sorry for anythin'.

STARKEEPER. *(Taking his basket coming down off the ladder.)* You ken be as sot and pernicketty as you want. Up here patience is as endless as time. We ken wait.

(He turns to BILLY in a more friendly way.)

Now look here, son, it's only fair to tell you - you're in a pretty tight corner. Fact is you haven't done enough good in yer life to get in there - not even through the back door.

BILLY. *(Turning away.)* All right. If I can't get in - I can't.

STARKEEPER. (*Testily.*) I didn't say you can't. Said you ain't done enough so *far*. You might still make it – if you tried hard enough.

BILLY. How?

STARKEEPER. Why don't you go down to earth fer a day like I said you could? Do somethin' real fine fer someone.

BILLY. Aw – what could I do?

STARKEEPER. Well, fer one thing you might do yer little daughter some good.

~~**BILLY.** (*Turning to STARKEEPER, elated.*) A daughter. It's a girl – my baby!~~

~~**STARKEEPER.** Ain't a baby any more. She's fifteen years old.~~

~~**BILLY.** How could that be? I just come from there.~~

~~**STARKEEPER.** You got to get used to a new way of tellin' time, Billy. A year on earth is just a minute up here. Would you like to look down and see her?~~

~~**BILLY.** Could I? Could I see her from here?~~

~~**STARKEEPER.** Sure could follow me.~~

~~(**STARKEEPER** and **BILLY** cross down right. The lights dim and the gauze cloud curtain descends behind them.)~~

~~**BILLY.** Tell me, is she happy?~~

~~**STARKEEPER.** No, she ain't, Billy. She's a lot like you. That's why I figure you're the one could help her most – if you was there.~~

~~**BILLY.** If she ain't happy, I don't want to look.~~

~~**STARKEEPER.** (*Looking off left, as if toward the earth.*) Well, right this minute she appears to be havin' a fine time. Yes, sir! There she is runnin' on the beach. Got her shoes and stockin's off.~~