

Piece of the Sky

By

Beth Huber

PIECE OF THE SKY

© 2023 by Beth Huber

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **PIECE OF THE SKY** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for **PIECE OF THE SKY** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee. Inquiries concerning production rights should be addressed to genekato@nextstagepress.com

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **PIECE OF THE SKY** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

PIECE OF THE SKY

for Phill, Ash, and Jason

PIECE OF THE SKY

CAST:

GILBERT	A man in his early forties.
JACK	A man in his mid to late thirties.
BENJAMIN	A 25-year-old man
GABBY	A 45-year-old woman.
ONE	A Bartender of any sex/gender; any age
TWO	A Bartender of any sex/gender; any age

TIME: It is nighttime on no particular day in no particular era.

SETTING: We see three bars: One stage left, one stage right, and one center on an elevated platform.

The stage left bar and background should look as if it were designed from various time periods. There is one short bar slightly upstage with two bar stools. The only other thing necessary to the bar is an old wall-hanging telephone.

The stage right bar and stools, also slightly upstage, and background should be sleek and modern.

The center bar should be V-shaped, with sides facing both stage left and stage right. The stage left center bar should be a sort of negative image of the stage left bar; same décor only backwards or color-switched. The stage right center bar should do the same. It should be clear that the center bars are not quite representing their counterpart bars.

NOTE TO DIRECTOR: The lighting cues for this play are essential to the meaning of the play, as are some of the stage directions, as is the invisibility of the alternate characters and the drinks. Please read all stage directions carefully.

PIECE OF THE SKY

PIECE OF THE SKY

At rise, we see ONE at the stage left side of the center bar, back to the audience. They are casually wiping down the station and humming “Lida Rose” from The Music Man. After a moment, TWO enters in a panic.

TWO. Ohmygod. Ohmygod. Ohmygod. Ohmygod. I’m so sorry. So sorry. So, so sorry. (*Two begins to vigorously wipe down the stage right side of the center bar with a T-towel. One finishes while Two keeps scrubbing and humming a Lady Gaga tune. One watches the frenetic display.*) I got lost. I got lost. How do you find anything around here? Everything looks the same. There should be a map. Ohmygod. Ohmygod.

ONE. First time at the bar?

TWO. (*Two stops scrubbing.*) Yes. Yours? Please tell me you weren’t early.

ONE. I’ve been here... It’s been a while.

TWO. I’m so nervous. I don’t want to mess it up.

ONE. I get ya.

TWO. There should be a map...It’s not about the map.

ONE. It’s not about the map.

TWO. (*Two resumes scrubbing.*) I mean...It’s just so...important.

ONE. I know, I know.

TWO. Boss watching everything I do. Is my bar clean enough? Is my uniform right? Like...I honestly thought I’d have a different uniform. This seems so...I don’t know...ordinary? Shouldn’t I look more like...more professional? You know...like in the brochure?

ONE. You’ll be fine.

TWO. I’ll be fine.

ONE. Just remember the rules.

TWO. The rules. The rules.

ONE. You read the handbook?

TWO. I read the handbook. The rules?

ONE. The section on intervention?

PIECE OF THE SKY

TWO. Oh. Those rules. So many rules. Yes. Give them only what they need. Nothing more.

ONE. Right. And?

TWO. Right and...right and...Oh! Observation - not judgment.

ONE. See? You've got it. Superstar! *(A small light comes on over both stations signaling that it's time for them to work. One turns back to the bar and continues to hum. Two faces stage right and nervously wrings the towel.)*

TWO. I've got it. Observation. No judgment. No judgment. Jesus Christ. *(Lights dim on the Center bar and rise on the stage right bar. A spotlight alternates between GABBY and BENJAMIN who are facing the audience.)*

GABBY. "Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within." James Arthur Baldwin.

BENJAMIN. "I love you, and because I love you, I would sooner have you hate me for telling you the truth than adore me for telling you lies." Pietro Aretino.

GABBY. Truth is... I needed him to lie to me.

BENJAMIN. The reality? ...I didn't want her to see me.

GABBY. I did.

BENJAMIN. I didn't. *(Spotlights go out on stage right and lights rise on stage left. We see GILBERT sitting alone, holding a mug of beer. His clothes and hair are disheveled, and he is unconsciously weaving side to side. He is unintelligibly and without talent slurring his way through what might be "Lida Rose." He occasionally stops to hold his beer out in salute to an invisible bar-mate.)*

GILBERT. *(Slur-singing.)* "Lida Rose...I'm home again rooooooose ... roooooose...To get the sun back in the skyyyyyy..." *(Gilbert stops singing, looking around for appreciation from invisible patrons. He sees an old phone attached to the wall, goes to it, picks up the receiver, and listens as if for a dial tone. Disgusted, he hangs it back up and continues to go in and out of song.)* Useless. "Something roooooose..." What's wrong? Don't know the words or just a bunch-a scaredy cats? It's sing along with Gilbert time. "About a thousand kisses...oooooh a million kisses..." I said it's sing along with Gilbert time. Sing! "Something about a...BELL!" I think it has a bell. Does it have a

PIECE OF THE SKY

bell? "BELL!" (*Gilbert stops and sways for bit, looking for his balance, then circles the bar, addressing each invisible patron.*) You saps! I saw that play, ya know. Ten. I was ten. No, eleven. Aw, who can keep track. You have that problem, buddy? It's from Music Man, ya bonehead! Bartender guy? Another. (*The invisible bartender apparently pays no attention.*) "Ding dong ding...I can hear the..." Oh, God! I forgot the words. Shit. No, you don't understand. I cannot forget those words, man. I cannot forget. "Ding dong...something about bells..." (*Frustrated, Gilbert slams his beer down on the bar and starts to pace.*) Pop use to do this when he'd forget. He paced a lot. Back and forth, back and forth. Ruts in the friggin' carpet. "Ding dong ding... the..." Goddamnit! Something about bells! Goddamnit! (*Gilbert begins to imitate his father.*) "Gilbert, Goddamnit. Quit yer bellyaching and do your homework. Can't expect to learn if you don't keep to the books. Memorize, memorize, memorize." (*Gilbert stops pacing and looks up toward the ceiling, afraid. Then he pulls himself together and reclaims his bar stool and his beer.*) You've heard of it, buddy. About this con man...musicals love grifters...this con man who comes into this town and seduces the lovely heroine, Shirley Jones I think, seduces her by pretending...that's what con men do, don't they...by pretending to be this music teacher, right? Ha, what a gas. Cons the whole town. Hey, bartender guy? Another. (*Once again, Gilbert appears to get no response, but seems not to notice as he grows serious and sits there brooding. Lights dim stage left and rise stage right. We see Benjamin sitting at a bar, talking to his friend, who we do not see.*)

BENJAMIN. (*Laughing.*) ...So the third nun shoves the other nun out of the way and sticks her face in the fountain. And St. Peter asks her what's she's doing, and she says "I'm gonna wash my mouth out before Sister Mary Katherine sticks her ass in that water!" (*Benjamin slaps a 'high five' to his invisible friend. Gabby enters through the bar door, sees her friend, who we do not see, waves, and heads toward the barstool next to Benjamin.*) You should've seen his face! It was like he was looking at me for the first time and I had just grown a set of horns. Well...I thought it would be less offensive than the Scottish safe sex joke!

GABBY. (*To Benjamin.*) Putting X's on the sheep that kick! (*Benjamin, startled, turns to look at Gabby. He laughs and offers up a high five for her*

PIECE OF THE SKY

as well. She accepts, then sits next to Benjamin, back to back, who returns to his silent conversation with his friend. Gabby offers up a hug to her friend, who we do not see.) Hey, Celie! Thanks for meeting me. Dear God, what a fucking day! Truly. No...yes...this one kid actually had the stones to question why I made him write the day before spring break. Yeah. So I said, "Because it's a fucking writing class, you asshat!" Okay, no, I didn't say "fucking" or "asshat." But the voice in my head was cursing a blue streak. This girl don't get played like that! *(Gabby and Benjamin both continue their conversations with their friends. We hear pieces with occasional dialogue overlapping.)*

BENJAMIN. Well, it was due on Tuesday, but I couldn't get my thoughts straight. A jumble of words without...

GABBY. ...meeting went fine, just...well...I think whoever Robert is, God should strike him dead for those nasty rules of order...

BENJAMIN. ...was sitting there just staring at the inside of my eyelids waiting for...

GABBY. ... just think that if you have something to say, you shouldn't have to wait for someone to recognize you...

BENJAMIN. ...all about whether or not we create our realities with our words... you know, which comes first...

GABBY. ...not trivial...I mean, the way it is...the way I see this thing...

BENJAMIN. Thought or words? Thought or reality? Words or reality?

GABBY. ...and you have to grab the moments when they're there...

BENJAMIN. ...We're creating moments. They don't exist without us...

GABBY. ...It was like I was invisible...

BENJAMIN/GABBY. And I don't exist unless someone else sees me...

(Gabby and Benjamin both swivel their chairs to the front at the same time, both to face the bartender, who we do not see.) Bartender? *(Benjamin and Gabby both freeze with a hand in the air, as if summoning the bartender. The lights go up on the center bar as Two makes a hand motion toward stage right. There is a pause, then Benjamin and Gabby close their eyes. Light dim, but not out, stage right.)*

TWO. *(Two looks relieved, then nervous again.)* Are we allowed to leave our stations to talk?

ONE. You have anyone?

PIECE OF THE SKY

TWO. (*Looking toward Gabby and Benjamin.*) Almost. Not yet.

ONE. (*Walks toward Two.*) Me neither.

TWO. Will we know if we're needed? Will we hear a buzz or a bell or something?

ONE. Trust me, you'll know.

TWO. I'll know?

ONE. You'll know. (*Two meets up with One, who takes the time to straighten Two's uniform.*) So, how'd you end up here?

TWO. (*Laughing.*) Whew. How long do you have?

ONE. (*Straight-faced.*) Long.

TWO. Welp...A string of bad choices...

ONE. Judgment.

TWO. String of ...interesting...choices. That...put me...um...

ONE. Right where you needed to be? Glad to have you here.

TWO. Thanks. Not what I expected.

ONE. Never is.

TWO. How many of us are there?

ONE. We get new folks all the time. But only people with a special *something* end up at the bar. As you said, it's important work.

TWO. You must be very good at it to have been here so long. I guess I'll learn from the best, right?

ONE. And fresh eyes make us all better. (*One appears to hear something.*)

Got one. Be right back. (*One heads to the bar, pours an invisible beer and sets it down on the stage left side of the center bar. They pause as if waiting for just the right time,*

then pulls a cell phone out of their bar apron and dials a number. They

wait with the phone away from their ear for a few seconds, then sets the

phone on the bar without saying a word. Two starts to speak, but One

holds up a finger to wait. Another small pause. One then gets a bowl of

peanuts from under the bar, puts them on the bar, and returns downstage center.)

TWO. And you?

ONE. Me?

TWO. How did you end up doing this?

ONE. Choices.

PIECE OF THE SKY

TWO. (*Understanding.*) Yeah.

ONE. It's nice not to have any anymore though.

TWO. Yeah?

ONE. Yeah. (*One and Two head back upstage to their bars. Two starts to say something but thinks better of it as lights dim on center bar. Lights dim on center bar and rise stage right as Gilbert seems to come out of a trance, surprised, and continues his conversation with his invisible buddies.*)

GILBERT. So anyway...everybody thinks this music grifter is some big, fancy guy. Fancy clothes, fancy talkin', fancy this and that. Hook, line and sinker, boy. Running around saying 'teach my little Johnnie to play, he's got so much talent.' Cons the kids, too. Course, that's what they do, isn't it? Isn't it, bartender guy? (*Gilbert stumbles from his stool and begins pacing again, trying unsuccessfully to remember the words. After a moment, he looks up at the phone against the wall. The phone begins, quite literally, to glow in an otherwise darkened bar. Gilbert stops and rubs his head in amazement.*) Bartender guy? Hey, bartender guy? Do you see... (*He looks around, wildly.*) Does anyone see... Hey, buddy? (*Gilbert becomes mesmerized by the phone which is now glowing even brighter. Suddenly, the phone rings. Gilbert startles then stares for a long time as we hear nothing but the ringing phone.*) Bartender guy? Mister? Should I... Do you want me to... (*As the phone continues to ring, Gilbert walks nervously toward it. He slowly picks up the receiver, still looking around him.*) Hello? Hello? Somebody there? Hello?

(*Angrily.*) Talk to me, Goddamnit! (*Gilbert slams the phone down.*

Instantly, it begins to ring again. He picks it up and places it to his ear.)

Hello? (*Hearing nothing, Gilbert lets the receiver go, leaving it dangling under the phone. He stumbles back toward his bar stool, very shaken, and quietly, tentatively resumes his singing.*) "Ding dong ding...

roooooose...bell...something....bell... something..." Hey, bartender guy?

Another. (*Gilbert begins to nervously finger through the peanut bowl on the bar, occasionally turning to stare at the phone. Finally, he screams at the phone.*) STOP IT! STOP IT! (*As Gilbert is screaming, JACK, a young man about the same age, comes in and stands behind him. He is holding a mug of beer. Jack, like something straight out of Father Knows Best, is*

PIECE OF THE SKY

dressed neatly in pressed black slacks, pressed white shirt, and thin black tie. His hair is slicked back. He watches Gilbert scream at the phone.)

JACK. (Concerned.) Love troubles?

GILBERT. (Startled.) Jesus! Who...What the hell are you doing at my back?

JACK. I'm sorry.

GILBERT. Christ! Don't do that to a guy, man! Scare the shit outta me.

JACK. I didn't mean to...

GILBERT. Hey, buddy. No, I'm sorry. Didn't see ya, that's all. Spooked me up a bit. (*Gilbert points to the phone.*) You see that thing?

JACK. Get disconnected? (*Gilbert just stares at Jack, not sure what he means. He swaggers to a standing position.*)

GILBERT. Well, since you were nice enough to let me scream at you like that, you might as well sit down right here and let me buy you another beer, right? (*Jack extends his hand in greeting to Gilbert, who doesn't notice as he is trying to ready a bar stool for Jack to sit on. Jack retreats his hand and sits.*) Long day. Long, long day.

JACK. Yes. Long day.

GILBERT. Bartender guy. Another for my buddy here? What's yer name? A beer for my buddy! (*Jack starts to say his name but Gilbert talks over him.*) What do you do, dressed up all fancy like that? Sure is a classy suit there.

JACK. Salesman. I'm a salesman.

GILBERT. Sales. Wooweee! That's a tough job. People slamming doors in your face and all. I know that.

JACK. You're a salesman?

GILBERT. Nah. Know a lot of them, though. You go from town to town?

JACK. Seen the USA in my Chevrolet! (*Jack laughs. Gilbert doesn't get the joke. He looks over again at the phone.*)

GILBERT. What's your name, buddy?

JACK. Jack. (*Jack extends his hand once again to Gilbert, who just stares back. They freeze. Lights dim stage left and rise on center bar.*)

TWO. Interesting one?

ONE. Have you had to make special arrangements yet?

TWO. No. It seems complicated. Is there, like, paperwork or something?

PIECE OF THE SKY

ONE. Boss tends to expedite those kinds of things.

TWO. How does it work, then?

ONE. Well, it's a bit complicated.

TWO. I gotta learn some time. (*One brings Two down center away from the bars and once again primps Two's uniform before speaking.*)

ONE. Time is a funny thing, right? Time causes expectations.

TWO. I don't...

ONE. Time is a human perception...a memory...a hope. Time is nothing more than us knowing that what's *now* is not what's *tomorrow*. Time causes us to expect that things will eventually become...become something predictable. The sun rises because it always rises. It sets because it always sets.

TWO. It rises. It sets.

ONE. But what if you didn't expect it to do either?

TWO. (*Gets it.*) What if there were no memory of it?

ONE. To up-end expectations, you have to dissolve time.

TWO. Of course.

ONE. Yeah, It's usually the stubborn ones that get special arrangements. When a feather won't do...

TWO. You give them a two-by-four.

ONE. Or a mirror.

TWO. Observation. What... (*One holds a finger up again for Two to wait, returns to bar, pours another invisible beer, and sets it at a distance to where the previous had been set. One takes out another bowl of peanuts and places them on the bar and returns to center.*) Anything? (*One shrugs.*) Waiting is the hardest part.

ONE. When I first started, I wanted to get in there and tell them the solutions to all their problems.

TWO. Yes!

ONE. But that's not what this job's about. Give them what they need...

TWO. Nothing more.

ONE. Solutions imply there's an end to it. Solutions let you off the hook. Process! Process sets you free.

TWO. Observation.

PIECE OF THE SKY

ONE. Then? (*Two appears to hear something and motions for One to be still. Two waits, listening, looking at nothing in particular. Lights up on Benjamin and Gabby, who open their eyes at the same time. They do not look at each other until Benjamin speaks.*)

BENJAMIN. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

GABBY. No, you got the first syllable in faster than me.

BENJAMIN. Ladies first.

GABBY. X's on sheep. Darlin', I'm clearly no lady.

BENJAMIN. (*Smiling.*) Age before beauty?

GABBY. (*Smiling back.*) Ouch. You go ahead and order while I pretend to be offended.

BENJAMIN. Thanks. (*To the bartender.*) Another PBR.

GABBY. (*Feigning a horrified look.*) Ack. Seriously? I should've gone first.

BENJAMIN. Now's your chance. Best me.

GABBY. (*To bartender.*) The driest white you've got. I want to feel sand in my mouth while I'm drinking.

BENJAMIN. Sand? Seriously?

GABBY. Beer of champions?

BENJAMIN. Point. (*Benjamin and Gabby find themselves staring at each other while the stage right lights dim and spotlights alternate between the two as they face out.*) I remember trying to think.

GABBY. I remember trying to speak.

BENJAMIN. It didn't make any sense.

GABBY. An exchange about bad booze?

BENJAMIN. It overtook logic.

GABBY. The words in my head just stopped. (*There is a long pause with the spotlight on Gabby before Two speaks.*)

TWO. Ah – I see! It's like you can hear thoughts.

ONE. Observation then...

TWO. Then perception. Got it. (*Lights dim center then up stage right as Gabby and Benjamin get their drinks and nod toward each other.*)

BENJAMIN. Cheers!

GABBY. No-Zdorovie!

BENJAMIN. Russian? You speak Russian?

PIECE OF THE SKY

GABBY. Only when I drink.

BENJAMIN. Well, then, by all means...Nos-da-roovie!

GABBY. Cheers! (*Benjamin and Gabby clink glasses. There is an awkward moment before they turn back-to-back on the barstools. They both appear to be listening to their friends; therefore, there is a long silence as we see them being aware of each other's presence. Gabby is brought back to her friend's conversation.*) I'm sorry, no...I heard every word. (*Gabby continues her silent conversation, still aware of Benjamin's presence while he is engaged in his own conversation.*)

BENJAMIN. I see what you're saying. Yeah, Gaga. I just think the meat dress was over-doing it. The statement got lost in the pandering. (*Gabby shifts slightly on her stool sporting an amused look.*) No...yeah...the music is fine. Yes...I agree....some of her ideas could be important if they were not undercut by...well...a cut of meat. I mean, come on! Just low class.

GABBY. (*Still facing her friend.*) Says Mr. PBR. (*Benjamin shifts slightly. He has heard her.*) What? No, I was just talking to myself. I'm sorry...keep going...

BENJAMIN. (*Making sure Gabby can hear.*) She's cultivated this aura of being bolder than everyone else. Like no one else matters but the... (*Using air quotes twice.*) "Lady." But, if you ask me, she's no "lady."

GABBY. (*To her friend, also using air quotes.*) Maybe she just needs the right meat. (*She laughs; Benjamin smiles.*) I'm really sorry, Celie. I swear I'm paying attention. Okay. Yeah, do you want another drink when you get back? (*Gabby watches her friend head to the bathroom. She faces forward again and motions to the bartender.*) Another rum and coke here. (*Gabby sits staring straight ahead, waiting. Benjamin finishes up his conversation with a couple of 'yeah' and 'right' responses.*)

BENJAMIN. (*To his friend.*) Yeah, I'm good. Let's do it again real soon. Later. (*Benjamin stands up to watch his friend leave then sits again. Benjamin and Gabby continue to face forward as they speak to each other, both smiling.*) The right meat?

GABBY. You kinda asked for that one.

BENJAMIN. I guess I did. Bartertender? Tab out?

GABBY. Done for the night?

PIECE OF THE SKY

BENJAMIN. Yeah.

GABBY. Well, I'll miss your brilliant insights.

BENJAMIN. And I'll miss your dry wit. (*They look at each other.*)

GABBY. Goodnight, PBR.

BENJAMIN. Goodnight, m'lady. (*There is a pause as they continue to look at each other, then lights out. Dual spotlights come up on Benjamin and Gabby.*)

She's like a long-lost memory.

GABBY. I couldn't breathe.

BENJAMIN. But she wasn't what I expected.

GABBY. I didn't breathe for a week... (*Pause. Spot goes out on Benjamin but remains on Gabby looking a bit anxious.*) As he was leaving, I said... to no one in particular... "I'll be here next Friday at six." ... But I said it quietly. (*Lights out. Lights up on the center bar. Two, turned upstage, stands there for a moment, then raises both hands up as if silencing a crowd. As One looks on approvingly, Two points to both ends of the SR bar and SPOTLIGHTS appear at each end. We see Gabby and Benjamin on the barstools, facing forward and silently mouthing words as if they are recreating the previous thoughts scene. TWO pauses and begins to laugh.*)

TWO. They're funny.

ONE. Funny 'ha-ha' or funny 'odd'?

TWO. Yes. Meat. Sand. Sheep. Hysterical.

ONE. Of course.

TWO. And they both seem to be. Funny, that is.

ONE. It happens that way sometimes. (*Looking to Two's bar.*) You forgot something.

TWO. Oh. (*Two flips a hand and the two spotlights go out.*)

ONE. Nice touch.

TWO. I have a flair for the dramatic. Maybe that's why I got this one. It's going to be a multi-stepper, I think.

ONE. Keep focused.

TWO. It's also a two-fer.

ONE. The boss must have great confidence.

TWO. Or a really sick sense of humor. (*Two flips a hand again and the spotlights return on Gabby and Benjamin, who are silent and staring*

PIECE OF THE SKY

forward. Pause. Two stares at them, thinking, then gestures. Spotlights out.) But seriously, why do you think they're here?

ONE. They're not here.

TWO. No, I mean, why do you think boss made them a priority? It doesn't make much sense, does it? Why them?

ONE. Why not them?

TWO. Isn't it obvious? It's really obvious. I think it's obvious.

ONE. *(Pauses.)* Do they know each other?

TWO. No. They just met.

ONE. Are you sure?

TWO. I...no...they just met.

ONE. *(Puts their hand on the bar and rubs it a few times.)* What is this bar made of?

TWO. This is a test, isn't it?

ONE. The bar.

TWO. I feel a wrong answer coming. Um...wood. Formica? Tile? The tears of bartenders past?

ONE. Atoms. Energy. Light.

TWO. Damn it.

ONE. A rock is not just a rock. A bar is not just a bar. It's all the beautiful synthesis of probabilities made real when light collides with light.

TWO. Did Shakespeare used to work here?

ONE. And where does light come from?

TWO. Oh god. They know each other. *(Lights dim at center bar and rise stage left. Jack's hand is still out waiting for Gilbert to respond, then, once again, Jack retreats his hand.)*

JACK. Have I said something?

GILBERT. Hey, bartender guy, another. Excuse me, buddy. *(Gilbert gets up and starts pacing again, silently mouthing the words to the forgotten song.)*

JACK. What are you doing?

GILBERT. What does it look like I'm doing?

JACK. I don't know.

GILBERT. Doing the Rhumba, buddy. Doing the Rhumba.

JACK. *(Pause.)* It doesn't look like the Rhumba.

PIECE OF THE SKY

GILBERT. Damn it! I almost had it. You made me forget again.

JACK. I'm sorry.

GILBERT. (*Stumbles over to the phone, stares awhile, and looks back to Jack.*) Tell me you see it.

JACK. The phone? Of course, I see it. Are you waiting for a...?

GILBERT. I ain't waiting on nothing. Don't like phones. Communication with the Devil's all they're for.

JACK. Oh.

GILBERT. You got that right, buddy.

JACK. I use them all the time.

GILBERT. Salesman, right? Pop always had one of those to his ear. He used to say, "Call you when I get to Cleveland, son. Call you from Cleveland. Promise." Laugh riot he was.

JACK. Pop?

GILBERT. Pop used to say a lot of things. "We're going to that Cardinals game this time. Promise. Sorry 'bout that Cardinals game. Hey, but look, I bought you this chewing gum instead." My teeth are rotten to this day.

JACK. You don't like your father.

GILBERT. Watch it, buddy. I never said that.

JACK. No?

GILBERT. Pop, God rest his soul, just wasn't very good at it, I guess.

JACK. Good at what?

GILBERT. Being a Pop. He seemed to be good at everything else. Just not good at that.

JACK. I'm sorry.

GILBERT. You got kids?

JACK. One.

GILBERT. Don't ever make promises you can't keep. Right, buddy?

JACK. That's not always easy.

GILBERT. It should be. (*Gilbert returns to the bar stool. The two men sit quietly staring at their beer mugs. Jack takes a pack of gum out of his pocket and offers Gilbert a piece. He takes it and they laugh.*)

JACK. Hate to say it, but I bought this gum for my boy.

GILBERT. What'd ya promise him? (*They continue to laugh until Gilbert grows silent.*) Sorry to get all serious on you, buddy. Long day.

PIECE OF THE SKY

JACK. Long day.

GILBERT. Shirley Jones is some babe.

JACK. Excuse me?

GILBERT. Tell me about him?

JACK. Who?

GILBERT. Your boy. You said you had a boy, right?

JACK. (*Proudly.*) Oh, he's a real pip.

GILBERT. (*Laughing.*) A real...pip, huh? How old?

JACK. Six. No, no. He's six and a half. You have to add the half or he skwooshes up his face and throws a fit. A real pip.

GILBERT. A real pip.

JACK. Tomorrow's a big day for him. So I came back from my trip a day early to surprise him when he wakes up in the morning.

GILBERT. Big day?

JACK. First day of school, of course.

GILBERT. Of course!

JACK. Going to be a man now.

GILBERT. Damn right! Guess that makes you an old man now.

JACK. I feel it. They grow up so fast, you know?

GILBERT. Don't have any.

JACK. They do. One day you're a hero, the next you're just in the way of an intense game of Wild, Wild West.

GILBERT. Wild West? Didn't know kids still played Wild West. I was always the gunslinger. (*Gilbert jumps off the bar stool and pretends to draw a gun.*) Put'em up, pardner. (*Jack feigns surprise.*) Too slow. Bang, bang. You're dead! (*Jack makes a dramatic fall off the bar stool. They laugh so hard that Gilbert, feeling the effects of the beer, falls down. Jack runs over to him and tries to help him up.*)

JACK. You ok? Geez.

GILBERT. (*Fighting his help.*) I can do it. I can do it. (*Gilbert crawls to the bar stool and climbs up. He begins to stare at the phone again, which seems to be glowing even brighter now.*) Yeah, well...my Pop was never a hero. Course, he was never in the way, either. He wasn't ever home long enough to be in the way.

PIECE OF THE SKY

JACK. Oh. (*Lights out stage left and up stage right on Gabby sitting in the same seat, a week later. She is staring at her watch, holding a drink, but not drinking it. We then see Benjamin enter the bar, hesitantly. He slowly walks to the bar and sits next to Gabby. Both continue to stare forward. Lights out and shift to alternating spotlights.*)

GABBY. I said it quietly.

BENJAMIN. Like a voice in my own head.

GABBY. It was the most dangerous thing I'd ever done.

BENJAMIN. The craziest thing I could imagine.

GABBY/BENJAMIN. But I had to see him/her. (*Full lights up.*)

GABBY. Hey, PBR! What are you doing here?

BENJAMIN. M'lady. I had hoped you were talking to me.

GABBY. Was I that obvious?

BENJAMIN. I was just that hopeful.

GABBY. Gabby.

BENJAMIN. Benjamin. (*They awkwardly reach out to shake hands and quickly pull back.*)

GABBY. (*An awkward pause.*) Did you know that all flies are named Herman?

BENJAMIN. Did not know that.

GABBY. Sorry, I'm a bit nervous. (*To bartender.*) A PBR for my date. (*Benjamin smiles.*) Forgive the assumption.

BENJAMIN. (*Benjamin reaches into his inside coat pocket and pulls out a wilted rose that looks like it has been sitting in his pocket all day.*) Fair assumption.

GABBY. (*Gabby takes the rose, amused.*) You have got to be fucking kidding me!

BENJAMIN. Used to be in the Navy? (*They laugh.*)

GABBY. Thank you. That's very sweet. (*Looking at the rose.*) And sad.

BENJAMIN. Yeah, well...it was a crazy day. So, when not on a ship chewing steel, what do you do?

GABBY. I teach poetry.

BENJAMIN. Please tell me it's not at an elementary school.

GABBY. The university. What about you?

BENJAMIN. I'm a student at the university.

PIECE OF THE SKY

GABBY. (*Nervously.*) Oh, crap. What department?

BENJAMIN. Philosophy.

GABBY. Thank God! I almost just watched my life flash before my eyes. And trust me... that would be a long flash. (*Pause.*) Get it? Long flash? How 'bout this: Long hot flash? (*Gabby laughs nervously.*)

BENJAMIN. Uh...you've just put me in a scary and potentially life-threatening position.

GABBY. Go ahead.

BENJAMIN. How old are you? (*Benjamin holds his fingers up in a cross, like warding off a vampire. Gabby laughs.*)

GABBY. Let's just say Carter was President.

BENJAMIN. (*Appearing to do the math in his head.*) Ah, so you have a painting in your attic.

GABBY. Ah, darlin'...flattery will get you...anything, really. (*Gabby and Benjamin stare intensely at each other for a moment.*) And you?

BENJAMIN. Let's just say Carter was not President.

GABBY. Clinton?

BENJAMIN. Something like that. (*Gabby winces. Benjamin grabs her hand.*)

GABBY. Wow. Well, my President was better than yours.

BENJAMIN. No argument here. (*Lights out then replaced by individual spotlights on Gabby and Benjamin.*)

GABBY. Twenty-five.

BENJAMIN. Forty-five.

GABBY. Fuck.

BENJAMIN. Fuck.

GABBY. My son's twenty-one.

BENJAMIN. My mom's forty-seven.

GABBY. It's time to get out.

BENJAMIN. Is there any good excuse to leave after a conversation like that? (*Lights up.*)

GABBY. A young philosophy student and you don't know why the meat dress is important?

BENJAMIN. Oh, are we going back to that now?

PIECE OF THE SKY

GABBY. No, I'm filling space with words until I'm out of shock and no longer want to run for the door.

BENJAMIN. Yeah, okay. So this is a bit unusual.

GABBY. A bit? At least tell me you're not either a) married to some hot thing your age or b) engaged to some hot thing your age or c) sleeping with some hot thing your age.

BENJAMIN. At least tell *me* you're not married to some hot thing *your* age.

GABBY. We don't have hot things at my age.

BENJAMIN. Well, that's clearly not true.

GABBY. You didn't answer my question.

BENJAMIN. And you didn't answer mine. (*They look at each other with a silent agreement to let it drop.*) You know, age is just a state of mind.

GABBY. Nietzsche say that?

BENJAMIN. No, Nietzsche said that truth is an illusion that we have forgotten is an illusion.

GABBY. Nietzsche was a lying sack of shit.

BENJAMIN. Probably.

GABBY. So what will you do with a Master's in philosophy?

BENJAMIN. Ph.D. eventually.

GABBY. I already feel better.

BENJAMIN. I'll just stand around wearing paper hats and saying, "You want fries with that?"

GABBY. I'm a poet. We can work at the same Burger King.

BENJAMIN. I'll give you the good shifts.

GABBY. Manager material, are you?

BENJAMIN. Well, you poets are too flakey to be in charge of anything.

GABBY. Point. (*Benjamin and Gabby clink glasses in agreement. Lights dim stage right and come up on center bar. One and Two are both watching the scene stage right.*)

ONE. I knew you'd be a natural.

TWO. (*Leans in, conspiratorially.*) Right now, it's shock and awe.

Listening...really listening for the need then shifting perceptions.

But...and this is the real job, right...what if I don't get the creation right?

ONE. What if *you* don't get it right?

PIECE OF THE SKY

TWO. The creation. Yes.

ONE. It's not a ... It's a...No. That's not your job. It's their's. You can only *tilt* their world. You can't create it. (*One seems to hear something, turns their head, but makes no move.*) They have to re-see. They have to think it into being. They... (*One, again, hears something and makes no move.*)

TWO. You going to get that?

ONE. He's had enough.

TWO. Judgment.

ONE. Fresh eyes. Thanks. (*One pours another invisible drink and sets it on the stage left center bar.*) Okay – How about this... What are thoughts?

TWO. Here we go again. Thoughts? What are thoughts?

ONE. What happens when you're having a thought?

TWO. I...I'm sorry...

ONE. Which comes first...thoughts or words?

TWO. You have to think before you can speak. I mean...words don't just fall from a void.

ONE. Okay then. Do me a favor and try to have a thought without a word attached to it. (*Two stands there, physically contorting, trying to think without words.*) See?

TWO. Wow.

ONE. Wow.

TWO. Okay – thoughts are nothing but words. But words come from the outside. Oh! The outside is my inside!

ONE. And what does that mean, then, about the words?

TWO. Words are..

ONE. The stuff that all of reality is made from.

TWO. But the material world exists without us having named it.

ONE. Does it?

TWO. Sure. Of course.

ONE. It exists prior to intention?

TWO. Uh...

ONE. What are you doing here?

TWO. (*Awestruck.*) Crap.

PIECE OF THE SKY

ONE. Right. So, if we can change reality with our intention...and our intentions are our thoughts...

TWO. And our thoughts are nothing but words...

ONE. Then tilting the world just a bit will undo their thoughts because there's...

TWO. No words to describe it!

ONE. Yes.

TWO. Then...uh...

ONE. Then they have to name everything they see... and therefore?

TWO. Create a new reality.

ONE. Yes. You can only tilt their world; you cannot create it.

TWO. I'm new here.

ONE. No harm, no foul.

TWO. Back to work?

ONE. Back to work. *(Lights dim center and rise stage left on Gilbert and Jack who are sitting in awkward silence. After several false starts, Jack finally manages to get something out.)*

JACK. Look, I'm no good at advice, but I try to be a real good listener, you know?

GILBERT. What kinda crap is that?

JACK. I just mean that...well, you seem to...never mind. I won't interfere.

GILBERT. *(Gilbert pauses a long time, finally looking deep into Jack's eyes.)* Do you know God?

JACK. Personally?

GILBERT. You know what I mean.

JACK. I...uh, I believe in God, if that's what you're asking. Why?

GILBERT. What do you think of him?

JACK. God?

GILBERT. Never mind.

JACK. Please.

GILBERT. I mean, well...say if this guy were to, say, really hate this other guy, right? And say this guy is like really mean to this other guy, right? You know, saying bad stuff to him and shit, calling him a low-down dirty bastard and stuff. And say this other guy suddenly drops dead.

PIECE OF THE SKY

JACK. While you were calling him a bastard?

GILBERT. This is hypothetical like.

JACK. Hypothetical, right.

GILBERT. Would God be out to get the first guy, do you think?

JACK. God's not out to get you.

GILBERT. How do you know that?

JACK. Because you didn't mean the things you said.

GILBERT. How do you know that?

JACK. Did you? (*Gilbert stares at Jack for a long time.*)

GILBERT. Who needs God anyway. Right, buddy?

JACK. I...

GILBERT. I'm just tired, I guess...tired of people all up in my face trying to save my soul, what's left of it. Talking about God and Jesus and a whole lot of crap that doesn't mean anything to a guy in a bar. Tell me God likes to souse it up once in a while, then I'll be saved. See, the way I look at it from the bottom of this here glass...Religion's just a bunch of cliches and tired old wives' tales. Our father who art in heaven...You ever hear that one?

JACK. Hallowed be thy...

GILBERT. You want this guy as your father?

JACK. Well...

GILBERT. I mean, look at it...Here's this omni-potent fella, all-knowing, all-seeing, right? Guy sends his boy down to what he knows is a living, breathing hell. He knew what he was doing, better you believe it. What kind of father, let's say, just ups and dumps his boy off in Brooklyn without a quarter? Then this self-proclaimed creator of all pulls out all the stops. Hires the thugs and puts out the hit. What kinda father is that? What kinda Pop is that, huh? Goddamnit, bartender! I want another goddamn beer! (*The two men grow silent. Jack begins to absent-mindedly finger the peanuts in the bowl on the bar as Gilbert sits and sulks. Lights rise on the center bar as One and Two are watching Jack and Gilbert.*)

TWO. You going to do something about that?

ONE. What would you have me do?

TWO. Seems to me that now would be a good time to tilt it up.

ONE. It's as it should be.

PIECE OF THE SKY

TWO. Are you sure?

ONE. (*Stares at Gilbert and Jack, then looks back at Two.*) It's not my job. (*Lights dim center.*)

JACK. I haven't seen my boy in two weeks. (*Gilbert just stares at Jack.*) We do what we've got to do, right?

GILBERT. Whatever you say, buddy.

JACK. Kids need things, you know? Clothes, footballs, cowboy hats. It's my job to make sure he has... This is my job.

GILBERT. It's your job.

JACK. I'm a salesman. And I'm good at it, very good. Ernie, the guy who runs my leads, always gives me the tough ones. He knows I put that extra effort in, that extra touch of sincerity. Ernie always says I could sell an automobile to a blind man.

GILBERT. Real smooth talker.

JACK. But why do you think I do it?

GILBERT. Clothes, footballs, cowboy hats.

JACK. Cowboy hats. He loves them and it's my job to get them.

GILBERT. And you're good at it.

JACK. May well be the only thing I'm good at. See, when my boy was born... he was the most beautiful baby God ever sent down.

GILBERT. Yeah?

JACK. I know all fathers say that. But a prouder man you never saw. I counted every finger and toe. Twice. I needed to make sure I hadn't failed in the design, right?

GILBERT. (*Softening a bit, laughing.*) A Pop's first big test.

JACK. And he had the biggest peepers... bright, beautiful eyes. The first time I held that little China doll...so fragile. I was afraid I'd break him right in two. But those

peepers caught sight of these peepers...looked right down into my soul.

Innocent, not a care in the world. Those eyes trusted in me. Trusted me, through and through, not to fail him. I made a promise right there and then.

GILBERT. What'd you promise, Jack?

JACK. I promised him the sky. (*Jack pauses to look at Gilbert.*) And I intend to deliver every piece of it.

GILBERT. One piece at a time.

PIECE OF THE SKY

JACK. If that's what it takes. Barkeep, another beer for my buddy here.
(*Jack raises his beer to Gilbert. They clink glasses, laughing.*)

GILBERT. (*Singing.*) "...about a thousand kisses shy...Ding Dong..."
Something about a bell.

JACK. It's Lida Rose.

GILBERT. What?

JACK. It's Lida Rose. The barbershop quartet.

GILBERT. That's it. Goddamnit, that's it! "Ding Dong..."

JACK. "Ding. I can hear the chapel bells chime..."

GILBERT. (*Excited, Gilbert begins looking around the bar to his invisible bar mates.*) Finally, somebody who knows his classics!

JACK. (*Getting into the excitement.*) Ding dong ding.

GILBERT. Ding dong ding!

JACK. Ding dong ding!

GILBERT. I knew I liked you, buddy.

JACK. Music Man.

GILBERT. Damn right, Music Man.

JACK. It's my favorite. Saw it opening night, Cleveland, you know?

GILBERT. No shit?

JACK. No kidding. Front row seats.

GILBERT. Ah, God, it's been years.

JACK. My entire Seattle trip went into that show.

GILBERT. Whoa, big spender.

JACK. My boy wanted to see it.

GILBERT. Well, of course he did. I'm starting to like this kid.

JACK. You should've seen his little face when all those kids came out with the horns...

GILBERT. And the drums, and the cymbals...

JACK. And the uniforms...

GILBERT. (*Childlike.*) Cool! That's really cool!

JACK. (*Laughing.*) Couldn't eat for a month, but boy was that worth it.

GILBERT. (*Becoming misty-eyed.*) You're a good Pop. He's a lucky boy.

JACK. Just a small piece of the sky.

GILBERT. My Pop took me to see that show.

JACK. You must have been a lucky boy too.

PIECE OF THE SKY

GILBERT. Just a small piece of the sky. (*As Jack and Gilbert grow sullen, lights rise slightly on center bar as One picks up a cell phone, punches in a few numbers, and lays the phone back on the bar. One puts their hand over their heart, with no emotion, and bows their head. Gilbert bursts into tears. Jack moves to comfort him, but before he can get near, Gilbert moves away, toward the phone that seems to be glowing even brighter now. Lights out stage left and center then rise stage right.*)

GABBY. Alright Mr. Philosopher, why don't you go ahead and tell me what's under the surface.

BENJAMIN. You know...Nietzsche may have been a lying sack of shit, but he was also on to something. Nietzsche also said something like...you have your way and I have my way, but as for the right way, the only way, it does not exist. Or something like that.

GABBY. Do you agree?

BENJAMIN. Are you asking if I believe in right and wrong?

GABBY. Good and bad?

BENJAMIN. I think it's all in the perception of something.

GABBY. What's wrong for one person can be right for another.

BENJAMIN. A thing...an action...can be both. Good and bad. Right and wrong. Take, for example, killing. Thou shalt not kill. Unless it's for God and country. Or self-defense. Then, kill away. This whole reality is created for us by social

agreement, or more precisely by religious social agreement, and we fall right into it, generation after generation.

GABBY. (*Sarcastically.*) Heathen.

BENJAMIN. Are you saying you do believe in right and wrong?

GABBY. I have to. My preacher wouldn't lie. Like Nietzsche, the bastard.

BENJAMIN. The bastard.

GABBY. No, seriously, I see what you're getting at. And you're probably right. But let's face it, whether socially...religiously socially created or not, if we do something wrong, there are consequences. And your philosophers aren't going to be there to help me when I have to run around with a big old A on my chest. Scarlett letter, baby. (*Benjamin is clearly struck by what Gabby has said. There is now a tension in the air.*)

BENJAMIN. Wow.

PIECE OF THE SKY

GABBY. Yeah, Wow.

BENJAMIN. What about *my* A?

GABBY. Seriously? This thing goes south – you get a trophy. I get an A. (*Benjamin looks stunned.*) Listen, PBR, I think you should make an exit while you can. (*Benjamin pauses and stands up. Gabby stares straight ahead, looking stoic. Benjamin turns with his hand out – an offer to dance. Gabby stands up, grabs Benjamin’s hand, and they begin to dance without looking at each other.*) I used to be a dancer.

BENJAMIN. Back in the day? (*Gabby smacks Benjamin on the arm. They both laugh and now look at each other, still in the dance embrace. They freeze as they are hit with a single red spotlight. Pause. They then speak without moving.*)

GABBY. This is crazy.

BENJAMIN. Yes.

GABBY. We’re crazy.

BENJAMIN. You’re beautiful.

GABBY. You don’t know me.

BENJAMIN. I think I do.

GABBY. I don’t know you.

BENJAMIN. I think you do. (*Lights up as Gabby abruptly pulls out of the dance.*)

GABBY. Thanks, PBR.

BENJAMIN. Benjamin.

GABBY. Too real right now.

BENJAMIN. (*He pulls out Gabby’s bar stool.*) M’lady. (*They sit.*) Can I buy you another drink?

GABBY. Sand please. (*Benjamin motions for another drink as the lights convert to simultaneous spotlights on Gabby and Benjamin.*)

BENJAMIN. When I held her...

GABBY. ...It felt like time just...

BENJAMIN. ...dropped away, and space...

GABBY. ...just dropped away...

BENJAMIN. ...and we became...

GABBY. ...he could see me...

BENJAMIN. ...she could see me...

PIECE OF THE SKY

GABBY. ...and we became...

BENJAMIN/GABBY. ...a ball of light. (*A pause as Benjamin begins to look afraid.*)

BENJAMIN. And I can't do this. (*Benjamin's spotlight goes out leaving Gabby alone in her spot.*)

GABBY. (*Quietly.*) I'll be here next Friday at six. (*Pause; then louder.*) I'll be here Friday. At six. (*The lights go out stage right and rise on the center bar.*)

TWO. Oh! They're moving so fast. (*Two runs to the stage right center bar and causes a red spotlight to appear on Benjamin and Gabby, who are frozen in a dance pose. Two looks to One, smiles, pauses, then causes the spotlight to disappear. Two then begins to pour two more invisible drinks, but before they can get the second one done, they look to One, panicked. As Two looks back to the stage right bar, a large and very bright white spotlight comes up where the red light had been. Gabby and Benjamin are not in it. It's just the light. It grows brighter and brighter. Two looks back again, panicked, to One.*) I'm not doing that!

ONE. It's okay.

TWO. I'm not doing that!

ONE. It's okay! (*The white spotlight goes out very quickly. Two looks at One, then back at the stage right center bar. A smaller, single spotlight comes up at one end. It stays up.*)

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
ORDER A COPY AT WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM***