

**THE UMBRELLA & THE BILLOW**

*There are two bar stools and a third way upstage-  
we are in a crowded inner city bar at lunchtime.*

*YVONNE- sits at a table in shadows of club/pub,  
upstage, throwing salt over her shoulder and  
intermittently circling her table three times,  
or whatever her habit is. She seems to require a  
certain period of finger clicking with her arms  
in the air to complete the process.*

*Abbie, wearing something red, forces her way to  
the bar, coming into near collision with the  
salt thrower- wipes down her dress, collects  
herself..looking for her internet date.*

*NOTE: every drink they take is embodied- no  
miming of drinking but the action of ingesting  
something, whatever that is for each character,  
the shudder and thaw of it, its affect on them,  
is embodied / physicalised. It's a coping  
strategy for each involved.*

ABBIE

(to members of crowd)

...ex-squeeze me, sorry...sorry....

*Arrives at bar.*

Red wine, please. Large.

LARGE. Sorry? Oh - house, yes - (shouting) HOUSE. Thanks.

*Abbie fixes herself, she can spy her reflection  
in any one of the mirrors on the wall opp, the  
ceiling, checks herself. A man arrives at the  
bar, an anxious or vulnerable air about him,  
sits next to her, slowly raises a red umbrella,  
sits staring ahead. Abbie laughs.*

I don't think you'll get wet in here

HAMILL

(trying to ignore her, centre  
himself)

It's always wet and I'm always thirsty

ABBIE

*Thinking it's a joke, laughs, then corrects  
herself...drinks -*

Sorry?

HAMILL

(to her)

It's always wet and I'm always thirsty

ABBIE

Oh.oh...

*Beat, intrigued, another sip*  
What does that mean?

*Hamill is clutching his Billow, looking around for somewhere else to sit*  
Oh, of course! Drink! I'll get you one- what're you having?

HAMILL

(instructive, definitive)  
It's not that kind of thirst.

ABBIE

Oh? Oh, you mean...thirsty, in here, (*indicating the heart*)  
in a kind of spiritual sense? (*impressed*) wow...yes..yes  
aren't we all! Ha!.

*He turns away*  
oh no i understand i do, i - well, i i mean, i'm not  
exactly religious, actually, maybe a bit in my spare time,  
well, the god of love, ha! but not - i don't believe in -  
so not - but of course, heart it's all about the heart,  
isn't it? gosh, i'm raving, raving, sorry - what'll it be?

HAMILL

No, no -

ABBIE

It's fine, really - I know you're loaded but this is my  
treat- can't miss *that* fire engine red, that's for sure.  
Supreme choice. I only had this drab red thing..

HAMILL

Sorry?

*Yvonne, a female Superstitionist from across the bar, squeezes her way to them.*

YVONNE

(small voice, loud bar)  
Excuse me, excuse me, sorry, I don't mean to interrupt, I  
was just wondering - would you mind very much lowering your-  
putting your umbrella down?

HAMILL

Sorry?

ABBIE

(to HAMILL)  
You can close it now, I mean, I've seen you, loud and  
clear! It's a great idea. Actually couldn't miss *anyone*  
under these mirrors (*indicating the ceiling*), a bit much,  
don't you think? Ah, but maybe you have a ceiling mirror in  
your bedroom! Ha!

*Beat*  
See yourself upside down?

*Beat*  
Do you?  
(he doesn't answer,  
bewildered)

YVONNE  
(closer now)  
Excuse me - it's hard to be heard in here - I don't mean to interrupt, but the umbrella - could you please -

HAMILL  
No, no, it's not an umbrella -

ABBIE  
(to YVONNE)  
Can you not see? (above his umbrella, to order)  
(to bartender - )  
Stella please, and a House, HOUSE red  
(to YVONNE)  
I'll order for you -

YVONNE  
No, its not obstructing my view,its -  
(to bartender)  
Large. LARGE.  
(To Hamill)  
Stella, is that ok?  
(to bartender)  
Stella

HAMILL  
No - no- thanks, I'll get -

ABBIE  
(to bartender)  
- Hang on,  
(to Hamill)  
I'll guess -

YVONNE  
It's -  
HAMILL  
(to Yvonne)  
It's -

ABBIE  
(to Hamill)  
- Gosh, I just assume all over the place....oh he's doing two Stellas...we gotta be quick....Whiskey?

HAMILL  
I don't want a whiskey!

YVONNE  
- raised indoors! I don't mean to impose, but could you please lower your umbrella!

HAMILL  
 (to Yvonne)  
 It's not an umbrella, it's my Billow

YVONNE  
 Your umbrella?

ABBIE  
 Your what?

HAMILL  
 Billow! We don't call it an umbrella.  
 (returning to his prayer)  
 It's always wet and I'm always thirsty.

ABBIE  
 Ah, right. OK. Yep. It does rain a lot!

(to Yvonne)  
 What do you want?  
 (to Hammill)  
 I think *she's* a Superstitionist.

*Yvonne doesn't know what to do with herself, didn't see this hitch coming, the billow- she is a little stumped, turning for advice from her fellowship, who are watching her in support from the back of the bar*

ABBIE  
 (to Yvonne)  
 Are you a Superstitionist?

YVONNE  
 Who are you?

ABBIE  
 Hey, I come in peace! Abbie, I'm Abbie...I think he may be...you know, I think this is his thing. So.. which is fine..

*Hand on his arm, marking her territory with Yvonne..Hamill is shocked...*  
 I'm fine with that.

(to Yvonne)  
 Do you want a drink? Last chance

YVONNE  
 No

ABBIE  
 Good.

YVONNE  
 I've mine over there.

ABBIE  
 Oh yes, I see them. Hey, do you actually pray to the ladder? You see my grandma used to -

YVONNE

Look, I didn't come over to discuss my convictions, I came to convey my complete distress at this um- billow- being raised indoors. It's only a matter of time before something happens. It's a beautiful red but please lower it.

MAN

I can't put it down. I just can't.

ABBIE

..ok.

HAMILL

It's always always always always

YVONNE

I don't know what you mean -

HAMILL

Please...this billow is my prayer.

ABBIE

Your what?

HAMILL

PRAYER.

*pause*

ABBIE

You're not my internet date are you?

*Pause*

HAMILL

WHAT?

ABBIE

I was looking out for a man wearing something....well, red.

HAMILL

Oh! No...I - no, I - oh, my, no wonder you bought me a drink! Oh, my, no, I don't- I mean, I'm married, I don't -

ABBIE

Married, yes, of course.

YVONNE

Please, I don't want to disturb your - but I'm only asking you to lower it. You don't even have to close it.

ABBIE

(to Yvonne)

Hang on a sec.

(to Hamill)

Are you sure? About being married?

HAMILL

( bartender)

Vodka. Double.

(to Abbie)

I'm sorry, but I can't - no, no ice- I must turn from you now, sorry, but it's Friday, you see it's - I'm not allowed to talk to women on the prowl on a Friday.

ABBIE

You what?

HAMILL

(to Abbie, firmly, under fire)

Please, no, I'm very sorry. I hope you find who you are. Looking for.

(to Yvonne)

Why don't you two...chat..just please ..to ignore me. Please. Please please please-

YVONNE

Look, I respect your right to pray, of course, but you must understand that a) we are in a pub which is NOT a church and b) raising your umbrella is sending shock waves into your good self, into me, here look, I'm almost shaking, into my colleagues in the corner, into this table, into this chair, into the very bubbles in your beer... Please, we've come here to drink peaceably among friends and bother no one. Can you not raise it another time, or do that outside?

ABBIE

What do you mean, it's Friday?

(he doesn't answer her)

what do you mean? On the prowl?

(he doesn't answer her)

Hello!?! Hey! I'm right here!

YVONNE

Look, he told you - they don't speak to single women. Fridays.

ABBIE

But - but -maybe I'm married- does that make it ok? If I'm married?

YVONNE

It's in the Billowbook. Look it up.

*Tense, looking at her watch.*

(to herself) it's almost time.

(to him) Sir, could you not pray outside?

(to Yvonne)

*he takes a swig.*

YVONNE  
 (looking at watch)  
 There are outdoor beer gardens up there!

HAMILL  
 It would get wet

YVONNE  
 What would?

HAMILL  
 My Billow!

*(GLASS SHATTERS, someone screams, they all  
 flinch, look around)*

*Beat*

ABBIE  
 Oh Ouch, that's a nasty cut! Taxi!

YVONNE  
 (looking for her friends,  
 panic has got her by the  
 throat)  
 What did I tell you? what did i tell you?

*She is breathing deeply to calm herself.*  
 Please, I beg of you, depress your billow now and let us  
 all live without consequence.

ABBIE  
 Wait a minute, you think that happened because of the  
 umbrella?

HAMILL  
 Billow

YVONNE  
 Of course it did!

*(looks at watch, to herself).*  
 I must take a seat-

*None spare.*

HAMILL  
 (like a mantra)  
 It's always wet and I'm always thirsty

ABBIE  
 Drink up. Actually, no, I take it back. (grabs his  
 untouched Stella).

YVONNE  
 He won't answer you, i told you! Not till tomorrow morning.  
 Could I please borrow your seat?

ABBIE

(to Yvonne)

I'm sorry but I'm waiting for someone. Perhaps you should just get back to your drink.

YVONNE

(to Hamill)

No, it's not safe. What is your name? what is his name?

*Abbie shrugs, feigning indifference*

YVONNE

Sir, I admire your determination and I'm sorry you're always thirsty, I really am, we can all relate to that, we can all relate to an aching inside of us which is -  
(gestures) -

*He is listening now.*

which can't be soothed by anything external, which no amount of smoothing down a handtowel or laughing in this pub with our friends can fix, that feeling that we are always looking for something,

ABBIE

I'll drink to that.

YVONNE

- something to fill that gnawing emptiness, this gaping vacuum which quickens our pulse in a queue because we have to stand still and face ourselves, this emptiness which threatens to swallow us whole when we see how close other people are to each other, how far away we are from what we wanted,

ABBIE

I try not to look at it that way

YVONNE

yes yes, of course, we can all relate to feeling thirsty no matter how much we drink, no matter how many of these drinks we down, this thirst that stays in here, on the inside, rain hail or shine-

ABBIE

(out, blankly, to bartender)

I just tend to black out

YVONNE

but please, take responsibility for your own thirst, please, you cannot raise an umbrella indoors, take your prayer to where it is not threatening the lives of innocent people. Someone's palm is bleeding out there. If you absolutely must raise it, have some consideration for those around you and step outside!

HAMILL

Oh, you want *me* to step outside? See what *people* these are! She wants *me* to step outside! Now *I* must step outside!

*Taking a stand, stuck for words.*

ABBIE

Oh, gawd...

HAMILL

- I'm to blame for this bleeding palm? always my fault, is it?

YVONNE

I'm just asking you to consider what-

HAMILL

Consider? Consider perhaps to ruin a prayer and pester me with your pathetic ideas of queues and what gaping little emptiness is tickling you inside, is is-

*Drinks*

Why should *I* have to leave - just because you think there's something spooky about walking under a ladder?

*(Hamill moves in front of her with the raised umbrella, Yvonne backs off, is cornered)*

YVONNE

I don't have to listen to this

ABBIE

Hey, hey, people, it's just a bar! Wow. Look, does that prayer have to last the whole evening? Can't you just close it now?

*(he ignores her again)*

YVONNE

Exactly. Let me pass.

*(looks at her watch again, looking around )*

HAMILL

What, you've not got time for me now?

YVONNE

I need a seat!

*(she spies his seat but doesn't want to go near that billow)*  
*(to Abbie)*

Can I have your seat?

ABBIE

Why?

*She doesn't move. Hamill retreats to his stool.*

YVONNE

Now!

*Yvonne looks over at her colleagues, all seated.*

ABBIE

Oh, they're all seated over there. Yes, I'd heard about that. Must feel good to join hands like that, but sorry I'm - give her your seat.

*Hamill ignores Abbie.*

ABBIE

Oh, for - !

*(Abbie grabs at the umbrella, Hamill jumps off his seat to swing it out of her reach)*

HAMILL

Why you-

ABBIE

Ah, so I do exist!

*Yvonne grabs Hamill's seat.*

HAMILL

I was talking to - *(sees Yvonne in his seat)* hey!

*Yvonne is doing a superstitionist five past one ritual, clicking her fingers and focusing intently on the rhythm, regaining her equilibrium.*

*(laughing but suspicious)* What are you doing?

YVONNE

*(to herself)*

I should be over there

*(meaning with her other Superstitionist friends).*

*(to Hamill)*

If you don't put that down, I'm warning you, there'll be more trouble! You must believe me, I don't want anything to happen to you, to any of us, we're in a bar for goodness sake, we are trying to relax, have some respect, lower it, take it outside.

ABBIE

*(to YVONNE)*

You need a drink- I'm getting you a -

HAMILL

*(raises it higher, stuck standing)*

I have a right to raise my Billow if I want to! You can't just waltz in here, you you Supersitionists, putting all the ladders down and expect me to change my way of life by claiming your god made someone cut themselves!

YVONNE

Your way of life? This is my local too! I drink here all the time! My god? Superstition is a belief formed without reason or knowledge, what the hell do you think your umbrella is?

HAMILL

Billow

YVONNE

I don't even believe in a god!

HAMILL

Then you've spoken your own thirst.

*Beat.*

*They all drink.*

ABBIE

I've got to find my date.

YVONNE

Put it down before we all die!

HAMILL

No.

*(turns away, under his  
breath)*

Infidel.

*(Yvonne throws the spare Stella on the Billow)*

ABBIE

Hey!

*(beer all over her red dress)*

HAMILL

What did you do that for?

YVONNE

*(to HAMMILL)*

That is what we call a Consequence. I asked you nicely.

HAMILL

*(to Abbie)*

Could you find a - a teatowel?

ABBIE

Could I? could I? I'm on the *prowl*! How could I? I'm a woman on the *prowl* on a Friday!

*(storms out to clean herself up, find her date).*

HAMILL

(taking Abbie's seat)

I'm not putting it down. If you think a bit of beer is going to change anything, you're wrong.

YVONNE

(standing)

What exactly do you have against Superstitionists? What!? I asked you gently, I've pleaded, I've done nothing but be civil but if you keep sitting there, all holier than thou, rocking under that pert pathetic piece of umbrella like it's raining in here -

HAMILL

BILLOW!

YVONNE

something bad will happen! Excuse me, bartender, excuse me

YVONNE

He won't lower his billow -  
umbrella!

HAMILL

She won't let me pray at the  
bar!

*(The ceiling mirror comes loose, falls, shatters. They both duck, knocked over. Both are then crouching in recovery under the umbrella, between two bar stools)*

YVONNE

(shell shocked)

told you so.

HAMILL

Oh, please

YVONNE

That's one massive mirror -

HAMILL

Oh my, the girl, the girl in red, she's - *(grimaces)*

YVONNE

It's completely shattered.

HAMILL

Oh my, I hope she's -

YVONNE

..it could have fallen on all of us

HAMILL

It didn't!

YVONNE

Thank god.

HAMILL

Yes.

*He does*

YVONNE

Oh, that's sweet, look, the tall one, he's really attentive to her

HAMILL

Well, he landed on top of her too.

YVONNE

No, I mean look, she - I think she's giggling -

HAMILL

Because he keeps bashing her with his elbow.

YVONNE

Oh...he's giving her his coat.

HAMILL

Looks painful.

YVONNE

(startled, pushing Hamill  
away)

Christ Jesus Fuck

HAMILL

What???

YVONNE

I've been under the umb- your billow

*(pulls back, standing suddenly)*

HAMILL

I think you'll be ok

YVONNE

No. No. Have you only one parent?

HAMILL

Excuse me?

YVONNE

I've got to kiss someone who has only one parent, re-directs the intention. Otherwise the consequence will rest on me. Alone. Entirely on me!

HAMILL

What?

YVONNE

Have you only one parent?

HAMILL

*(shaking his head)*

You must be terrified all the time

YVONNE

No, no, you've no idea, do you? There are links, there are synchronicities, there are things - look, you wouldn't understand... have you only one parent?

*Beat*

HAMMILL

Who has only one parent? You really believe this don't you?

YVONNE

(looking around for other  
contenders, clicking her  
fingers in the air)

Well? Yes or no?

HAMILL

...Now.

YVONNE

Sorry?

HAMILL

He - We- I've come from his funeral...to have a drink.

YVONNE

I'm sorry....

HAMILL

And here I am surrounded by bits of broken mirror,  
crouching under a bar stool with a, a finger clicking, self  
righteous..little..sorry.. scared ...little  
Superstitionist.

YVONNE

I'm not - ....I'm sorry.

*Beat*

HAMILL

Don't be. My father would have approved of your...logic.

YVONNE

They want (bar staff) us to move. Please, can I kiss you  
quickly, I'm shaking again - I'll be quick-

*Goes to kiss him for her own selfish purposes,  
he is turning away*

HAMILL

I - I -

YVONNE

I know you're married, it won't -

HAMILL

No, no, it's not that, I mean, I'm not but I -

YVONNE  
You said you were

HAMILL  
I lied. I can't-

*(she goes to lean in , he pulls away, billow raised between them)*  
It's Friday!

*Yvonne is hurt*

HAMILL  
I'm really sorry, it's Friday, I-

YVONNE  
I'm not on the prowl! Look at me - I need to find someone to kiss.

*(going to do so, but -)*  
Why? Explain Friday!

HAMILL  
You wouldn't understand

YVONNE  
What, because I'm a woman?

HAMILL  
No, well, yes, it's traditional, is all.

YVONNE  
What is? Spurning women on Fridays?

HAMILL  
Only sunset to sunset

YVONNE  
Why women?

HAMILL  
You don't understand.

YVONNE  
And if my leg were broken?

HAMILL  
Oh, please!

YVONNE  
No, if my leg were broken, I'm lying beneath this stool, beneath this terrifying shard of mirror and it's a Friday?

*(pause)*  
What, you'd just turn away? Given I'm a single woman?

HAMILL  
Are you? Single?

Unbelievable. YVONNE

Of course I would. HAMILL

What? YVONNE

Help. If your leg were broken. HAMILL

Lost? YVONNE

What? HAMILL

If I were only lost? YVONNE

No. HAMILL

Unbelievable. YVONNE

Well, you could ask someone else. For directions. HAMILL

Someone willing to speak to a loose woman on a Friday night? YVONNE

You asked! HAMILL

I'm trying to understand, really I am, but that's - it's- (gestures) YVONNE

If you had a broken leg, I would! HAMILL

*Pokes someone in eye with his billow.*  
Sorry -

HAMILL  
You believe in sitting down  
at five past one, for fucks  
sake!

YVONNE  
I'm not even looking for a  
fucking man!

*Beat*

YVONNE  
We can't both be in this bar.

*Hamill blows her a slow kiss.*

HAMILL

That one's for my father

YVONNE

What???

HAMILL

I mean, he would have -

*Abbie hobbles over, oversized man's coat on  
shoulders  
(to Hamill)*

ABBIE

What? Is she married too? And that makes it ok?

YVONNE

Are you ok? Watch it, don't -

ABBIE

So not everyone is out of bounds on a Friday night?

(to Hamill)

Look! It's ok, I'm ok, it's only a small cut- see  
Though of course you can't see me under that -

*Abbie smears blood on his face*

'Billow'

*Hamill grabs her, wrestles her to the ground,  
handing his billow to Yvonne who drops the  
billow once realizing*

ABBIE

So i do exist! I do!

YVONNE

Stop it! Stop it! She's just LONELY!

*Yvonne pulls Hamill off her, helps Abbie up*

ABBIE

(to Yvonne)

I'm not fucking - I've a very large man over there, you you-

*Hamill rescues his Billow*

HAMILL

(to himself, regaining  
composure)

It's always wet and I'm always -

ABBIE

- Bitch!

*Abbie slaps Yvonne, then storms out, hobbling.*

YVONNE  
 (holding her cheek, to  
 Hammill)  
 I....told...you.....to.....close .....it

HAMILL  
 (pleading)  
 Wait!  
 Wait - don't go. not yet. It's not safe

YVONNE  
 What do you mean?

HAMILL  
 Hail, there may be hail, huge lumps of hail

YVONNE  
 I've got to find my group

HAMILL  
 No, wait-

*Pause*

YVONNE  
 It makes me nervous

HAMILL  
 I'll stay over here, look, I'm hiding over here

YVONNE  
 But you've still got - it's still-

HAMILL  
 You can't see me

YVONNE  
 That's not the point.

HAMILL  
 Look! (*clicking his fingers on one hand, rocking under his  
 Bellow*) look! What you said about thirst - does this help  
 you? does it quench something for you?

YVONNE  
 Stop rocking

HAMILL  
 Does it?

*Beat. Takes a peek at her.*  
 what's wrong?

YVONNE  
 I don't feel so well - why do you want to know?

HAMILL

There are not many - I meet not many people who..own their own..emptiness. You're full of it. I mean, I mean-

YVONNE

Doing it on your own doesn't do much, but all together, when we're together - yes, it helps. I've got to find my group

HAMILL

I understand, I do. Family.

YVONNE

Yet you laugh at me

HAMILL

I don't laugh much

YVONNE

(smiling)

I bet you do. When you're not praying.

*Yvonne leaving*

Wait....I'll walk you out? You can use my Billow as an umbrella?

*She glares at him.*

No, no I mean- on the outside?

*Pause. She considers this.*

*HUGE CRAAAACK ABOVE.*

*Hamill is clutching his Billow*

YVONNE

What was that?