

Blue Umbrella

A Ten-Minute Comedy

by Butch Maxwell

The Characters

MARA — “I don’t know.” A professor in her 50s. Agnostic, skeptical, pragmatic.

PAUL — “I know.” A professor of theology. Intelligent, funny, and fully aware of the problems with the position he holds anyway.

ELLIE — “I need to know.” A younger staff member. Raised with faith, she has lost it, or is losing it, and has an actual decision riding on the answer.

Setting:

A student lounge in a classroom building at a small university. An exterior door, mostly glass, looks out onto the rain. A hallway leads toward classrooms.

Time:

The present. Around 9:00 p.m., as night classes let out.

A student lounge in a classroom building at a small university. Vending machines, institutional furniture, a bulletin board gone soft with age. An exterior door, mostly glass, stage right or left, through which rain is visible and audible. A hallway upstage leads toward classrooms. Night classes have just ended. It is around 9:00 p.m.

At rise: PAUL and MARA are carrying their things — bags, papers, the debris of a long teaching day.

PAUL

I said I know. I didn't say I could prove it.

MARA

That's not a distinction. That's a loophole with a philosophy degree.

PAUL

It's a distinction.

MARA

(Zipping her bag.)

Fine. Prove nothing and know everything. Very efficient. Saves so much time.

PAUL

I didn't say I know everything.

MARA

You said you know God exists. That's not a small everything.

PAUL

It's one thing.

MARA

It's the thing.

A beat. Distant, through the hallway, a door closes. Footsteps, receding.

PAUL

You believe things without proof constantly. You believe your car will start tomorrow.

MARA

I have evidence my car starts. It's called yesterday.

PAUL

You believe your friends like you.

MARA

I have considerably less evidence for that one.

Paul almost laughs. Doesn't quite let himself.

PAUL

You see how you do that?

MARA

Do what?

PAUL

You let yourself be charming so I forget you didn't answer.

MARA

I answered. I said I don't know. You're the one who won't say it.

She looks toward the exterior door. Rain, harder now.
Wonderful.

PAUL

What?

MARA

I left mine in the car. Three buildings away.

Paul checks his bag. Nothing.

PAUL

Mine, too.

MARA

Of course.

A beat. She looks at him — an idea arriving, uninvited, the way irritation invents things.

MARA

Ask Him.

PAUL

Ask who what?

MARA

You know who. Ask Him for an umbrella.

PAUL

That is not how it works.

MARA

You just told me you know Him. On a first-name basis, presumably, though I assume you use the formal address.

PAUL

Prayer isn't a — you don't just—

MARA

You don't just what? Ask?

PAUL

Request. Demand. Whatever verb you're reaching for. It's not a — He's not a—

MARA

Vending machine.

PAUL

Thank you.

MARA

Then this should be easy. Ask for something you're certain He won't provide, and watch nothing happen, and we'll both have learned something.

Paul, despite himself, is turning this over.

PAUL

That's not — you're trying to set up a test.

MARA

I'm trying to get home dry.

PAUL

Those aren't the same thing and you know it.

MARA

Either way, I win. If something happens, I stay dry. If nothing happens, I get to be right.

A silence. Paul looks at the door. The rain.

PAUL

An umbrella.

MARA

An umbrella.

PAUL

Any umbrella?

MARA

(A beat.)

Blue.

PAUL

Blue.

MARA

Blue. If we're doing this, let's not do it halfway.

PAUL

You're not taking this seriously.

MARA

I am freezing, my car is far away, and you've made a number of claims tonight that a blue umbrella would go a long way toward—

PAUL

Fine.

This stops her. She didn't expect fine.

MARA

Fine?

PAUL

Fine.

Unnoticed by Mara and Paul, ELLIE appears in the hallway, coat half on, slowing as she approaches.

Paul does not close his eyes. He does not fold his hands. He simply looks toward the door and the rain, and says, quietly, without performance—

A blue umbrella. If it's no trouble.

A beat. Nothing happens, because, of course, nothing happens.

MARA

If it's no trouble.

PAUL

I'm not going to demand.

MARA

God forbid.

ELLIE

Tell me that's not what I think it is.

MARA

Depends what you think it is.

ELLIE

You're making him pray for something.

PAUL

She's making me pray for something.

MARA

Nobody's making anybody. I asked. He agreed. There's a difference.

ELLIE

There's really not.

Ellie has drifted toward the exterior door, checking the rain, only half listening now.

It's really coming down.

MARA

We noticed.

ELLIE

Neither of you has one either, I'm guessing.

PAUL

We're addressing that.

ELLIE

Through prayer.

PAUL

Through prayer.

ELLIE

(Not quite hiding a smile.)

Well. Don't let me interrupt something so promising.

She glances out the glass — idly, the way you check weather, not expecting anything. Stops.

Huh.

MARA

What?

ELLIE

There's an umbrella out there.

A beat. Nobody moves.

MARA

There's an umbrella lots of places, Ellie, it's a university, people own umbrellas—

ELLIE

It's blue.

END OF SAMPLE