

British Theatre Guide

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Under The Lamp Post

Ilaria Passeri

Micheál Jacob and Ilaria the Storyteller

Gullivers, Manchester

29–31 July 2025

In character as Ilaria the Storyteller, Ilaria Passeri tours venues with a suitcase containing puppets and props telling uplifting and amusing tales. Having recently grasped the concept of a rite of passage, however, Passeri revisits turning points in her life, transforming tonight's show, *Under The Lamp Post*, into a gossipy therapy session.

Verbal storytelling is a well-worn technique, and there is an old-fashioned tone to the evening. As Passeri's family lacked Internet connection, they tackled questions in the traditional manner by looking up answers in *The Hutchinson Encyclopedia*, a copy of which lies on the stage. In her pre-teen years, Passeri longed for her mother to find a husband after the breakdown of her first marriage. When the wish is granted, Passeri could not be happier, even when her stepfather's tardy timekeeping leaves her stranded under a lamp post waited to be picked up after drama class.

Passeri uses the intimacy of the small venue to enhance the emotional impact of her story, there are no barriers between her and the audience; we could be having a chat in a pub. The opening of *Under The Lamp Post* is in the cheeky tradition of autobiographical storytelling. Passeri relates how her credibility at school is enhanced when she mentions her stepfather has given her *Animal Farm* and her schoolmates assume it is a then-notorious pornographic video, not the Orwell novel. As she ages, Passeri notes how she begins to assume the mannerisms of her mother including adopting a specific coat for dramatic exits.

Even when her beloved stepfather falls ill, the tone of the show remains light, initially at least. The nurses transporting him to the hospice arrive on Halloween to be greeted by Passeri's brother in costume as the Grim Reaper mistaking them as trick or treat 'sexy' nurses and distributing sweets.

The atmosphere turns deeply personal, indeed, raw and truthful. It is easy to relate to Passeri taking silent offence that the wake for her late stepfather does not feature his favourite foods, and conversations do not seem to relate to the deceased. She does, however, see the humour in a thoughtless mourner claiming to have had the worst day ever.

The weary desperation of a family trying to respond to the requests of the ailing father is heartbreakingly recounted, as is the defensive dark humour adopted at such times. As a relative is a funeral director, Passeri's stepfather is delighted to qualify for a friends and family discount.

Passeri uses the show to express, if not exorcise, her grief, and tonight, at least one of the moments where she is overwhelmed by emotion does not seem like acting. The tone becomes particularly intense as Passeri finds grief intruding into her daily activities leading her to question the value of her work and causing her to display symptoms of a nervous breakdown. Passeri feels like reverting to her teenage self, waiting under a lamp post for an adult to help.

Storytelling is generally used in a light-hearted manner aimed at audiences relaxed after a few drinks and eager for entertainment. Ilaria Passeri uses *Under The Lamp Post* as self-therapy working towards catharsis, resulting in an emotionally demanding, even discomforting show which is hard to forget.

Reviewer: [David Cunningham](#)