

UPPIES AND DOWNIES

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Mike McCafferty

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SYNOPSIS: Paul and Rudolph are riding the Sissymaker, the largest, most injury-inducing roller coaster in the world. Rudolph is an "uppie" (hands up during the ride) while Paul is a "downie" (hands down). During the slow climb to the top, they talk about life, roller coasters, and hot dogs and find a common link with them all.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(2 MEN)

PAUL (m)

RUDOLPH (m)

AT RISE:

We see two people seated in a coaster car. RUDOLPH sits on the right, PAUL the left. PAUL looks a little uncomfortable, while RUDOLPH beams. After a few seconds of sitting quietly, RUDOLPH acts as if he reaches the top of the coaster hill. He lifts his arms and begins screaming wildly. He lurches left, then right, then left again, making appropriate grunts and hoots along the way. At last, the coaster seems to come to a halt. RUDOLPH huffs and hollers a bit more and at last seems satisfied. He lowers his arms and is now quiet. He then stares at PAUL, who is looking straight ahead, almost oblivious. Until finally...

RUDOLPH: Boy, I can't wait for this ride to start.

PAUL: Yeah.

RUDOLPH: I can't believe it. I'm actually on the highest, fastest, longest, most injury-prone coaster in the world.

PAUL: Yes.

RUDOLPH: *(Raises his arms triumphantly.)* The Sissymaker! Boy, what a ride! What a ride! I can't wait. Hey, could you believe that line? Four hours! Wow!

PAUL: It was long.

RUDOLPH: Hey, you can say that again, buddy. It's a good thing they had all those food vendors near the line so that you could keep from starving all that time. Hey, how much were those cheese and chili hotdogs anyway?

PAUL: Six seventy-five a piece.

RUDOLPH: Holy butt-scratchin'! That's a lot. But I guess when you throw in these commemorative napkins and the free handful a' mustard, they give you, it almost breaks even. Still, that kinda stuff can add up!

PAUL: *(Sort of under his breath.)* Especially when you eat six of them.

RUDOLPH: Hey, did I eat that many? Cripes, I'm a pig! Ha! Hey, I hope those dogs and all that beer I chugged don't make me sick! Then I might heave all over ya! Ha! I'm just kiddin' on that one. Don't worry, buddy, if I feel the 'urge to purge' I'll just lean over the side and let 'er rip! *(They both lurch back as the coaster begins to move.)* Whooo! Here we go! Hope your insurance is made out buddy, 'cause we're on our way!

PAUL: Yes, yes, we are.

RUDOLPH: *(To people in line.)* Hey! I'm gonna barf! I'm gonna barf! Ha! Look at 'em run! *(To PAUL.)* Just kidding. I'm not really gonna barf. That's immature. I'm gonna spit. *(He spits off the side. They both watch.)* Uh-oh. I hit that big guy. *(Pointing to PAUL.)* Hey! He did it! Ha! Just kidding, buddy. No offense.

PAUL: Huh, sure.

RUDOLPH: *(Sits back quietly for a few seconds then studies PAUL. After contemplating him with what faculties he has.)* So, you an uppie or a downie?

PAUL: Wh-what?

RUDOLPH: An uppie or a downie? You know - - *(Lifts hands.)* Hands up *(Lowers hands.)* or down during the ride?

PAUL: Oh. I, uh...down, I guess.

RUDOLPH: *(Slaps PAUL on the back.)* Ha, ha, ha! That's what I thought. I looked at you, and I just knew that you were a downie. I don't know if it's my instinct, my keen sense of observation, or that plate in my head, but something told me you were a downie.

PAUL: Yes, well, I.... So you're probably an...

RUDOLPH: *(Raises his arms in the air triumphantly.)* Uppie! Whoo, whoo! Always an uppie! I've been on all the great coasters, the 'Terror,' the 'Bone Smasher,' the 'Chiropractor's Delight,' and I've always been an uppie.

PAUL: Wow. That's something to be proud of.

RUDOLPH: I think it goes back to the days when my dad and I used to play my favorite game as a kid: 'toss you off the roof.'

PAUL: Oh. I've never played that. How does that go?

RUDOLPH: Well, my dad would take me to the top of the roof and uh...toss me off.

PAUL: Didn't that hurt?

RUDOLPH: Oh, no... Well, not until we moved into the two-story house.

PAUL: I see.

RUDOLPH: Good thing we never moved into that high rise like Dad always wanted.

PAUL: Yeah. Good thing.

RUDOLPH: *(Pause, looks down.)* Well, almost half-way up!

PAUL: I didn't realize this thing went so high.

RUDOLPH: You bet, buddy. So, how many coasters have you been on before?

PAUL: Uh, well, counting this one?

RUDOLPH: Yup.

PAUL: One.

RUDOLPH: One? Only...you mean this is your first time on one of these? Boy, you picked a doozy!

PAUL: Well, I needed to go on this.

RUDOLPH: You needed to? Why?

PAUL: Well, all my life I've been afraid of roller coasters. Just terrified of them. I've been to many amusement parks before in my life, but I've never been able to ride the coasters. Isn't that strange?

RUDOLPH: Why, of course not. It's perfectly understandable. Sure... You're just a pansy! Ha, ha! Just kidding there, buddy; a little coaster humor for ya.

PAUL: Very amusing. *(Starts to look down. Pause.)*

RUDOLPH: Hey, do ya mind me asking why you're riding this all of a sudden?

PAUL: Well, I needed to overcome my fear.

RUDOLPH: Of coasters?

PAUL: Of death.

RUDOLPH: Death.

PAUL: Yes.

RUDOLPH: How you gonna overcome your fear a death? *(Pause.)*
You gonna jump?

PAUL: What?

RUDOLPH: You gonna take a leap off this coaster?! No, no, don't do it! Please don't do it - -

PAUL: No, I - -

RUDOLPH: Don't do it yet. (*Yelling down.*) Hey, Elaine! Grab the camera! This wacko is gonna jump! I wanna get it on tape for 'America's craziest videotapes'!

PAUL: No, I'm not gonna, going to...

RUDOLPH: Alright! This is going to be great! I'll preserve this moment of human drama and cleverly edit it to become sidesplitting humor for the American populace! Then the tragic turned hilarious ending of your existence will become a multimedia sensation and pave the way for better understanding between all peoples and this great blue planed. Plus, I'll get ten thousand dollars! (*RUDOLPH looks expectantly at PAUL.*)

PAUL: I'm not jumping.

RUDOLPH: Then I'll finally be able to buy what I've always dreamed of, a giant inflatable gerbil! Man, I'll be the envy of the whole block!

PAUL: I'm not jumping.

RUDOLPH: People from miles around will say, "Hey, nice gerbil." And I'll just kick back and smile. Man, what a life.

PAUL: (*Pause.*) I'm not jumping.

RUDOLPH: You're not?

PAUL: No.

RUDOLPH: (*Pause.*) You owe me ten thousand dollars! And world peace now that I think of it. Elaine, turn off the camera. He's letting us down.

PAUL: Look, I'm sorry.

RUDOLPH: Well, what are you gonna do? Elaine! Take Junior outta that moat! Either he spilled his Mountain Dew or he tinkled in it again. (*Pause.*) So, I don't get it. Why are you riding this thing?

PAUL: Well, I finally discovered that the reason I was afraid of these rides is because they remind me of death.

RUDOLPH: Yeah, you said that. (*He reaches down and puts on an air mask.*)

PAUL: What is that?

RUDOLPH: Oxygen mask. Wanna hit?

PAUL: No, I... How high are we?

RUDOLPH: See that island over there?

PAUL: Yeah.

RUDOLPH: England. So how do these rides remind you a death?

PAUL: Well, you see, when you reach the top of the coaster, the very top and you look down - - which I hope to do in my life time - - at that very moment, you are staring into the jaws of death. You stare down at this endless void that terrifies you. You don't know what's down there, if anything. Will you continue on the tracks safely? Or will something go wrong, like you've suspected, and you plummet to nothingness? You don't know. Nobody knows until they reach the bottom. And by then, of course, it's too late. It's that moment of absolute uncertainty that scares me, because that is death.

RUDOLPH: Wow. That is deep!

PAUL: Yes, I know. My analyst told me.

RUDOLPH: Hey, I got a question. If you go on this thing, this death coaster backwards, is it like being born? Ha, ha, ha! Hey, sorry about that. Just a little existential coaster humor for ya!

PAUL: Well, I knew you wouldn't understand.

RUDOLPH: I do understand, but I think you got the wrong metaphor going. Ya see, the coaster isn't like death. It's like life. See, on this coaster, we all go on the same ride. But it's how we interpret the ride that makes it, and us, different. If you're terrified of life, then that first hill scares the heebie jeebies outta you. You go on through the ride clutching on to the bar just hoping that the end of the ride is coming up. It isn't fun, and neither is life. But if you look down that first hill and see it as an adventure, then the ride changes. Sure, it gets scary sometimes. But that's what makes it an adventure. You just let it carry you wherever it goes because you can't get off. Too late for that. And when the ride is over, you had a great time and you wanna ride again. Hey, look at some people sometime, and you can see 'em both, the uppies and the downies. Clear as day. And who enjoys life? Who do you think?

PAUL: *(Profound pause. PAUL is dumbfounded.)* I can't believe you just said that.

RUDOLPH: 'Why? You gonna jump again? Hey, Elaine, keep the camera rollin'.

PAUL: No, because that made sense. That makes all the sense in the world, and you said it.

RUDOLPH: Hey, what can ya do?

PAUL: You're right. I don't have to live my life in fear. I don't have to be afraid of everything I do. I - - DUCK! *(They both duck as something passes over them.)*

RUDOLPH: Plane?

PAUL: Satellite. I don't have to be afraid on that first hill. I should enjoy it.

RUDOLPH: There ya go.

PAUL: So what if at this height we could plunge to our deaths!

RUDOLPH: Right.

PAUL: This coaster might just jump the track at any moment.

RUDOLPH: Sure.

PAUL: We could end up smashed into a quarter inch of red and pink slime on the ground, but who cares.

RUDOLPH: *(Starts looking down, a little nervous.)* Uh-huh. Say, we really are up here...

PAUL: That's all part of life, the not knowing. We could die at any time...

RUDOLPH: We sure could. Hey, is there any way to unlatch this bar thing?

PAUL: And there isn't anything we can really do about it.

RUDOLPH: I think we're at the top. Does this thing look safe to you?

PAUL: Who cares! We won't know 'til we get there, and I think we're here.

RUDOLPH: *(Looks down the hill.)* Holy butt-scratchin'!

PAUL: *(Mentally bracing.)* Here it is! The moment of truth! *(As they both start to descend, they have their hands at about chest level. Suddenly PAUL lifts his hands in the air as RUDOLPH clutches on to the bar.)* I'm alive! I'm living! I'm alive!

RUDOLPH: In my pants! I'm peeing! In my pants!

BLACKOUT.

THE END