

Downhill Ride

By D. Richard Tucker

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Dave Tucker
PO Box 4032
Kent, WA 98089
(206) 817-4196
dave@drichardtucker.com



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CAST

PHIL, M, 39

MIKE, M, 40

JILL, F, 25-50

The stage is bare except for several pairs of chairs, arranged in a column to represent seats on a roller coaster. MIKE and PHIL enter and stop at an imaginary boundary keeping them from boarding the cars. MIKE hands a ticket to PHIL.

PHIL
This is stupid.

MIKE
Live with it.

PHIL
I don't want to do this.

MIKE
You used to love the roller coaster.

PHIL
When I was twelve.
(pause)
Forget it, Mike – I'm leaving.

MIKE
Look, this is my birthday present to you, so just go along with it, okay?

PHIL
It's not even my birthday.

MIKE
It will be tomorrow.

PHIL turns to go.

PHIL

Then let's do it tomorrow.

MIKE

Phil! Come back here. This is important. It's your last day as a thirty-nine-year old.

PHIL

Don't remind me.

MIKE

It's my birthday present for you and you are going through with it.

PHIL

Why can't you give birthday presents like I do?

MIKE

Like what?

PHIL

Remember what I did for your 40th birthday?

MIKE

Yeah, that was great.

PHIL

Then why can't you simply take me to the Superbowl, instead of a roller coaster.

MIKE

For one thing, it's not even football season. And for another thing.... this is different.

PHIL

What's so different? I'm old, okay? My youth is gone, my life is almost over and you drag me up here to ride a roller coaster.

MIKE

I'll show you after the ride.

PHIL

You are such a jackass.

JILL enters and goes to the imaginary rope entrance to address the riders.

JILL

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen - welcome to Thunder Road. My name is Jill-

PHIL and MIKE

HI, JILL!

JILL

(startled, pause)

Umm...hello. Before we begin the ride, I must advise you of several safety tips to help make your ride more enjoyable.

PHIL and MIKE

THANK YOU, JILL!

JILL

(pause)

First of all, you must be at least forty-eight inches tall to ride Thunder Road.

MIKE

Are you forty-eight inches tall?

PHIL

Lying on my back.

JILL

Rather than bore you all to tears by telling you the rules for riding Thunder Road, I'm simply going to direct you to read the posted rules.

(gestures to imaginary placard)

Please read them before boarding the train, because once you get in the train, you won't be able to see them, and we will not let you take the posted rules with you, because the people that ride after you are going to need to read them, too. . the rules for riding the roller coaster and the directions of your operator. Keep your arms, hands, and legs inside the car at all times. In the event that you see something that may appear unsafe, please alert the car operator immediately.

MIKE

This is just like when we were kids.

PHIL

Try not to throw up this time.

JILL

Keep everything inside the car, including your hands and legs. If anything comes out of the car while you are riding, I get to keep it... including your hands and legs. At the end of the ride, stay in your seats until the attendant releases you. Any questions?

MIKE

Is there a movie on this flight?

JILL

(glares, and then to the rest of the crowd)
Please pass through and take your seats.

JILL removes an imaginary chain. MIKE quickly moves to the front row and sits. PHIL casually enters to sit next to him.

MIKE

No, not here. Sit behind me.

PHIL

Why can't I sit in the front car?

MIKE

I need you to sit behind me.

PHIL

I want to sit up front.

JILL approaches.

JILL

Hey- you two having problems?

MIKE

No, not a problem.

PHIL

I just want to sit up front.

MIKE

But you can't.

PHIL

Yes, I can.

MIKE

No, you can't.

PHIL

Why not – it's my birthday!

MIKE and PHIL remember JILL is watching and are suddenly embarrassed.

MIKE

Um, see it's his 40th birthday.

PHIL

Not until tomorrow.

MIKE

Tomorrow, and well...I wanted to do something special for him, but in order to do that, he can't be sitting in the same seat, because , well-

JILL

Look, you two are holding up the ride, and you know what that means?

MIKE

Well-

JILL

That means that every ride after this is going to be late, and because of that I'm going to be late for lunch and then I'm going to be late getting off and then I'm going to be late for bed and have to wake up tomorrow without getting my full allotment of beauty sleep, because you two pansy boy couldn't decide where to sit, so - put your butts in a seat, or I'm gonna kick your little asses right out of the park. Understood?

MIKE

Understood.

PHIL

Sure.

JILL attends to other passengers as PHIL goes to sit next to MIKE.

MIKE

No, not here!

PHIL stops short, then reluctantly gets in the seat behind MIKE.

PHIL

You are such a jackass.

MIKE turns to speak with PHIL behind him.

MIKE

Look, I'm sorry, it's just that I've got this all planned.

PHIL
You're an idiot.

MIKE
No, seriously, it's kind of a surprise.

PHIL
And you're kind of a jackass.

MIKE
Look, it's symbolic. It's a metaphor.

PHIL
And you're a meta-jerk.

MIKE
It's just like your life, we'll climb to the top – that would be your youth, and then we'll go over the peak and down -you know - all those things you've achieved are behind you and you're looking down the other side.

PHIL
And why can't I sit in the front seat?

MIKE and PHIL lurch forward as the roller coaster starts to move. SOUND: clicking of the train.

MIKE
Hold on!
(pause)

Listen to that: "Click, click, click." That's your youth, buddy, leaving you behind.

PHIL sits, unimpressed, almost depressed, as the clicking continues.

MIKE (cont'd)
Hear it? That was middle school. Remember Pop Warner football? Remember that bloody nose you gave me at our first practice?

PHIL
Yeah.

MIKE
And the eighth grade science fair? How you got sick when you sucked in the fumes from the sulfuric acid, and had hallucinations about Mr. Highsmith in a hula skirt.

PHIL

Shut up.

MIKE

Ooo, here comes senior prom. Remember that? You were going to get lucky that night.

PHIL

But I didn't.

MIKE

Remember joining the Marines with Bob Olson?

PHIL

Oh, I bet he still hates us. He should have known we'd chicken out at the last minute.

MIKE

I'll never forget his face when he got on that bus for boot camp.

PHIL

I bet he still hates us.

MIKE

And this is where you met Rita.....Remember that?

PHIL

(warmly)

How can I forget?

MIKE

Ooo, look out, here it is – Phil walks into his office on Walker Street and finding it was empty, he goes home thinking he's been laid off?

PHIL

Hey, I wasn't expecting a promotion.

MIKE

But you scored big, didn't you? Three major accounts downtown.

PHIL starts to enjoy the memories.

MIKE

Do you hear the wedding bells now, Phil?..... Remember when the minister told you to kiss the bride and you kissed Rita on the nose.

PHIL

Yeah.

MIKE

And then, whatta ya know – little Matthew was born.

PHIL is smiling now.

MIKE (cont'd)

And right behind him, little CaitlynPhil and Rita sent out photo Christmas cards to everybody. Then Phil was the best man at his brother Tony's wedding.

PHIL

Yeah

MIKE

And then the day when Matthew made it to first grade.....And then Phil got another big promotion.....And then Caitlyn graduated from Kindergarten with honors.....
.....And soon afterwards, Phil became an uncle..... And then, suddenly –

The clicking noise stops. MIKE pulls out his camera as he and PHIL crest the top of the ride and begin their descent.

MIKE (cont'd)

Hold on Phil! Here we go!

MIKE holds the camera over his head, pointing back at PHIL and flashes it in PHIL's eyes, just as they descend. PHIL yells and holds his hands up in the air. MIKE thrusts his hands up as they descend, then MIKE and PHIL move their body in synchronized motion as the roller coaster goes up another hill, then make several turns and brings them back to the starting point with a lurch. They both take a deep breath.

MIKE

How was that?

PHIL

You know, that was fun. What was that flash about?

MIKE

I took your picture.

PHIL

A photo?

JILL enters and removes the safety bars in front of them. They stand up and exit, as JILL tends to the rest of the car. MIKE takes a look at the camera to see the picture he took.

Oh, wow!

MIKE (cont'd)

What?

PHIL

That's hilarious. Look.

MIKE

(looking at camera)
Oh, my god. I really look scared.

PHIL

MIKE
The camera doesn't lie – that's the expression of a man facing his future - his youth is over, and here comes middle-age. I'm going to frame this one.

PHIL
So why did you do this?

MIKE
It's a great memory. That's your expression as you start the downhill ride into middle age. I think I'll call it "Over the Hill."

JILL
Let's go, people.

MIKE
Isn't this a great photo?

JILL
Please move along.

MIKE
See, this is a man facing holy terror – his fortieth birthday. His youth is gone and it's all downhill. Isn't that the most horrific thing you've ever seen?

JILL

(looking it over)

I don't know. I mean, sure he's screaming his head off like a little girl, but look close. His eyes are smiling - there's a little twinkle - kind of like he's looking forward to the ride as he crests the hill.

MIKE

Well.... yeah.

JILL

I mean, isn't that why we ride the rollercoaster anyhow? To get to the top.... to go over the crest. It's scary, but we do it for the thrill of the ride down.

MIKE

,....yeah.

JILL exits.

PHIL

(looking at photo)

I think she's right. We buy a ticket, we stand in line, we climb to the top. There's a certain amount of fear involved, but-

MIKE

Hey, don't get philosophical on me. Let's go.

MIKE starts to exit.

PHIL

Mike.

MIKE stops and looks back.

PHIL (cont'd)

(nodding toward the rollercoaster)

Want to go again?

MIKE

Let's wait til we're forty-nine.

MIKE and PHIL exit.

End of Play.