

FROM: TAKE 10: New 10-Minute Plays

"FERRIS WHEEL"
by Mary Miller

SETTING

The setting is two folding chairs placed side by side on a small bench. The motion of the ferris wheel can be created by the movement of the actors . . . gradually leaning forward going up . . . leaning backwards going down. The safety bar in front of them should be mimed when necessary.

Note: The bulk of the play should run as almost two separate monologues with the characters seldom relating to one another until they have to.

CHARACTERS

JOHN and DORIE: They can be any age as long as they are close to the same age. However, the play becomes more poignant if they are a little older and rather average looking.

TIME: Late afternoon. The present.

The stage is two folding chairs—or a small bench. A woman is seated with her arms outstretched in front of her, her fist clenched, her feet planted firmly on the ground and her eyes shut.

A man enters. He looks down at the woman and then behind him and then back at the woman. He then starts to sit next to her . . .

JOHN: Excuse me. Excuse me? I hope I'm not . . . crowding you . . .

DORIE: (flustered/embarrassed) No.

(He slides into the empty seat next to her and takes hold of the "bar.")

JOHN: I would have taken another seat but the line is too long to let anyone ride by themselves.

(She nods but doesn't respond.)

JOHN: . . . They force you to be a couple whether you want to or not . . . not that I mind. I mean it's a pleasure.

(He looks at her, sitting bolt upright and perfectly rigid.)

JOHN: Are you comfortable?

DORIE: Just fine. Whoops . . . we're off.

(She squeezes her fist tighter, clenches her eyes shut and presses her feet to the floor.)

JOHN: Are you all right?

DORIE: I'm fine.

JOHN: Are you sure?

DORIE: Couldn't be better.

JOHN: But you're not looking?

DORIE: No ~~frightened~~. I'm frightened of heights.

JOHN: And you ride a ferris wheel?

DORIE: Just once a year. On my birthday.

JOHN: Happy birthday.

DORIE: Thank you.

JOHN: You're welcome.

(*He looks at her gripping the bar.*)

JOHN: Your knuckles are turning white. Are you sure this is good for your circulation?

DORIE: What doesn't kill me makes me stronger ~~and~~ ~~stronger~~.

JOHN: So you do this in lieu of a birthday party with cake and ice cream?

DORIE: Oh no, I have that too, when I get through. Like a reward.

JOHN: But you go through this first.

DORIE: My Daddy started it and I keep it up.

JOHN: He was frightened of heights?

DORIE: Oh no, he just believed you should do something that frightens you at least once a year. Builds character. Strengthens moral fiber. You ought to try it sometime.

JOHN: I am riding.

DORIE: No, doing something *you're* frightened of, this doesn't count if you're not frightened of heights. I had this cousin

once who tried to pretend like she was frightened of small places until she got locked in the attic during a thunderstorm. Lightning struck that house and burned it to the ground.

JOHN: Now she's frightened of fire?

DORIE: No sir, she's dead. You can't go messing with things like this.

JOHN: Truth is stranger than fiction.

DORIE: Don't you know it. Once I had this art teacher named Miss Thumb, who was missing two fingers. She used to say to paint all you needed were your ten good fingers and she'd hold up eight.

(*She demonstrates and then grabs for the bar.*)

~~DORIE: Whoops!~~

~~JOHN: (Arc) you're all right?~~

DORIE: I ~~was~~ ~~was~~ (pause) . . . You're not from around here?

JOHN: No. Passing through, saw the wheel and drove on over. That's my little red car down there.

(*He points. She starts to look and stops.*)

DORIE: I'll take your word for it. (pause) You know it's funny running into a man like yourself riding a ferris wheel alone.

JOHN: (*embarrassed*) I used to do this as a kid . . . but you get older . . .

DORIE: Nonsense, you're never too old. My Momma always said you're only as old as you feel. Of course some days I feel like I'm a hundred.

(*Suddenly they both jerk forward in their seats . . . and stop still.*)

DORIE: Oh my God? What happened?

jerk
gosh

JOHN: Looks like we stopped.

DORIE: Why?

JOHN: We seem to be stuck.

(*He leans forward to look.*)

DORIE: Don't do that!

JOHN: Do what?!

DORIE: Don't move! You're rocking the car. Please don't rock the car.

JOHN: I'm sorry. They're probably just making an adjustment. We'll be moving . . . (*They do not move. He looks at her.*) . . . any minute.

DORIE: Yes. (*panic growing*) We should be . . . rolling? Any . . . minute . . . ?!

~~JOHN: Would you care for a cigarette? Calm your nerves.~~

~~DORIE: Me? No. I don't smoke. Do you?~~

~~JOHN: Not if you don't want me to.~~

~~DORIE: No, it doesn't bother me.~~

(*He starts to light up.*)

~~DORIE: When I was younger I saw this demonstration with an invisible man, where they hung this sack off his windpipe and said it was an exact duplicate of the human lung tissue. Then they put this bit cigarette in its plastic mouth and we watched the smoke slowly trickle down into the lung sack. And all of a sudden it started popping and bubbling—disintegrating right in front of our very eyes 'til it was nothing but a brown dripping glob hanging off that clear plastic windpipe. They said that's what happens to a tiny layer of your lung every time you take a puff. So I don't care to smoke myself, but if you want to, go right ahead.~~

(*He looks at the cigarette in his hand, changing his mind.*)

~~JOHN: I was thinking of giving it up. Now would be as good a time as any. Right? . . . Do something, you're frightened of . . . sure? Why not?~~

~~DORIE: Once you don't it's best not to take it back. Remember my poor dead cousin . . .~~

~~JOHN: I don't need a cigarette~~

~~DORIE: Good.~~

~~(*He pats his chest pocket where his cigarettes are, then starts twitching his shoulder, drumming his fingers on his leg impatiently . . . leans over, looks down.*)~~

~~JOHN: It must be mechanical.~~

~~DORIE: (*newly panicked*) Mechanical?! We could be up here for days!~~

~~JOHN: No.~~

~~DORIE: It is possible.~~

~~JOHN: Anything is possible . . .~~

~~DORIE: Oh God.~~

~~JOHN: Why don't you open your eyes?~~

~~DORIE: I'm frightened of heights!~~

~~JOHN: Just lean back and look up.~~

~~DORIE: Lean back . . . and . . . look . . . up!?~~

~~JOHN: Like in a field, on your back, looking up. Nothing scary about that.~~

~~DORIE: ~~Leaning back and looking up?~~ Lean back and look up? (*She does.*) Yes. (*looking up*) Oh God, it's going to rain. What are we going to do if it rains?! This thing will rust over solid and we'll be stuck up here forever!~~

JOHN: It's not going to rain. My knee locks up when it rains and it's fine. See.

(He moves his knee.)

DORIE: Don't move!

JOHN: I'm sorry.

(He looks at his pocket where his cigarettes are.)

DORIE: So much for my luck. I should have checked my horoscope.

JOHN: We're going to be... all right. (referring to having quit smoking) ~~It's going to be all right~~ (He looks away from his pocket and pats his chest.) This isn't so bad.

(Unnaturally, he takes a deep breath.)

DORIE: ... ~~But~~ I knew today was going to be bad when the cream in my coffee curdled up like a relief map of the Himalayas.

~~JOHN: I'm sorry. (sounding like Ferris Wheel)~~

DORIE: You know, like the kind of maps we made back in high school... out of flour and salt water? Of course my mother never would let me cook.

~~JOHN: I could have quit a long time ago (grassy) So, how long has it been?~~

(He feels in his pants pockets.)

~~John:~~ You wouldn't happen to have any gum, would you? Juicy Fruit?... Doublemint?

DORIE: Gum? No... My grandmother never allowed it.

JOHN: Neither would mine.

DORIE: She thought it was tacky. Bad for your teeth.

JOHN: ... a waste of money.

Turn Away

DORIE: ... socially incorrect.

JOHN: (as if to himself) She grew up during the Depression... always kept her money in a black leather purse pinned tightly under her arm.

DORIE: (to herself) My family has always been socially correct, even at the most incorrect political times.

JOHN: When she died, that was the first time I'd ever seen her without that purse.

DORIE: My cousin made her debut during the Vietnam War.

JOHN: I thought without that purse, she wasn't going any place.

DORIE: My sister was a Nixonette during the Watergate Convention.

JOHN: Not Heaven...

DORIE: We got our first color TV the day Kennedy was shot...

JOHN: ... not Hell...

DORIE: ... spent the rest of the week watching his funeral...

JOHN: ... they say her house is haunted...

DORIE: ... in black and white...

JOHN: ... I know what she's looking for...

DORIE: ... on a color TV!

JOHN: ... that ~~small~~ ^{skin} purse!

DORIE: (to him) So, I doubt I have any gum. But you're welcome to look.

Turn back

(She hands him her black leather purse and he jumps.)

JOHN: ~~NO! NO! NO! NO! NO!~~ (pause) So... Seriously. How long has it been?

DORIE: Five minutes.

JOHN: Just five minutes! (to himself) And I'm already starving. ~~Ben~~
~~blow up like a blimp.~~

(He unconsciously starts moving his leg and tapping his foot.)

DORIE: (without looking down) What are you doing?!

JOHN: Nothing.

DORIE: You're moving.

JOHN: I'm not moving.

DORIE: You're twitching.

JOHN: Twitching?

DORIE: (pointing down/looking up) Your leg. It's going like a house of fire. Are you nervous? . . . Or is this some sort of warning signal before you break into a full uncontrollable fit?

JOHN: I am not breaking into a fit!

DORIE: A nervous twitch, wouldn't you know it!

JOHN: I'm not twitching! Look. (She doesn't look.) Don't look. See . . . (He holds his hand out in front of him.) . . . Steady as a rock. (His hands start to shake, he grabs for the bar.) Oh ~~God~~ ^{God}!

DORIE: Oh ~~God~~ ^{God}! What if they make us climb out on a ladder?!

(panic) I can't climb out on a ladder. I'm going to be sick.

JOHN: Just take a deep breath. It's mind over matter. Just breathe.

~~Breathes~~

(They both breathe together, she a deep breath and he like he's smoking an imaginary cigarette.)

JOHN: (breathing) Better?

DORIE: (breathing) Better.

JOHN: It's all will power. (He closes his eyes) Visualization. See a stream. A peaceful . . . quiet . . . winding stream . . .

(smiling) . . . draw it into your mouth . . . taste it . . . feel it going down . . . hitting you here. (He hits his chest.) Cooooouggghh!! (He opens his eyes, sits upright.) You wouldn't happen to have a Tic Tac . . . Lifesaver . . . cracker . . . ?

DORIE: I wish you'd quit mentioning food. That's like talking about going to the bathroom in a moving car riding down the highway.

JOHN: I hadn't thought about the bathroom.

(He crosses his legs.)

DORIE: Just promise me one thing, promise me you won't eat me.

JOHN: Eat you?

DORIE: It happens. I've read about it. "Snowbound in the Andes." "Shipwrecked on a Desert Island." Two people stranded together and one eats the other. Instead of falling in love you have to worry about being dinner.

JOHN: I am not that hungry.

DORIE: Of course, I could stand to lose a pound or two . . . but I never lose it where it counts—it drops out of my face and I look like a cadaver with hips.

JOHN: I feel fat. Do I look fat? I am putting on weight and I'm just sitting here!

DORIE: Nonsense. You're thin.

(JOHN: I used to be thin. TOGETHER!

DORIE: I used to be thin.)

(During the following he starts picking lint off his jacket and biting his finger nails.)

DORIE: In high school, I was so thin when I wore panty hose I pinned them to my bra. That kept my panty hose up and my bra down.

JOHN: But you filled out nicely.

DORIE: (*embarrassed*) Thank you.

JOHN: (*distracted*) A regular beauty pageant contestant.

DORIE: I was once. But I didn't win.

JOHN: The prettiest girl doesn't always win. (*He bites at a nail.*)

DORIE: Of course not. If looks were all that counted *anybody* could win.

JOHN: I bet you won Miss Congeniality.

~~DORIE: Me? Oh no. She was incredible. She had a way of making friends . . . getting coffee—smiling and greeting—always saying you're prettier than she was; and let me tell you, that is one sure fired way to make friends at a beauty pageant contest. Why the night of the finals she came fully equipped with vaseline for your teeth, double stick tape for your bathing suit, needles, thread, a walking medicine cabinet for headaches and cramps, everything from dental floss to Dr. Scholl's. I voted for her. You can't let that much talent go unrewarded. . . .~~

JOHN: . . . and she was a cousin.

~~DORIE: Would that she were! We would have been proud to have her in our family tree.~~

JOHN: I'd have thought anybody as . . . ah . . . as . . . *charity* . . . as you would have won Miss Congeniality. (*He spits out a nail.*)

DORIE: That's just my breeding. My mother always said it was our social obligation to be entertaining.

JOHN: Don't have to feel any obligation on my account.

DORIE: No! You're easy to talk to. I could talk to you all day.

JOHN: (*reacting—he bites his finger*) Ouch!

DORIE: You are going to bite those nails clear down to the nub if you're not careful.

JOHN: It's just a . . . hangnail.

DORIE: I had this roommate in school once who got gangrene from an infected hangnail. Nearly had to have her finger cut off . . .

(*Takes his hand out of his mouth, starts feeling for his cigarettes.*)

JOHN: (*recalling*) You said, that cousin of yours—who broke this pact . . . Died, didn't she?

DORIE: Deader than a door nail. They say that poor little body was charred beyond . . .

JOHN: STOP! I'll pay you a *hundred* dollars if you don't say another word.

DORIE: I could never take money from a stranger. My mother always told me . . .

JOHN: (*interrupting/loosening his tie*) Is it hot up here? Do you feel hot? I feel hot . . .

DORIE: No.

JOHN: How can you feel anything? You haven't stopped talking since we sat down. I'm sorry. It's my fault. (*pause*) Five minutes? It's only been five minutes! They say when you die your life flashes in front of you in five minutes. I never believed that was possible before now.

DORIE: I'm sorry. I'm boring you.

JOHN: You're not boring me. It's just . . . (*He pats chest.*) I've been smoking ever since I was twelve. They'd give me a ~~dollar for the collection plate at church and I'd fish out change enough for a pack. God get the bulk of it but it's getting even now.~~

DORIE: No, you are right. I do talk too much. I always have. Especially when I'm nervous . . . or scared. Sometimes I get so wound up I can feel myself floating up over my body and I just want to slap myself silly saying . . . "Shut up. Shut up. Shut up." (*pause*) Like now. I'm sorry.

JOHN: It's OK.

DORIE: No, you see my greatest flaw is . . . I just want people to like me. I'm about the only person I know who thought Sally Field's acceptance speech at the Academy Awards . . . "You like me! You like me!!" . . . had real depth. I understood what she meant. But sometimes what we do has the exact opposite results.

JOHN: I like you.

DORIE: How can you tell, you keep twitching and biting and picking . . .

JOHN: . . . and listening. ~~Sometimes when I listen to you I forget about smoking.~~

DORIE: You're teasing.

JOHN: No. I do . . . like you . . . and . . . ah . . . I don't even know your name.

DORIE: My name is . . . Dorien. But people call me Dorie.

JOHN: Pleased to meet you . . . Dorie. I'm John.

(*He holds out his hand to shake hers and as she does, she briefly looks down and grabs the bar.*)

DORIE: Oh my God. ^{Gush}

JOHN: Just look up. Look up. (*She does.*) Better?

DORIE: Yes. (*Yause*) I'm sorry about the smoking.

~~JOHN: No, I was planning on giving it up . . . sometime . . . sooner or later. Maybe. (*longingly*) Nasty habit. A manner of keeping your distance with those . . . little . . . perfectly round . . . white cylindrical ~~things~~ and a quarter inch cigarettes . . . Oh God.~~

DORIE: But I bet your wife will be happy.

~~JOHN: I'm not married.~~

*Dorie: Are you married?
John: I'm not married!*

DORIE: (*suspicious*) ~~No? A . . .~~ ^{No?}

JOHN: ~~You?~~ ^{You?}

DORIE: (*embarrassed*) Me?! No! No . . . But . . . you? . . . I assumed . . .

JOHN: No, divorced. Traveling salesman . . . only she couldn't take the traveling so *she* moved on.

DORIE: I'm sorry.

JOHN: (*covering*) Yeah, well, you get used to being alone. You get over it. You adjust.

DORIE: Isn't that the truth. Why, I don't even mind eating by myself anymore. Not as long as I have something to read. Newspaper, magazine, those little bittry sugar packets they set at the table, the ones with the history of each state written real tiny on the back. You can learn a lot eating alone. The state flowers. The state birds. . . .

~~(*Suddenly he leans over and kisses her on the cheek.*)~~

DORIE: What did you do that for?

JOHN: I don't know . . . I thought if I kissed you, you'd stop talking for a minute.

DORIE: Oh.

~~(*She looks at him. He leans over and kisses her on the lips.*)~~

DORIE: I wasn't talking.

JOHN: No. My lips. I had to do something with my lips.

DORIE: So you didn't mean anything personal by it. It was just, sort of, reflex action?

JOHN: No. It wasn't totally reflex. I enjoyed it.

DORIE: ~~You did? Oh . . . ah . . .~~ (*nervous/flustered/she starts talking again*) Did I tell you I have an aunt who lives in Dublin,

G.A., semi-related to Kim Basinger? You remember the movie *The Natural*... Well, she was in it... Kim... not my aunt... and when they started (filming)...

~~(He leans over and kisses her again, on the lips.)~~

DORIE: Lips itching for another cigarette?

JOHN: No. Partially.

DORIE: But not wholly?

JOHN: I wanted to see if I enjoyed it as much the second time as I did the first.

DORIE: Did you?

~~(Their lips almost touching when... suddenly they both jerk back in their seats.)~~

DORIE: What was that?

JOHN: Looks like we're moving.

DORIE: (She looks down.) Oh ~~God!~~ ^{gosh} (She grabs the bar and shuns her eyes.)

JOHN: Won't be long now. (looking) They're letting us out one by one.

DORIE: You don't think we'll go around again?

JOHN: No.

(They jerk again in their seats.)

DORIE: They'll probably close it for good.

(They jerk in their seats ~~and stop~~.)

JOHN: This is us.

(They both raise their arms up and let go of the "bar")

DORIE: Yes.

Jerk

Jerk

Jerk

(She then suddenly embarrassed jumps out, extends her hand in a formal good-bye.)

~~Down!~~ It... it... has been a pleasure.

(He takes her hand.)

DORIE: (newly flustered) Yes. Well... you better get going... ~~and hand that cigarette. I wouldn't want you to get in any trouble kissing every girl in the park just so you can make it through the day without smoking...~~ Look at me I'm running off again and I am safe on the ground. I don't know what's the matter with me... I better get going.

(She lets go of his hand and starts to walk away. He hollers out to her.)

JOHN: Dorie, you coming back next year?

(She stops and looks at him.)

DORIE: It is a tradition. And you know, my family, we're keen on tradition.

(She exits right. He looks after her, smiles but doesn't follow. He takes out a cigarette, puts it in his mouth, hears thunder clap and, thinking better of it, puts the cigarette back in his pocket and exits left.)

END

Turn away