

FALLING HARD

by **D. C. Savadge**

Characters

Mr. Donahue – a popular, energetic and charismatic History teacher at a Wisconsin high school, early 30's. A Choate and Amherst grad. He is called Mr. D or Don.

Katie Erickson– a high school senior with a dark secret

Abbie - Katie's best friend, also a senior, any ethnicity (Doubles as the voice of Shelley)

Mr. Erickson- Katie's father, intimidating (doubles as the voice of Hildy and the voice of Grandfather)

Dr. Fran Royce – principal of the school. At times effective and organized. sometimes weary and eager for the year to be at an end. (any ethnicity)

Actors double as offstage voices: Students in the assembly, students on the bus, Child at the Dairy Queen, Dairy Queen customer, Seniors at a meeting of the Class Trip.

NOTES FOR ACTORS

- Slash marks (/) indicate the point at which the next speaker begins.

SCENE ONE

*SOUND: A high school auditorium full of high energy teenagers .
Mr. Donahue, a charismatic man in his thirties bounds on stage from the house and speaks energetically to the audience.*

MR. DONAHUE, also called MR. D or DON

Okay guys, cool it!

(THEY are somewhat quieter.) If you want to hear the news, chill please.

(THEY are quieter still.)

Welcome back from Spring vacation. I hope you made good use of the time off.

(Some laughter and hooting.)

Juniors: Many of you applied for next fall's American History AP Seminar. I wish I could take you all into my class, but there simply aren't enough chairs. Thank you all for the pleasure your essays gave me. You may want to use them as the basis for an essay for a college application. There were a WHOLE LOT of wonderful ones. After Assembly, please check my bulletin board to see who will be in this class. *(The sound of foot-stamping.)*

And, if you signed up to compete for a spot on the Travelling soccer team, those try-outs will be held after school on Wednesday. We have a record number of sign-ups, so if you aren't serious about playing soccer, you can save us all a lot of time by skipping try-outs. If you loooooove soccer *(Woos!)* - or Football as some of us call the game *(a whoop from the audience)* - I hear you - I look forward to seeing you on the field. We are going to have the time of our lives! *(Many whoops.)* Go Spartans!

And Seniors. *(Whoops.)* Thank you for your hard work. We have raised the money: There will be a Washington trip just before graduation. *(applause and cheers)* Last year's trip was a highlight of high school for many seniors. So if you want to be a part of the trip, get your permission slips in Yesterday. Space is limited to the size of the bus.

Oh! One more thing: I'll be in my classroom during second period lunch for anyone who wants to join our Lunch Meetings before the end of the year. This week we're playing the cast recording of *Hamilton*. *(Cheers.)* There will be stuff that isn't part of the regular curriculum. *(Some laughter.)* Mature audiences only. *(More laughter. Whoops.)*

Dr. Royce has some other announcements *(groans.)* Please be courteous to our principal. She'll be talking about the Social Justice Service Project. A lot of us spent time trying to make this new initiative something you will NOT want to miss. (A few "Woos.") So please give her your full attention. Let's give a round of applause to Doctorrrrrr Rooooooyycce! *(scattered applause begins as LIGHTS SHIFT.)*

SCENE TWO

*Two high school girls are at their lockers.
THEY wear cheerleader uniforms.*

KATIE
Did you see him?

ABBIE
Yes.

KATIE
Didn't he look so - ?

ABBIE
Cool. He looked cool.

KATIE
He looked right at me before the assembly started.

ABBIE
It's obvious that he likes you.

KATIE
You s'pose? He hasn't really SAID anything.

ABBIE
You know he does.

KATIE
I think he does. *(SHE laughs, delighted.)*

ABBIE
He talked to you after the game that time.

KATIE
That was really to Both of us. He didn't say, "Hey, Katie," or anything.

ABBIE
But he was watching you.

KATIE
He's never really...I have to try to find a way to be alone with him.

ABBIE
You will!

(THEY laugh.)

KATIE
I'm going to try to see him after school.

ABBIE
You want me to come with you?

KATIE
I'll meet you at the Lions after I talk to him.

ABBIE
Good luck!

KATIE
You're so lucky!

ABBIE
How am I lucky?

KATIE
Ben's at college. But you get to be with him on weekends.

ABBIE
Some weekends.

KATIE
You're going to be there in the fall.

ABBIE
Yah.

KATIE
What?

ABBIE
He'll be away all summer. He can't come for prom –

KATIE
That sucks, / but

ABBIE
(a mantra)
“This too shall pass.”

KATIE
Yep.

KATIE AND ABBIE
(singing, a rock and roll song)

“Thiiiiis too shall pass!”

THEY laugh, hilariously, On the CROSSFADE.

SCENE THREE

The Principal’s office.

SHE wears a skirt, blouse and cardigan and sensible shoes.

Mr. Donahue knocks, briefly, and enters.

MR. DONAHUE *(also called DON)*

Hey, Fran, you wanted to see me?

DR. ROYCE (FRAN)

Oh, hello, Don. Come on in.

HE does so.

Shut the door, please.

MR. DONAHUE
(as he does so, laughing)

Must be serious business.

FRAN
(serious)

Thank you for coming by.

MR. DONAHUE

Of course.

FRAN

Don, we both know you’re one of this school’s most popular teachers.

MR. D

Thank you.

FRAN

Probably among the most popular teachers this school has ever had.

MR. D.

/ Well –

FRAN

No, false modesty, Don. Students pull strings to get in your classes. The games you coach are mobbed. Students practically follow you around as if you were a rock star.

MR. D.

I don't know about / that.

FRAN

So I'm reluctant to even say anything about this, but it's on my mind.

MR. D.

I want to hear whatever feedback you want to give me, Fran.

FRAN

It's about the lunch meetings.

MR. D.

O-kay.

FRAN

I know it started out as a way for some students to earn extra credit.

MR. D.

Right. That and just to extend conversations we began in the classroom.

FRAN

But it seems to have devolved into something else.

MR. D

Oh?

FRAN

You must have felt it yourself, haven't you?

MR. D.

I'm...not sure I know what you're....getting / at.

FRAN

They seem to be more about a sort of hero worship, don't you think?

MR. D

Hero worship?

FRAN

A kind of cult of personality.

MR. D.

(laughing)

You think I'm leading some kind of religious experience during the lunch hour?

FRAN

Let's be straight with one another.

MR. D

Sure.

FRAN

Parents come up to me at PTA meetings to say they're thrilled that their students are engaged in history and in / current events –

MR. D.

Thank you for / telling me

FRAN

Yes, but that's not all. I also get phone calls here at school, at my home.

MR. D.

/ Okay....

FRAN

I hear from parents who say, "Who is this Mr. D. that my kid keeps talking about?"

MR. D.

That doesn't sound /so bad.

FRAN

And they say, "My student seems to have fallen under the influence of one of the teachers. And I'm not sure it's a completely legitimate student-teacher relationship."

MR. D.

There have always been parents who think teachers should be very...authoritarian.

FRAN

You don't consider yourself an authority figure?

MR. D.

I'm an authority on American History. I'm pretty up-to-speed on current events. But I'm not "authoritarian."

FRAN

I'm just wondering if maybe you need to be less of a buddy to the students and more of a figure of authority.

MR. D.

You want me to be less friendly to / our students?

FRAN

I don't mean you have to be un-friendly. I just mean maybe you should try being less of ...a pal.

MR. D.

How should I Do that?

FRAN

Possibly by spending less time with the students outside of class.

MR. D.

I should decline to make time for students before and after school and during the lunch hour?

FRAN

...I'm not calling a halt to the lunch meetings.

MR. D

Then...

FRAN

I think you should be very...reticent about meeting students on weekends.

MR. D.

....Are you talking about during weekend soccer games?

FRAN

No.

MR. D

Well, then I don't....

FRAN

I'm talking about spending time with students on the weekends.

MR. D.

I have taken the soccer team for pizza after the games.

FRAN

I'm not talking about pizza, Don. But while we're on the subject, you might make sure your assistant coach is along on those pizza outings.

MR. D.

Jerry always goes home with his family after the games.

FRAN

...Think it over. And let's circle back to one another in a few weeks. I say this because the Washington trip is on the line. There are other faculty members and parents who might be willing to step up to chaperone if your...reputation is not...unimpeachable...by the time of the trip. I don't want this to be the kind of school where rumors circulate about the faculty.

MR. D.

Fran, I wish you'd be a little less....cryptic / in

Her phone buzzes.

FRAN

I've been as specific as I care to be at this point. I'd like to see some the murk of rumor lifted. When we circle back, if I feel it's necessary, I'll try to lay out my expectations more clearly.

*Her phone buzzes again.
SHE picks up the phone.*

Yes, Sam?...Thank you. *(to Mr. D.)* I'm afraid I have to take this.

*MR. D. stands and, for the first time, seems discombobulated.
HE awkwardly backs out of the room.
CROSSFADE.*

SCENE FOUR

Mr. D is at the bulletin board outside his classroom, putting up an announcement with push pins. KATIE appears, tentatively. SHE waits for him to notice her and, when he does not, she speaks. HE has just come from his meeting with Fran and is still on edge.

KATIE

Mr. D?

MR. D.

(barely taking her in)

Hey there.

KATIE

Um.

....Mr. D?

MR. D.

Yes?

KATIE

Um, I was wondering if I could...um...come to the lunch meetings?

MR. D.

I don't see why not, Kelly...um, Katie.

KATIE

Well, I only have second period lunch on Wednesdays and Fridays.

MR. D.

Well, then, join us on Wednesdays and Fridays.

KATIE

Isn't Friday the day it's mostly the soccer team guys?

MR. D.

That's true. But we're open to....other...participants.

KATIE

Oh good.

(HE is preoccupied with the bulletin board, straightening and moving some items.)

Um.

Can I also get a packet about the Washington trip?

MR. D.

You're thinking of going on the Washington trip?

KATIE

...Um, yah. My friend Abbie and I both want to go.

MR. D.

That's...good. The Washington trip is usually...most popular with the students in American History Honors.

KATIE

I know.

MR. D.

(giving her his full attention)

But it's not limited to those students.

KATIE

Good.

I'll ask my dad if I can go.

MR. D.
Will you do something for me?

KATIE
Sure.

MR. D.
Tell Fran, uh, Dr. Royce, that you and – Abbie, is it? – would like to go on the trip and that...Mr. D encouraged you to get a permission slip in early...because the trip is very popular.

KATIE
Okay. Sure.

MR. D.
You can just say all of that to Sam, Samantha – to Ms. Schafer. She...shares everything with Dr. Royce.

KATIE
Okay.

MR. D.
I'll...get you that packet. Will you wait for me?

KATIE
Sure!

*He exits into his classroom. SHE smiles, delighted, as
LIGHTS CHANGE. SOUND: a door opens and slams shut.
ERICKSON appears, carrying a mug. HE is very affable.*

SCENE FIVE

ERICKSON
Katharine? Is that you?

KATIE
(from off)

Yes.

ERICKSON
Come in, Honey.

KATIE enters and stands in front of him.

How was school?

Fine. KATIE

Just fine? ERICKSON

It was...fine. KATE

Do you have very much homework? ERICKSON

...Yes. KATE

You're lying. ERICKSON
(with a smile)

??? KATE

They don't give seniors very much homework in the spring semester. ERICKSON

It's not...difficult homework. But it's a...fairly large amount of homework. KATE

Like what? ERICKSON

Like reading a newspaper and choosing an article to report on. And memorizing a passage in French, and studying for an AP / Bio quiz. KATE

Well, you'd better get to it. ERICKSON

Okay. *(SHE turns to go.)* KATE

Dinner is at 6:30. ERICKSON

KATE

What time will Mom be home?

ERICKSON

She traded shifts. She's doing an overnight tonight.

KATE

(stricken)

Oh!

ERICKSON

(very affable)

So, when you finish your homework, we'll have a chance to visit.

KATE

I.....have to call Abbie to give her the French homework.

ERICKSON

That's okay.

But you have to get your sleep. You really have to be in bed with lights out by eleven.

KATE

Okay.

ERICKSON

Okay, what?

KATE

Okay, Dad.

ERICKSON

Dad?

KATIE

Okay.....Daddy.

LIGHTS SHIFT.

SCENE SIX

The next day. Katie and Abbie are at their lockers.

ABBIE

So did you ask him?

FOR THE REST OF THE PLAY PLEASE CONTACT THE PLAYWRIGHT.